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Faith, Politics, and Social Media

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Faith, Politics, and Social Media

Abstract

"The first few hopefuls for the 2016 Presidential race have begun making announcements over the past couple of weeks. Many more will be making their aspirations to higher office official in the near future. And, along with those announcements, the chatter on Facebook and Twitter are already ramping up. Have you seen it already? Mud is being slung. Venom is being splashed. Candidates who have just announced their intentions to run are already being demonized. And Election Day is a year-and-a-half away! I wish we could have more civil conversations about politics."

Posting about the trouble with having political "conversations" on social media from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/faith-politics-and-social-media/>

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Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

Faith, Politics, and Social Media

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Dave Mulder

The first few hopefuls for the 2016 Presidential race have begun making announcements over the past couple of weeks. Many more will be making their aspirations to higher office official in the near future. And, along with those announcements, the chatter on Facebook and Twitter are already ramping up. Have you seen it already? Mud is being slung. Venom is being splashed. Candidates who have just announced their intentions to run are already being demonized. And Election Day is a year-and-a-half away!

I wish we could have more civil conversations about politics.

You see, I'm a moderate. I find myself in the middle on almost every point of debate on the national stage today. And, as a result, I don't respond well to people bellowing the party line—of either party—without also expressing a willingness to listen to viewpoints other than their own, and an openness to reasoning a bit about how faith impacts their view of politics.

I have a conviction that approaching the intersection of faith and politics requires conversation: a willingness to share your thoughts, sure, but also a willingness to listen to what other people have to say. You would think that social media would be a great venue for this then, wouldn't you? A venue designed for sharing ideas? I think it's safe to say that social media is shifting the way political discourse happens. If you spend much time at all on social media sites you'll know what I mean. In fact, I'll probably share this post with friends and followers via Facebook, Twitter, and Google+, hoping to encourage more discussion. That said, I'm not entirely sure social media is the best way to have this kind of "conversation." Which, I recognize, makes this post a little ironic...but I hope you'll really reflect on the message I'm trying convey here.

The trouble I see with political "conversation" via social media is this: it's hard to be reasonable in the realm of social media. Most of the time, it's sound bites—you only get 140 characters on Twitter, right?—or links, or images, or video clips. It's pretty easy to push these things quickly and with low demand on your thinking. Which, I think, means we tend to shoot things out there that simply affirm our own thinking, rather than open us up to conversation. (And I recognize that I have been guilty of this in the past too, lest you think I feel I'm above the fray—I'm not.)

Most of the political stuff I see on social media sites isn't really about having a conversation. Most of it is more aimed at either:

- a) affirming what you already believe, with little consideration to how the message is being conveyed, or
- b) picking a fight with someone who thinks differently than you do.

In either case, I think this is pretty insidious behavior for Christians. Most of my friends on social media sites are fellow believers, and I'm increasingly disappointed by the behavior of some—not all—who seem to be seeking division, rather than unity. I worry that harsh disagreement about politics might drive a wedge between believers. I worry that we're judgmental of each other and insensitive toward other's opinions. I worry that we are too quick to snipe and too slow to listen, to have a conversation. Too much of what I'm seeing online is divisive rather than unifying.

But there are exceptions.

During the last presidential election, a good friend posted this image on Facebook.

I shared it, because on the day I saw this, I felt it was necessary. Many of my social media friends were lamenting one politician's views or another's, or filibustering about healthcare or taxes or a dozen other issues of the day—and usually in ways that alienated others, rather than bringing people together.

Then, on the same day I shared the above image, a pastor-friend posted this thought:

There is a false notion that speaking up for the unborn is a Republican issue. Or speaking up for the poor is a Democrat issue. Or marriage is a Republican issue and caring for the sick is a Democrat issue. First and foremost, they are gospel issues. And no political party has a corner on the gospel.

#thereisonlyonegovernmentthatisholy

This statement beautifully put into words the feeling in my heart. I think people are quick to paint their personal political beliefs with a veneer of religiosity—and this isn't just a Republican issue, lest my Republican friends get huffy too quickly. I think Christians on both the right and the left need to examine their political beliefs in the light of the Gospel.

Republican ≠ Christian.

Democrat ≠ Christian.

Faithfully following Jesus = Christian.

This is the heart of the issue.

So over the next weeks and months of politicking, what if we all determine in our hearts that we are going to strive for fruitful discourse? In particular, what if we commit to these ground rules for our political conversations, whether held in social media or otherwise:

1. Let us recognize who is really in control,
2. Let us seek middle ground and strive to be peacemakers, and
3. Let us work out our faith with fear and trembling—even in the realm of politics.

I'm a moderate, after all. I'm looking for common ground.

