
Hard on Ideas, Soft on People

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Recommended Citation

Hoekstra, Erik () "Hard on Ideas, Soft on People," *The Voice*: Vol. 66 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/voice/vol66/iss2/1>

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HARD ON IDEAS, SOFT ON PEOPLE

One of the joys of the spring semester is that I get to speak at the first chapel in January. This year, it happened to coincide with the inauguration of President Joe Biden; as our worship team welcomed students with praise songs, Biden had been president for about two minutes.



Given the date and time of day, I reminded our students, faculty, and staff of the biblical injunction from 1 Timothy 2: "I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

We paused during the service to do precisely that: to thank God for the service of those leaders who were vacating federal positions that day as well as to ask for God's blessing and wisdom to be given to those just starting in their roles—including Iowa Representative Randy Feenstra ('91), a Dordt alumnus and recent faculty member.

Praying for our political leaders is biblical, and I hope our students continue to do that regularly. But we need to do more than just pray—we need to be politically aware and active both as voters and as informed citizens. I want Dordt students to be "wise as serpents" about political issues of our

day—but they also need to be "innocent as doves" as they carry out this political activity as Christ's ambassadors in our culture today.

I shared some longitudinal survey data about political polarization in the United States from 1994–2017, helping students see how bifurcated the American electorate has become. The challenges inherent in having civil political conversations between those who disagree on policy issues is as difficult as it's ever been.

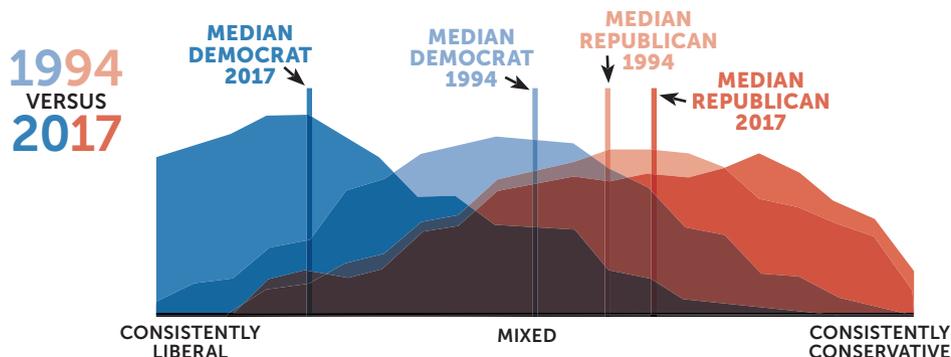
Toward that end, I encouraged students with a paraphrase of advice from theologians I admire: "Be hard on ideas and soft on people." Perhaps I was preaching more to myself than our students, as advice like that is easy to say and much harder to put into action.

But it needs to be our call as Christians. The personal attacks and cancel culture of our political life in our country today will be our undoing, and that doesn't mean an anything-goes morality or public policy approach. Especially as Christians, if we "win" the argument, but leave people wondering how we're living the fruit of the Spirit through the process, we likely aren't being effective kingdom citizens.

I hope our students heard me in that first chapel—and I hope all of us can live it out.

Soli Deo Gloria!

DR. ERIK HOEKSTRA, PRESIDENT



[HTTPS://WWW.PEWRESEARCH.ORG/POLITICS/INTERACTIVES/POLITICAL-POLARIZATION-1994-2017/](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/interactives/political-polarization-1994-2017/)

Voice

THE OF DORDT UNIVERSITY

WINTER/SPRING 2021

VOLUME 66 | ISSUE 2

The Voice, an outreach of Dordt University, is sent to you as alumni and friends of Christian higher education. *The Voice* is published three times each year to share information about the programs, activities, and people at Dordt.

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As an institution of higher education committed to a Reformed Christian perspective, Dordt University equips students, alumni, and the broader community to work effectively toward Christ-centered renewal in all aspects of contemporary life.

On the Cover

Assistant Professor of Chemistry Dr. Joshua Zhu teaches Organic Chemistry: Structure and Mechanisms, which focuses on helping students learn the foundational topics and problem-solving skills needed to understand the many chemical reactions that involve compounds containing carbon. Photo by Jamin Ver Velde.

