

Skills for Political Peace--Part 2
Three distinctions that can help—Handout (v. 03)

Access discussion handout on the website:

“Charlie Drew’s Class Resources” at <http://gracepasadena.org/livestreammedia>

Intro

Managing political polarization, especially at church, can be very difficult, calling for wisdom.
Last week—“Upstream Politics” from the Beatitudes.
This week—Three distinctions

1) Between the calling of the church and the calling of individual Christians

Callings of the church	Calling of individuals
Two things: • Pray (Matthew 6) • Evangelize and disciple (Matthew 28)	Quite varied: • Engaging public life directly • Engaging public life indirectly
The church must:	The church must: Encourage and release its people...

2) Between theocracy and influence

The theocrat in us...	The influencer in us...
Identifies a particular group/strategy with God and his strategy. Forgets <i>Rev. 1:16</i>	Seeks patiently to nudge the culture in the right direction by
Aims to win. Manipulation and power brokering:	Aims to serve. Incarnation:
Driven by results:	Driven by faithfulness:
At stake:	Faithfulness and trusting God for outcomes

Learning from the Founders.

Democracy is messy and inefficient (*Federalist Papers*).

- People are passionate
- Passions protected but not absolutized— “ordered liberty”
- Constitutional (agreed upon) structures and checks.
- Agreeing not to have to win all the time, or ever win completely.

The theocrat is both right and mistaken.

The theocrat in us is right...

He is mistaken...

- As to means....
- As to timing....

The recent ruling on IVF by the Alabama Supreme Court presents us with at least two issues:

- The ethics of IVF in its various parts.
- A theological vision for America.

Regarding the second issue:

- The Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court (Tom Parker) is affiliated with the NAR (the New Apostolic Reformation) whose vision is...

- Such a vision is compelling.
- But one wonders how to give it shape.

Wisdom from Edmund Clowney (*Commentary on 1 Peter*):

No state, no freedom fighter today can lay claim to Israel’s theocratic calling as warriors of God’s covenant. The new Israel is the church of Jesus Christ, and he has forbidden the sword to the church. Under the lordship of Christ the Kingdom of God does take form in the church, but through mightier weapons than the sword: weapons, as Paul affirms, that can reduce every towering imagination of the rebellious human heart. No other weapons can advance Christ’s Kingdom. The political renovation of the world awaits his return, for he is the sole monarch of the universe.

Wisdom from Ervin Duggan (Davidson College 1994 fall convocation).

Only years after leaving this place did I realize that the religious tradition honored by those starchy old Calvinists [Davidson’s founders] was what brought into being many of the things I treasured most. The teaching that all persons were created in the image of God, for example: that religious idea gives the only transcendent depth and meaning to our notions of human rights, of human beings as sacred. The ancient doctrine of original Sin, for example: it led James Madison and John Adams to insist upon limitations of power, upon a system of checks and balances. The Judeo-Christian idea of covenantal laws and relationships, for example: this led, in time, to modern democratic constitutions and the Bill of Rights. Indeed, our modern ideas of tolerance and pluralism owe much to great assertions of human universality like that of St. Paul: “I am persuaded that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek.”

3) Between moral principles and political strategies

<p>Issue Moral principles</p> <p>High commands of God:</p> <p>Church must....</p>	<p>Political strategies</p> <p>Fallible human efforts to move the culture in the direction of greater conformity to moral principles.</p> <p>Church must....</p>
<p>At stake Fidelity to Scripture where Scripture is clear</p>	<p>Wisdom and freedom of conscience where Scripture is not clear</p>

Two reflections on principles and strategies.		
<p>When we confuse principles with strategies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiables becomes non-negotiables. Opposition becomes the enemy of God. Recipe for... • We start to lose sight of.... Total depravity: Common grace: 		
<p>Distinguishing strategies from principles is not a cure all.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which moral principles? • Conflicting moral principles • Which moral principles should be more decisive (see FAQs) • Interpretation • Little interest in engaging the Scriptures 		
Issue	Principles	Strategies
<p>An illustration: Abortion</p>	<p>The pregnant woman is indisputably a person: <i>So God created man in his own image...male and female he created them (Genesis 1:27).</i></p> <p>The unborn child from its earliest moments is God’s loving workmanship: Unbroken continuity in God’s engagement with us from the earliest moments of gestation (<i>you knit me together in my mother’s womb</i>) through to our final days (<i>in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me</i>). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This continuity does not prove... • This continuity does create a burden of proof: </p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vote for a “prolife” candidate (NB: voting is a strategy—imprecise and short-lived). • Pass state laws severely restricting abortions (happening now). • Vote for candidates whose approach will decrease the need for abortion by...

	<p>Are there any legitimate grounds for us to intervene to end the Creator’s work? There <i>might</i> be, but we had better be sure and proceed with sadness.</p> <p>Biblical case law seems to prioritize concern for the woman over concern for the unborn when both are at risk. <i>Exodus 21:22-25</i> seems to favor care for a pregnant woman over care for her child if that child <i>comes out</i> (prematurely?) as the result of an altercation in which <i>harm comes</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The case might be relevant in instances where continuing a pregnancy threatens to harm the mother. • Leans against absolutizing protection of the unborn (“abortion abolitionism”). <p>Who decides whether an abortion is warranted? The Bible does not speak directly to this question.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noting that draconian abortion restrictions may lead to backlash that enshrines extreme pro-abortion policies, work towards solutions that engage all parties in ways that both reduce abortions and preserve the dignity, safety, and agency of the women involved.
At stake	Fidelity to Scripture where Scripture is clear	Wisdom and freedom of conscience where Scripture is not clear

Q and A

Closing Thought

We follow Jesus not simply by promoting what he says but by embracing his way of doing things— his modus operandi... He let go of his glory, rights, privileges, and freedoms as the eternal Son in order to join us fully in our human condition and to serve us there. But he did so without taking on our values [or M.O.s]...

Jesus’ manner of engaging the world gives us a mandate for involvement. But it also reins in the foolish triumphalism that makes us impatient with our neighbors and with one another. To choose Jesus’ M.O. is to choose faithfulness and service over outcomes, leaving the latter in God’s hands. We can expect to be resisted, we can even expect to suffer—for to love the world as Jesus did means, at heart, taking up a cross—not winning an argument or an election. Nevertheless, our efforts have value and lasting effect: insofar as we are obedient, wise, and loving in our public lives, God notes our efforts, rejoices over them, and values them as tokens of what is to be when his Son returns to make all things right. What is more, in some mysterious way, he causes them to last, promising that our “labor in the Lord is not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:58). (Surprised by Community, Charles Drew, pp. 127-129)

Homework

Have a political chat over coffee

This week have a cup of coffee with a Christian whose politics you don’t like.

- Say (and mean) that you really want to listen and understand their position.
- Ask questions aimed at understanding not only what they believe but why
- Listen: committed to understanding rather than winning.
- Determine that love (for people) and trust (in God), rather than fear, will drive your tone.
- Seek common ground, beyond differing political strategies, in shared moral principles.
- Pray together about what you can agree on.
- If you cannot agree, then agree to disagree, parting as friends.
- Have the Lord’s Supper together as soon as possible.

Plan a large group (church-wide?) discussion on immigration

Plan it with 2 or 3 friends (input and permission from the session would be wise). Give attention to how the design, content, and tone will contribute to peace and enlightenment in the church.

- Design issues:
 - How long and where: church building, elsewhere, on line? Why?
 - How would you promote it?
 - What sort of follow-up, if any, would you plan on?
 - When would you schedule it and why: Sunday after church? Weekday evening? Saturday morning?
 - Format: Talk with Q and A? Panel discussion? Small groups? Combo? How and why will this format contribute to peace and enlightenment in the church?

Leadership and teaching: In-house or someone from outside? A pastor? An elder? A lay person? Combo? How and why will this leadership design contribute to the peace and enlightenment of the church?

- Content and tone issues:

How might you try to incorporate the “upstream” attitudes and perspectives (the Beatitudes—see last week) and/or any of the distinctions discussed in this session?

How might you try to incorporate the following Scripture and data into the format of the discussion? What other Scripture and data might you incorporate?

- Relevant Scripture and data:

- Universal, intrinsic human dignity:

Let us make man in our image (Genesis 1:26);

What is man that you are mindful of him... Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor (Psalm 8:4-5);

I am fearfully and wonderfully made (Psalm 139:14).

- The high value of hospitality:

Love your neighbor as yourself

When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:33-34).

The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

- The hope of a united human race.

Jesus and the apostles envisioned a single new humanity (a flowering of the OT sojourner laws in the church), where the "borders" are open.

And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. (John 10:16)

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility... that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. (Ephesians 2:14-15)

- Jesus and the apostles are also comfortable acknowledging present national and familial distinctions and structures (and therefore borders?):

Render to Caesar what is Caesar's (Mark 12:17); If you owe taxes, pay taxes (Romans 13:7); Honor the emperor (1 Peter 2:17); I appeal to Caesar (Acts 25:11); If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially... his household, he... is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Tim. 5:8)

- Some facts:

Current immigrant population in the US is 44.5 million (13%).

Refugee quotas in the US: 2016—110,000; 2019—30,000; 2020—18,000.

Present populations of Syrian refugees: In Jordan (650,000—7%: 1 in every 14); in Turkey (3.8 million—4.5% of the population: 1 in every 20); in the US (300,000--0.09%: 1 in every 1100).

Praying in Song: *Speak, O Lord*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKtJVv5ffdw>

Speak O Lord as we come to You	Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see
To receive the food of Your holy word	Your majestic love and authority
Take Your truth plant it deep in us	Words of power that can never fail
Shape and fashion us in Your likeness	Let their truth prevail over unbelief.
That the light of Christ might be seen today	
In our acts of love and our deeds of faith	Speak O Lord and renew our minds
Speak O Lord and fulfill in us	Help us grasp the heights of Your plans for us
All Your purposes for Your glory	Truths unchanged from the dawn of time
	That will echo down through eternity
Teach us Lord full obedience	And by grace we'll stand on Your promises
Holy reverence true humility	And by faith we'll walk as You walk with us
Test our thoughts and our attitudes	Speak O Lord till Your church is built
In the radiance of Your purity	And the earth is filled with Your glory.

Resources

(Highlights. See more on “Resources on Politics and the church” on the website)

Frequently asked Questions

Movements and courses

Braver Angels: <https://braverangels.org/>

Not a Christian group, it nevertheless models and teaches skills for the sort of constructive and illuminating red/blue engagement we need in the church. A blurb from their website: “Braver Angels leads the nation’s largest cross-partisan, volunteer-led movement to bridge the political divide. Through community gatherings, real debates, and grassroots leaders working together, we’re offering America what it needs to overcome the bitterness of our partisan divide.”

Christian Civics-Foundations Course. A ten-week free video course. It is an illuminating, disarming, wise, accessible, theologically sound, and practical resource that I highly recommend to pastors and churches everywhere. Produced by the Center for Christian Civics, a Washington DC based non-partisan ministry helping pastors, ministry leaders, and lay people integrate civic stewardship into their community’s program of spiritual formation, and political de-polarization into their vision for witness and evangelism. It offers workshops, Bible studies, podcasts, articles, and recommended readings. <https://www.christiancivics.org/foundations>

Books

Charles Drew, *Surprised by Community: Republicans and Democrats in the Same Pew*. I suggest practices, ways of thinking, and strategies for in-church discussion that help believers engage in politics while making room for one another when their political convictions differ.

David French, *Divided We Fall*. French is a columnist, evangelical, and long-time conservative who has given particular attention to the defense of religious free speech and practice. In this book French analyzes the polarization of our time, warning that we could easily lose our two-hundred year experiment in united self-rule, while offering some hopeful direction.

Paul D. Miller, *The Religion of American Greatness: What’s Wrong with Christian Nationalism*. Miller distinguishes between Christian republicanism, which brings Christian principles to bear on how we think about and structure government (say, the intrinsic dignity and the corruptibility of people, and the role of common grace), and Christian nationalism, which seeks to make a culture Christian by force. His gracious and nuanced critique of the latter is persuasive because he writes as an insider—a long time Republican who has served in a Republican administration, a dedicated evangelical Christian, and a veteran. American historian George Marsden endorses his work: “Conservative Christians who suspect he may be wrong should at least give him a hearing. More progressive Christians can also learn from this balanced and constructive approach.”

Kaitlyn Schiess, *The Ballot and the Bible: How Scripture Has Been Used and Abused in American Politics and Where We Go from Here* (2023). Schiess reminds us with sensitivity and nuance of the all-important difference between the authority of the Bible (certain) and the authority of our interpretations of the Bible (much less certain). She documents our tendency to forget this distinction through our national story, from the era of the pilgrims to the present day, offering helpful advice along the way on how to be humble readers, together, of the Scriptures.

John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today--4th edition* (Zondervan 2006). Though somewhat dated, Stott’s work is still enormously helpful, offering thoughtful and practical insight into Christian engagement with many of the issues that trouble and divide us. Stott focuses particularly on war, creation care, global poverty, human rights, work, business, diversity, sexuality, marriage, abortion, euthanasia, and biotechnology.

N. T. Wright and Michael Bird, *Jesus and the Powers*. With close and challenging attention to (1) the long, complex, and nuanced history of the relationship between church and state and (2) what the Bible actually teaches, the authors challenge both our tendency to withdraw from political engagement and to engage in ways that Jesus never would. They ask, and begin to answer, “How do we build for the kingdom without falling into the trap of spiritual isolationism or being led into captivity to a political master?” [NB: There is another, very different, book of the same title].