

Skills for Political Peace

Part 1

The Beatitudes and Upstream Politics

Discussion Handout for Part 1

Available on the website:

“Charlie Drew’s Class Resources”

<http://gracepasadena.org/livestreammedia>

The Present Impasse

(Paul Miller, *The Religion of American Greatness*)

“Progressivism”

The “nationalist right”

“Progressivism” defined and critiqued

“Progressivism is best understood as a philosophy of history, a belief that history unfolds in the direction of progressive policy preferences... Such a ...narrative has no moral horizon or framework and no way of justifying what its policy preferences are, other than vague appeals to ‘the children’, ‘the future,’ and ‘the right side of history,’ which mean whatever they want those empty

phrases to mean. Shorn of any fixed moral commitments, progressivism deteriorates into the lowest common denominator available within the rhetoric of freedom: individual autonomy, personal discovery, self-expression, fulfillment, and empowerment...In this light, the progressive commitments to abortion, the sexual revolution, and identity politics are a feature, not a bug, of the movement. They express the fundamental core of what

progressivism is: a rebellion against any and all constraints and limitations on personal independence, including the limits of nature itself. Similarly, the hectoring, authoritarian temperament that gives rise to speech codes and cancel culture flows naturally from progressivism. Progressivism is a religion, but one without grace. It is a return to Puritan roots in the worst sense of the word, an endless crusade of moral reform with no forgiveness, no atonement, and no savior.” (p. 258)

The “nationalist right” defined and critiqued

“White American Christians bear substantial responsibility for the damage done to trust and common citizenship in the United States. By politicizing our religion and insisting that it is central to American identity while turning a blind eye to the continuing realities of racial injustices, or in past centuries actually defending slavery and segregation, we* gave non-Christians and non-Whites little reason to trust us or believe that they

could peacefully share a country with us. Our resistance to the loss of White Protestant influence at every stage in American history has not endeared us to others...*

“Conservative White Christians believe that the left is the aggressor in the culture war and that conservative efforts since then have been a justified, defensive attempt to preserve something good and decent from the civilization we inherited... White

Christians can only convince ourselves that we are not the aggressors if we view our previous dominance in American life as something natural, providential, and good.

But the pre-1960s Anglo-Protestant dominance in American history was itself a standing aggression: most obviously against Catholics, Native Americans, and especially African Americans, but also an aggression against American ideals and thus in principle *against every single American.*” (pp. 258-259)

Private work

- How in a sentence or two does Miller define and critique progressivism?
- What, if anything, do you disagree with in his definition and/or critique?
- How in a sentence or two does Miller define and critique the “nationalist right”?
- What, if anything, do you disagree with in his definition and/or critique?

Small group discussion

Share your reflections with each other.

Don't argue, just report and listen,
asking questions for clarification.

The Beatitudes

A Mandate for “Upstream” Politics

The Beatitudes

2 And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. 5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. 6 "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be

*satisfied. 7 "Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall receive mercy. 8 "Blessed
are the pure in heart, for they shall see
God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they shall be called sons of God.
10 "Blessed are those who are
persecuted for righteousness' sake, for
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

11 "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:2-12)

I) **Hungering and thirsting for righteousness**

Personal Meaning:

Right with God and each other

Loving God and neighbor (*Mt 22:37*).

If we *hunger and thirst after
righteousness*, we will be *satisfied*
(filled up).

Hungering and thirsting (cont.)

Cosmic meaning:

Righteousness filling the earth.

- Longing for love everywhere at every level.
- Longing for everyone to see God as he is...

Small group discussion

In what ways might you allow the beatitudes to do a better job shaping your public life—your political and social involvements?

II) Five qualities

- Respect
- Humility
- Trust
- Patience
- Hope

A) Respect

Jesus and Nicodemus

Respecting people's stories:

Respecting people's needs:

- Satisfying work....
- Working plumbing....
- First amendment freedom....

Wanting these things deeply (*hungering and thirsting*)

B) Humility

Poor in spirit

- Wisdom—from any source.
- Not smug or belligerent.
- *Hungry* for what we do not know or understand.

David French: “Negative polarization”

C.S. Lewis on democracy

C) Trust

Peacemakers because at peace.

Apocalyptic political rhetoric

- “In the 2016 presidential election Donald Trump... spreading paranoid warnings....
- Andrew Yang
- “... civil war within the next five years...

Trust (cont.)

Meaning for us:

Not triggered by such rhetoric.

Longing...with hope.

D) Patience

The *meek will inherit the earth (v. 5)*

Using opportunities but never forcing
the Father's hand.

Patience (cont.)

Learning from Jesus...

- Doing our best to win an argument...
but....
- Never controlled by results: (v. 10--
*Blessed are those who are
persecuted for righteousness' sake*).
- Content simply to have been faithful.

Patience (cont.)

Not learning from the world

- 23% of Americans believe that “true American patriots may have to resort to violence to save the country” (v. 15% in 2021).
- 31% of white Evangelical protestants support the idea, significantly more than any other religious group.

E) Hope

Blessed (9x!) because...

Hope, not despair.

Bush to Obama White House transition

Bi-partisanship.

- Asian hate crimes bill

Hope (cont.)

Fighting the culture war by catching the “enemy” doing the right thing.

Leaving motives with Jesus (*Wheat and Tares*)

Celebrating public good because it is good

The deepest aim in public life

Not to make ourselves happier...

Not to win

To make our heavenly Father happier
because....

We have help

Jesus in the Beatitudes and in us.

*Christ is in us, the hope of glory (Col.
1:27)*



O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free;
Rolling as a mighty ocean
In its fullness over me.

Underneath me, all around me
Is the current of his love;
Leading onward, leading
homeward
To my glorious rest above.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
'Tis a heaven of heavens to me
And it lifts me up to glory
For it lifts me up to Thee.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus
Spread his praise from shore to
shore
How he loveth, ever loveth,
Changeth never, never more.

Take-away

Have a cup of coffee with a Christian whose politics you don't like.

- Say that you really want to listen and understand.
- Ask questions: what they believe and why.
- Listen: no need to win.

- Determine that love and trust will drive your tone.
- Seek common ground in shared moral principles.
- Pray together.
- Agree to disagree.
- Have the Lord's Supper together soon.

Frequently asked Questions on politics and faith

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Resources and Bibliography

Available on the class handout

On the website