

The Right and Wrong Ways to Approach the Public Square

As Christians we are commanded to love our neighbours. One way we can love our neighbours is by working to ensure that all people, being made in the image of God, be treated with justice, respect, and mercy in the public arena. Our speaker will propose several characteristics and virtues we ought to exhibit when seeking the "welfare of the city" (Jeremiah 29:6-7). He will conclude by suggesting we need to develop an "Augustinian sensibility" if we are rightly to discern what we as Christians should aspire to do in our private and public witness.

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Six Propositions

- 1) We need a recovery of the cardinal virtue of “prudence.”
 - a) Prudence is defined as “practical wisdom” and helps learn to balance and chose among competing ideals in the public arena.
 - b) In practical terms, prudence is the thoughtful weighing of competing goods against lesser evils.
- 2) We need to understand the true meaning of the separation of church and state
 - a) The separation of church and state does not mean the separation of individual’s religious convictions from national, and local, public policy debates
- 3) While we each live in one nation, our societies are made up of several different cultures.
 - a) James Davison Hunter’s book *Culture Wars*
 - b) Gertrude Himmelfarb’s book *One Nation, Two Cultures*

- 4) The importance of “civility” in our public discourse: what we say in public matters. Our words and our “tone” matter.
- 5) We need to recover a Protestant understanding of “natural law” as it applies to society, politics, and the common good.
 - a) As Christian believers we need to learn to develop a “public language” and a “public grammar” when we make appeals in the public arena.
- 6) We all need to develop an “Augustinian sensibility” regarding our public witness.
 - a) We live between the ages of “The City of God “ and the “City of Man” and remembering the important implications of this will influence the way we see the possibilities of justice while living in these “in between times.”
 - b) This will cause us to have a “chastened” and realistic view of politics.

Conclusions

Suggested Readings:

The City of God, by St. Augustine.

The Naked Public Square by Richard John Neuhaus (Eerdmans).

A Preserving Grace, edited by Michael Cromartie (Eerdmans).

The City of Man, by Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner (Moody Press).

Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law, by J. Budziszewski (Inter-Varsity Press).

Rediscovering The Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics, by Stephen Grabill (Eerdmans).

Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World, by Richard Mouw (Inter-Varsity Press).