

Faithful Conversations: The Soul of Politics (Part 1)

OVERVIEW

We are living in a time of great division in 2022-23. Polling indicates that millions of citizens believe another civil war will likely occur within the next few years. As ELCA Christians, what role do we have to play in our churches, communities, and nation in the face of various issues dividing people? Can we be purveyors of hope and healing within our communities?

In this 4-session study, we will place our present moment in context by exploring our history, with a special emphasis on interpreting that history through the lens of Christianity. Each session will include a background lecture followed by opportunities for reflective discussions. Our plan is not to argue over issues or drive a particular agenda, but rather to have faithful conversations about HOW we navigate the challenges created by societal divisions, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Session 1: 14 September: Where are we Politically in September of 2022?

Session 2: 21 September: What Did the Founders Create? How are we doing?

Session 3: 28 September: Personal Politics and the Role of Political Parties

Session 4: 5 October: The Media Environment and its Impact

Commentary on Format

Each session will focus on one aspect of our political environment and will be an informal mix of lecture and discussion. Beyond the goal of revisiting some basics of our system with you, we will reflect on the role that Christians play within our communities, state, and nation. Our intention is to go further with this study (Part 2) by focusing on Luther's attitudes concerning the civic lives of Christians and further, how the ELCA approaches the political world.

Working Bibliography

If you enjoy reading in the historical/political realm, here are a few titles and article suggestions that are helpful for understanding our political foundations and present situation. I also included a couple of titles that are good for considering the intersection of religion and politics. We will reference some of these as we proceed.

Books

*Brooks, Arthur C. *Love Your Enemies: How Decent People Can Save America from the Culture of Contempt*. Broadside Books, 2019.

Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Gerstle, Gary. *The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era*. Oxford University Press, 2021.

- Holmes, David L. *The Faiths of the Founding Fathers*. Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Holton, Woody. *Liberty is Sweet: The Hidden History of the American Revolution*. Simon and Schuster, 2021.
- Lindberg, Carter and Paul Wee (editors). *The Forgotten Luther: Reclaiming the Social-Economic Dimension of the Reformation*. Lutheran University Press, 2016.
- Marty, Martin. *Martin Luther*. Penguin Books, 2004.
- Meacham, Jon. *American Gospel: God, the Founding Fathers, and the Making of a Nation*. Random House, 2006.
- Putnam, Robert, and Shaylyn Romney Grant. *The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How We Can Do It Again*. Simon and Schuster, 2020.
- Ratner-Rosenhagen, Jennifer. *The Ideas That Made America: A Brief History*. Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Ricks, Thomas E. *First Principles: What America's Founders Learned from the Greeks and Romans and How That Shaped Our Country*. HarperCollins, 2020.
- Seib, Gerald F. *We Should Have Seen It Coming: From Reagan to Trump – A Front-Row Seat to a Political Revolution*. Random House, 2020.
- Schmuhl, Robert. *The Glory and the Burden: The American Presidency from FDR to Trump*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2019.
- Shenkman, Rick. *Just How Stupid Are We? Facing the Truth About the American Voter*. Basic Books, 2008.
- Wehle, Kim. *How to Read the Constitution*. HarperCollins, 2019.

Articles (available on-line)

- Hofstadter, Richard. "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." *Harper's Magazine*, harpers.org/archive/1964/11/the-paranoid-style-in-american-politics/.
- Weigel, David. "The Seven Political States of Wisconsin." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 16 Aug. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/politics/wisconsin-political-geography/.

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