

## **APRIL 2017**



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### FROM THE DEAN

Greetings! Welcome to your first newsletter! Students, alumni and staff all said, "We need to find ways for our Seminary community to stay connected!"

We started a Facebook page. You can find it at <u>www.facebook.com/GracelandSeminary</u>.

This newsletter is another way to ensure that our community is well informed and connected. You will find in this newsletter updates on what's happening in the Seminary, introductions to our students, information on events, recommended resources and theological perspectives for spirituality and ministry. We hope you enjoy it!



#### OUR MISSION AND PURPOSE

Community of Christ Seminary is solidly grounded in the Christian faith and shaped by its religious heritage and tradition. This tradition understands that God's will and purpose for the world and the church continue to emerge out of the process of faithful response to human need. We affirm that the people of God are called to live in community with all creation, and that peace and justice are the touchstones by which the gospel of Jesus Christ is enfleshed.

The mission of the seminary is to educate and prepare — through prayerful scholarship, teaching, service and mentoring — faithful, creative and discerning leaders for ministries in congregations, church and the world. "[S]eek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning even by study and also by faith." (Community of Christ *Doctrine and Covenants* 85:36)

# FACULTY PERSPECTIVE THEOLOGY YOU CAN USE

#### Faith & Politics

This year's U.S. Presidential election ignited many people's political passions. People of faith, with and without party preference, are reacting to the new political environment. It is also impacting churches. Some communities feel galvanized by the politics after the election, while other communities are feeling pulled apart.

On December 9, I felt the need to respond. From conversations on social media and with others in the seminary, I realized we need to talk about faith and politics. I teach theology and social ethics, and Christian politics are central to this. Politics lie at the heart of the gospel. I wrote a blog post entitled "Faith and Politics" on <u>mattfrizzell.com</u>, which shared some thoughts about how faith and politics fit together. I'd like to share some of those thoughts here.

One reason faith and politics are so difficult is because "liberal" and "conservative" viewpoints are unavoidable in the U.S. They are hegemonic, meaning they have inescapable influence. These labels indicate widespread and opposing ideologies (frameworks of ideas and understanding) that fundamentally shape our ways of thinking and worldviews.

These labels serve a purpose. Because our world is complex, "liberal" and "conservative" labels help us navigate our complicated politics and culture. They simplify the competing interests, biases and perspectives that shape the information and misinformation flowing from media. They do so by appealing to our fundamental emotions and commitments.

We recognize "liberal" and "conservative" perspectives quickly by the language and issues we associate with them. They clue us into whether others see things the way we do. They simplify more difficult and involved conversations, filling in assumptions and shaping our interpretation. "Liberal" and "conservative" ideas make sense of the world creating unity between the like-minded and inherent disagreement with those who differ.

The inner logic of "liberal" and "conservative" viewpoints have become increasingly oppositional in two generations. This is what makes them both useful and divisive. By simplifying the complex issues of law, economics, politics and power, "liberal" and "conservative" points of view shape alliances and dialogue as quickly as they shut them down. This is what is so difficult in our churches. As soon as "liberal" and "conservative" labels come to dominate our interpretation of the issues or others, the tension becomes undesirable. Members group up in like-thinking groups. Others feel excluded and cry foul. Some speak up. Some leave.

Faith and politics in the U.S. cannot escape this tension. But the gospel offers another way to frame our politics. Christian faith offers another way to interpret the world, its issues and others.

Our faith rests on different foundations than "liberal" and "conservative." Christian faith has a unique politics based on the reign of God. To understand the reign of God, we turn to scripture. If we understand scripture in its context, we cannot spiritualize the politics of the Gospel to the point that they lose their modern political impact and meaning. The "Kingdom of God" is a wholly and holy political term. It is not just spiritual, but also incarnate - as God was in Jesus. To many, the term "Kingdom" of God has lost its political meaning because "kingdom" is an ancient and medieval political term. Americans don't talk that way, so the term does not bring up partisan thinking, questions of state authority or governance. But the "Kingdom of God" is political nonetheless.

What makes the "Kingdom of God" political is its reference to authority and how our lives are governed. In the Kingdom of God, God's will for creation reigns. This is a kingdom of radical equality and agape love. It holds the authority of both justice and grace.

"Jesus is Lord" is equally a political term in the gospels. As the messiah, the Lordship of Jesus indicates our Christian politics: Christ is for whom we live our lives and by whose rule our lives are governed. This rule is first, spiritual, but also incarnate in our behavior, actions and the life of the Church. Christ, the prince of Peace, is our King. He is the messenger and message of God's reign. God's will for creation is Shalom, a belief in the restoration and fulfillment of creation.

How the gospel's politics fit into American democracy, i.e. its theories of state, self-governance and party politics, is a critical question. But this question comes second. The Gospel cannot be reduced to one party or another, one government or another, because none stand in for God's reign. The Old Testament is clear on this. For Christ's community, the politics of God's reign is the foundation that comes first.

If we believe in faith and politics instead of faith or politics, the church has a foundation and tools to reframe the politics of our day. "Liberal" and "conservative" will not go away. We must engage their assumptions, point of view and political ends. But "liberal" and "conservative" politics cannot replace our language of faith. Rather, "liberal" and "conservative" politics can be transformed and changed by the language of our faith. Our faith points our politics to the reign of God. This changes the terms and ultimate outcome of our politics.

God's reign is achieved through protection of the vulnerable, humility and service to others, clear justice met with grace, and generosity and sharing of God's gifts. Moreover, God's reign can be revealed in the life of the church, through the means of state and government, through business and community relationships, and through individual lives. What is central is the transformation of lives and restoration of creation and its relations because of what God has done in Jesus Christ.

Putting faith first, politics can be different.

For information on how people of faith voted in the 2016 Presidential election, visit this *Pew Research* article: <u>http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-vot-ed-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/</u>

Written by Matt Frizzell

Matt Frizzell is Dean of the seminary and teaches in the area of theology and ethics.

#### WHAT'S NEW



The Seminary had a great incoming class this fall. We admitted 16 new students. Among our students are Latter day seekers, Catholics, Community of Christ pastors and priesthood, and emerging leaders from Europe. Our students are from India and Iowa, Canada and the United Kingdom, Munich and Brussels, San Francisco and Nauvoo. Among our new students are a university history professor, a playwright, nurses, finance professionals and small business owners.

#### OUR SEMINARIANS



Gayle is a new Seminary student this fall. She is an RN and palliative care nurse in the San Francisco area. She is a previous graduate of Graceland and has children who are also Graceland grads.

I am thankful to be a part of a church that is open and inclusive of all people. This is especially important to me as a male to female transsexual. And while my gender is only one aspect of who I am, when I came to the point in my life that I wanted to grow in my relationship with God and others, I needed a place where I could feel comfortable and focus my attention on my developing relationship and not just on my gender.

The Community of Christ Seminary is that place for me. I feel loved and encouraged to explore my relationship to God and others as well as gain new insights into my gender as it relates to my total being and God's creation of me as a person. I have found a place of sanctuary where I am safe and protected.

### RECOMMENDED

In the Seminary, we are often asked about good scripture study materials. Below is a list of recommended bible studies and books that are good for shared study or personal reading.

Bible Study (for congregations or personal use)

*Interpretation* Bible Study Series (*Interpretation* also has quality commentaries. Please look for their Bible Study series)

*Journey through the Bible* (available through <u>https://www.cokesbury.com/</u>)

20/30 Bible Study for Young Adults (available through Abingdon Press)

William Barclay Commentary Series (These are older commentaries, but quality resources to begin Bible study together)

#### Books on Scripture

Bernard W. Anderson, Unfolding Drama of the Bible
William Barclay, Guide to the New Testament or Mind of Jesus or Parables of Jesus
Marcus Borg, Reading the Bible Again for the First Time
Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite, #Occupy the Bible: What Jesus Really Said (and Did) About Money and Power

Robert McAfee Brown, Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes

Donald L. Griggs, The Bible from Scratch: The Old Testament for Beginners and The Bible from Scatch: The New Testament for Beginners

Dale Luffman, The Book of Mormon's Witness to its First Readers

Mark Powell, Introduction to the Gospels (Abingdon Press)

Luke Timothy Johnson, Living Jesus

Elsa Tamez, Bible of the Oppressed or The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead



#### CONTACT

Matt Frizzell, PhD Dean, Community of Christ Seminary mfrizzel@graceland.edu 641-784-5276

Community of Christ Seminary 1401 W. Truman Road Independence, MO 64050 Sharon Ward Assistant to the Dean, Admissions & Information ward@graceland.edu 816-423-4676

