

"Conscience and Compromise"
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FUUSA
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[the Children's Story was Hans Christian Anderson's "The Emperor's New Clothes"]

The Reading

"I Hate Losing When We Win"

Jim Hightower

[The] "New Democrats" are an embarrassment to the party of Jefferson and Jackson, Roosevelt and Truman, JFK & LBJ. Instead of standing proudly on the egalitarian principles of the party and fighting passionately for America's working-class majority, they cling to the moneyed elite and feebly attempt to govern as a bunch of Casper Milquetoasts skittering toward some mythical political "vital center" where they think they'll be safe. On all things they seek to portray themselves as moderates, apparently believing that folks down at the Chat and Chew Café will see this as some big political plus: "Hey, Earline, I'm all pumped up about the Democrats being so moderate toward the global scumbags and scavengers who're hauling every last one of our good jobs off to the Sultanate of Southeast Shish Kebob, aren't you?" People want moderates about like a hungry family wants a lecture on diet. . . .

[In a piece called "**Daddy's Philosophy**," Hightower wrote:]

Have heart, for a change is coming. It's coming because it must, just as it has had to come periodically in our history when economic elites have set themselves too far above the rest of us. "The fruits of the toil of millions are boldly stolen to build up colossal fortunes for a few, unprecedented in the history of mankind," proclaimed the preamble to the 1892 platform of the People's Party, rallying the Populist movement to an historic reshaping of America's political landscape. "We have witnessed for more than a quarter of a century the struggles of the two great political parties for power and plunder," the platform raged, "while grievous wrongs have been inflicted upon the suffering people. We charge that the controlling influences dominating both these parties have permitted the existing dreadful conditions to develop without serious effort to prevent or restrain them. Neither do they now promise us any substantial reform. . . . They propose to sacrifice our homes, lives, and children on the altar of mammon; to destroy the multitude in order to secure corruption funds from the millionaires."

No need to appoint a drafting committee to put forward the particulars of today's populist manifesto – just [email] this one across the country.

The Sermon [church and state]

I believe in the separation of church and state – it was part of the genius of the founders of this nation. The point of that principle is to keep religious establishments from dominating government and compelling agreement with their dogmas, AND, I would insist, it also functions to keep the religious institutions from being controlled by secular authorities: that is to say, it frees religious institutions to serve as critics of the political establishment. There are limits, which include respect for other religions. I believe the Roman Catholic church, for example, should be free to advocate for its anti-abortion position, just as we should be free to advocate for pro-choice. Much of the positive change that has taken place in our society has been based in the religious communities. The principles which we articulate as Unitarian Universalists are not just Sunday ideas. They relate to the real world and I believe we have an obligation to stand for them when we have consensus, including:

- ! The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- ! Justice equity and compassion in human relations;
- ! The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.

This morning's sermon is rooted in those principles.

[adolescence]

Adolescents can be a delight. Psychologists tell us that the adolescent years are marked by a high level of idealism. [I'm not sure that is as true today as it used to be – I'm afraid they've been paying too much attention to our actions instead of our words.] We have drilled our children with the ideals of our nation and religions, hopefully teaching them right from wrong, teaching them that all are created equal, teaching them that ours is a government "of the people, by the people, and for the people." Their naivete has been charming and has sometimes been the source of hope for us all.

Adolescents can drive you crazy. Their naive idealism can make us feel guilty, and we do not like to feel guilty. We often break down and tell them to "Grow up." Growing up, in our culture, too often means coming to understand that ideals are fine and good in church on Sunday, but they have little place in the workaday world of adults. To be mature means to learn to compromise. On the one hand we have the ideals we think we would like to see practiced; on the other hand we have the real world. In the real world, "Good guys finish last." If you really want five bedrooms, an SUV (or two), a large screen tv with a satellite hookup – the "truly fine things in life," some would say you need to learn to put ideals in their place – church.

What happened to the "flower children" of the sixties who warned us never to trust anyone over 30? They aged and, by their former standards, "sold out." The pressure of the society-at-large proved insurmountable. It seems as if the ones who remained pure are either being maintained on drugs - prescription or otherwise - or they are living on the irrelevant fringe of society.

[hypocrisy and antihypocrisy]

It is easy to be overly simplistic about this. In her fascinating little book on **Hypocrisy and Integrity**, Ruth Grant pointed out that:

It is a fairly straightforward matter to condemn . . . hypocrisy. But is hypocrisy always such a bad thing? Consideration of the antihypocrite as the alternative certainly gives one reason to wonder. The antihypocrite is also a classic type. Inflexible in his righteousness and unwilling to countenance any moral lapse, he scarcely recognizes the necessity for compromise. Too often the costs of his efforts to sustain his own purity are borne by others, and hence he ought not to be trusted .

. . . It is possible, after all, to be too good. This intuition feeds our suspicion of antihypocrites who appear in the form of political ideologues and religious zealots. The intuition is supported by psychologists who see moral rigidity as indicative of a personality imbalance, usually as evidence of an overweening superego.

Grant went on to suggest that:

Hypocrisy and antihypocrisy, cynicism and sanctimonious righteousness are not the only possibilities. The alternative we seek is integrity, keeping in mind that integrity may take a variety of forms. The person of integrity is one who can be trusted to do the right thing, even at some cost to himself. "Doing the right thing" may require compromise; some compromises are certainly possible without compromising oneself.

[compromise: the up-side]

The fundamental argument of Grant's book is that compromise is essential in the political process because politics force us to deal with conflicting perspectives and claims. Martin Benjamin, in a similar book, **Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics**, made the same point.

Although history books may honor a politician like Henry Clay as "the great compromiser," our moral exemplars are usually men and women who have been steadfast in resisting pressures or temptations to compromise. Socrates, Sir Thomas More, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the like are admired not only for the nature of their convictions but also for their refusal to compromise them.

Benjamin asserted:

Even if we disagree with one or more of a person's basic principles, we often think more of her if she conscientiously tries to act in accord with them than if she is too willing to compromise them. Indeed, if she is always prepared to compromise, we may question whether she has any principles at all.

We used to think it was naive to think we would be well served by any politician who was unwilling to compromise. Not only would such a person be unelectable, and not only would such a person be unproductive if elected, but such a candidate would probably turn out to be a tyrant, unable to see that he or she did not have all the answers in every situation. Benjamin insisted:

A political system of government is one that, first, acknowledges interpersonal and group conflict as an ineliminable feature of social life, and second, regards negotiation, compromise, and conciliation as preferable to force or violence as a means of ameliorating such conflict.

Benjamin had a wonderful line that we dare not ignore:

Requiring the impossible of our politicians -- that they retain the highest degree of ideological or philosophical purity while fulfilling their political roles- is to create a vacuum in our politics that cheerfully will be filled by the incompetent and the unscrupulous.

[times have changed]

Actually, times have changed. My sermon, to this point, is taken from the only one I ever wished I could take back. It is from sixteen years ago and it was delivered before the Gore/Bush election. In it I went on to suggest that while there were differences between them, it seemed as if those differences were less than the differences between them and Ralph Nader. Actually, according to the internet, I was in 78% agreement with Gore, 14% agreement with Bush, but 91% in agreement with Ralph Nader. In that sermon I expressed the dilemma I felt. Should I be practical or should I vote my conscience? I ultimately voted for Gore, but Bush won and proved worse than I had imagined he would be. The “compassionate conservative” proved to be less compassionate and more conservative than I anticipated

There are people who have never forgiven Ralph Nader, the green party candidate, for “robbing Gore of his victory,” but I have never agreed with them. I believe Gore ran a terrible campaign and the election should never have been close enough for Nader’s support to matter. And, of course, it was the Republican majority of the Supreme Court and not the voters who ultimately decided the election anyhow.

What no one could have anticipated back then was the rise of the Tea Party and the emergence of politicians to whom compromise was a truly dirty word - an unthinkable practice. Yes they could get elected, and they were. My mind still balks at imagining a meeting on the night of a Presidential Inauguration at which the opposition party declares its commitment to defeat anything and everything the new president supports. It was decided at such a meeting in 2009 that even bills proposed by Republicans must be defeated if President Obama supported them. I believe that qualifies as treason, but that’s how it’s been for the last eight years. And the president who has been stonewalled has, in spite of his elegant rhetoric and his charm, has not been all that liberal. The wealth which has been increased has almost all been in the pockets of the 1%. The stock market has hit historic highs. The pharmaceutical and insurance industries have done very well under the so-called Obamacare. This is not socialism. We continue to wreak havoc in Middle Eastern countries in the name of regime change. That “hopey-changeey thing” did not pan out as promised, and it was not only the stonewalling by the Republican congress – there has been no real principled struggle from the White House nor the Democrats in congress.

The Economist Magazine’s Intelligence Unit, which does an annual ranking of governments reported this week that the United States is now ranked as “a flawed democracy” rather than a “full democracy.” The largest reason for this is “a stronger emphasis on ideological purity and less appetite for compromise, which reinforces a lack of confidence in Congress among voters.”

[the 2016 campaign]

We have just been through an incredible presidential campaign, the like of which I hope is never repeated. Two candidates who were both heavily unpopular, fought against each other. We know that virtually all the “experts” were certain who was going to win, and all of them ended up with egg on their faces.

The new President claims to have won in a landslide. That is simply not true, just as so much of what he has said is not true. In fact, his 56.88 percent of the vote of the electoral college ranks 46th out of the result of 58 presidential elections. Hardly a landslide. The 3 million more popular votes his opponent received are a record for an unsuccessful candidate. [The illegal voters are a figment of his imagination.]

There are all kinds of excuses offered for the outcome: misogyny, fear of foreigners,

intervention by the FBI Director, manipulation by the Russians, the votes that went to a third party candidate, antipathy toward the candidate's family name, oh, there's a long list. My belief is more fundamental than that. Actually, it goes back to how the Democratic Party has been transformed in the last three decades.

[Arkansas]

To understand this, it might be instructive to look closer at an example of political compromise.

In 1979, the People of Arkansas elected a brilliant, charismatic young Liberal Democrat to be their governor. He made it clear that he was committed to liberal principles and he would not sell the people out for the sake of the big corporations that had exercised what he saw as excessive political influence in his state. The corporate executives tried to warn him, but he would not listen. He was driven from office in a humiliating re-election defeat in 1981. He learned about compromise the hard way, going from corporation to corporation, hat in hand. He painfully accumulated what some called political wisdom. The corporations could see potential – the boy was just naive. Having learned his lesson, he was reelected in 1983 as a "New Democrat," which is to say, a Democrat who looked and acted a lot like a Republican.

Jim Hightower commented on how it feels to lose when you thought you'd won. Hightower is not a naive idealist. He says, in a piece he called "Advice":

Now don't be clucking your tongue and lecturing on how politics is the "art of compromise." Sure it is – compromise is essential to democracy and all that. But one doesn't come out of the chute compromising: ride that bucking, twisting bull for all you are worth first! Reach your compromises honestly, after you've given it your best shot.

It was in the earliest days of Bill Clinton's first term as POTUS that the nature of his Presidency to come became clear. The brevity of his advocacy of acceptance of homosexuals in the military, and his quick betrayal of Lani Guinier, who had the potential of being an exceptional Attorney General, set the tone for the substance of the Clinton Presidency right off the bat. There never was much "there" there. While some point to the Republican Congress as the cause of Clinton's failure to deliver, I am among those who believe the truth is that Bill Clinton, as President, was so committed to compromise, had learned his lesson so well, had so thoroughly sold his soul, that he was afraid to offer leadership, to fight for his former principles. Think of the growth in prison populations, "don't ask, don't tell" and so-called welfare reform. And the Democratic Party followed suit to the point where it no longer stood for its former principles. The people who had supported Clinton felt betrayed

I have not sought a pure idealist for President of the United States. I respect the political process and I know it demands an ability to compromise. I believe, however, that the ability to compromise requires that one have a principled commitment that serves as a base – that one have, dare I say, a conscience.

[candidates?]

Jim Hightower's book, **If the Gods Had Meant Us to Vote They Would Have Given Us Candidates**, was published in 2000, but it certainly applied this year. In it he said:

Even before the voting starts, the election is over. OK, still up for grabs is which

personality will get to sit in the big chair with the Presidential Seal on it, and which party will have a congressional majority. But already decided is the basic issue of whom government will serve, with the status quo assured on middle-class job loss, trade scams, environmental gradualism, mergers, corporate welfare, biotech insanity, campaign-finance corruption, and the other policies that most effect Americans at the kitchen-table level . . .

. . . The candidates' views on all kitchen-table issues have been pre-tailored to get the money –a tailoring that lacks much subtlety, essentially coming down to this obsequious pledge: "I [name of candidate] will put your financial interests above all others, I will do nothing without clearing it with you first." It's a pledge that's also expressed more colloquially as "You da Man!"

The famous words of Henry Ford keep haunting me: "People can have the Model T in any color – so long as it's black." We can have any President we want, so long as he [or she] is more committed to the Dow Jones average than to social justice.

Participation of Americans in the electoral process continues to decline. Many analysts believe it is because, while there are differences in platforms, people increasingly believe that their vote does not really change the outcome in any substantive way.

What does a vote mean? Does it mean, "This is a candidate whom I believe will make a significant difference in the political spectrum," or is it, "I will choose A as the lesser evil?" At what point is it appropriate to stand up for the values in which you believe, and at what point does compromise become the "rational choice?"

How radical would it be to decide which candidate actually represents what you believe, and then make your vote a vote of conscience rather than expedience?

[whose fault?]

I confess I never felt comfortable with Secretary Clinton as a candidate for president. It had almost nothing to do with emails, certainly not Benghazi, nor her health or gender. It had to do with her penchant for secrecy, her support for a hawkish foreign policy which further destabilized the Middle East, her list of foreign policy advisers which was almost all villains from the Bush era, her support of the military dictatorship in Honduras, her close alliance with Wall Street, and her role in trade treaties.

Indeed, she did end up verbally supporting many of the policies advocated by Bernie Sanders, who I believe would have been a far more successful candidate, but that seemed like expediency, not principle. Mrs. Clinton never attracted the massive crowds Sanders did, which rivaled Trump's. The enthusiasm for Sanders was non-transferable. While her election was accepted by many as inevitable, it obviously was not. Lots of Democrats stayed home because their support of her was, at best, lukewarm.

I believe that the election of Mr. Trump was partly due to many things which I find abhorrent, but I also believe that many good people voted for him largely because he did appear to represent a rejection of the status quo. He was the ultimate outsider and Secretary Clinton represented the unpalatable status quo. The wealth of the white men he has nominated for his cabinet exceeds anything in American history, as is the fact that most of them oppose the purposes of the agencies they are to lead. He is not proposing to clear out the swamp as he promised: he is institutionalizing it. The end of the campaign has not seen his attachment to the truth increase. He continues to deny having said things that are readily visible on videotape. His claims about his election landslide reinforce the belief that he is not

attached to reality. His previously unheard of disinterest in security briefings is, to say the least, troubling: he seems not to want to know what he does not know. His ignorance of the Constitution and disregard of law is frightening. [He seems to know as little of the Constitution as of the Bible.] And now there is the insanity of his insistence on his grossly exaggerated perception of the turnout at his inauguration. But, as far as we know, he is going to be the president for the next four years. [I do have this fantasy that he will pull a Sarah Palin and decide to resign, but I can't imagine his ego permitting it.] I have grave doubt that he really wanted to win, but that's beside the point: he did.

[what now?]

Actually, the purpose of this sermon is to ask the question, "What now?"

I hear some Democrats advocating that we should do to President Trump what the Republicans did to President Obama: disrespect him and do everything possible to block everything he tries to accomplish. I cannot support that view. If it was wrong when the Republicans did it, and I believe it was, then it would be equally wrong for us to do it.

Nothing good can come out of our blaming ignorance, the Russians, or a "basket of deplorables" for Clinton's loss. I am not suggesting they were not a factor. We have seen the video of the Nazi salute and the "Hail Trump" that came from a neo-Nazi gathering in Washington. The Southern Poverty Law Center counted 867 cases of hateful harassment or intimidation in the United States in the 10 days after the November 8 election. The incidents have been widespread, the SPLC said. Contrary to what some would have us believe, 23 of them were aimed to Trump supporters. 23! There are deplorables out there and they need to be confronted, but not everyone who voted for "the Donald" is a deplorable. It is critical that we discern the difference.

Prior to the election, I delivered a sermon to the Central Square congregation on the rise of Adolf Hitler. Yes, we have a constitution and a long tradition that would make it hard for a dictator to take control – certainly harder than it was in Germany – but what about the new president's talk of taking away the citizenship of those who use the flag to express dissent in spite of the ruling by the Supreme Court, including Antonin Scalia, that flag burning is protected speech? What about his comments on limiting the freedom of the press to criticize the president and his attacks on the media? What about the shutting off of comments by government scientists? What about the chaos caused by the shutting of our borders? We could, indeed, have a very rocky time ahead of us. It is in trying times that our principles become most important. What do we really stand for? How courageously or ferociously are we willing to stand for those principles? We dare not "legitimize" or "normalize" the President, but, on the other hand, even a broken clock is right twice a day.

The Chinese have an idiom "point to a deer and call it a horse" which refers to confounding right and wrong, deliberately misrepresenting the truth, or distorting the facts for ulterior motives. The idiom originated during the reign of Qin Er Shi, literally the "second emperor of the Qin Dynasty" 210–207 before the Christian era.

The prime minister, Zhao Gao, was a man with greedy ambitions bent on usurping power. He wished to rebel and take the throne but feared that some of the officials might be against him. Therefore, he devised a way to identify them as well as to determine his own influence in the court.

One day, he rode a deer on an outing with the emperor. The emperor asked, "Prime Minister, why are you riding a deer?" Zhao Gao replied, "Your Majesty, this is a horse." The

emperor said, "You are mistaken! That is clearly a deer!"

Zhao Gao responded, "If Your Majesty does not believe me, then we must ask the ministers for their opinion." When the ministers were asked, half told the truth and said it was a deer, while the other half, either fearing Zhao Gao or supporting him, asserted it was a horse. Facing this situation, the young, insecure emperor actually doubted himself and chose not to believe his own eyes but to believe the words of the treacherous minister. The prime minister had those who insisted it was a deer arrested and executed.

Later generations in China have used the idiom "point to a deer and call it a horse" to describe a situation in which someone reverses black and white and turns the truth upside down in order to deceive others. Does that seem familiar? There were millions on the Mall! Don't believe your lying eyes!

This week, Bill Moyers called attention to an essay by Charles Bayer who, in turn pointed out that twenty years ago, Richard Rorty, in his book *Achieving Our Country* predicted that, if the liberals who had controlled the nation forgot to pay attention to the vast millions of rural residents and desperate unemployed workers,

"At this point," wrote Rorty, "something will crack. The non suburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strong man to vote for and . . . once a strong man takes office, nobody can predict what will happen. [Amen!]

[four helpful posts]

The Rev. Phillip Lund, a congregational life consultant working for the MidAmerica Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association, was one of our ministerial interns at the Rockford Church. Phil specializes in "Congregation-based Spiritual Direction." Phil did some research which relates to my intent this morning. At the beginning of December, Phil posted a four-part blog for religious progressives on responding to the election. They were all relevant but our time encouraging internet.

Phil's Lewis, York City "real, loving, not who voted questions to would 1. 2. 3. 4. Is I had

Some of the most incredible people I know voted for Donald Trump, and some of the most incredible people I know voted for Hillary Clinton. The people that I know that voted for Trump are not racist, misogynistic, or hateful, and the people that voted for Hillary Clinton are not hateful and intolerable. If you are someone who woke up this morning and is going to start seeing people as who they voted for, and not as the person you have always known them to be, then you are what is wrong with America. I will never think any less of any person who has different views than me, because some of the most beautiful, inspirational people I know will disagree with what I believe all day long, but at the end of the day they are still that beautiful inspirational person I have always known them as. Don't think less of people because some of their beliefs don't align with yours, and don't lose quality people in your life because you choose hate over love.

is short. Let me cite the fourth while you to seek out the first three on the '01/4-essential-posts-for-religious-progressives

fourth blog quotes The Rev. Jacqui minister of Riverside Church in New who stresses the importance of having care-frontational [**care**-frontational, **confrontational**] table talks with people differently from you. She offered four guide those conversations:

Why did you vote the way you voted?
What were you hoping your vote accomplish?
How are you feeling right now?
there anything we can do together?
an employer in my grant writing in

Canton who is somewhat to the right of Ghengis Khan politically. I have been tempted to delete him from my Facebook because of how offensive I find much of what he posts. But then there was this he shared just this week:

[two points to this sermon]

It was not coincidence that I chose Anderson's story of the "Emperor's New Clothes" for the children and to include the Chinese idiom for you. They point to what I believe we need to be willing to do in this challenging time.

Those stories point to what I believe is our most central responsibility as citizens: to be willing to stand up and speak the truth as we see it. We will not always be right, but there are times when we need to take the risk of speaking out and declaring, "The Emperor is bare!" "It is a deer!" Our declarations do not need to be abrasively confrontational, nor should they be rooted in our conviction [or the fantasy] of our intellectual or moral superiority. But we must be willing not to fall into "going along to get along" or we and our nation are lost.

My second point is that, if we respect the worth and dignity of every person, as we claim to, we need to look for the commonality between us and those who voted differently. We may not ultimately agree, but we need to understand each other better if we have any hope of improving the world. Respectful conversation is a start. It requires listening – really listening to one another.

Integrity and respect for others also mean our being willing to risk responding honestly: to call out the truth as we see it – the deer is a deer, the emperor is naked! . And an important function of this religious community is being willing to support one another in the taking of the risk that honesty entails.

When the fire of commitment
sets our mind and soul ablaze,
When our hunger and our passion
meet to call us on our way.
When we live with deep assurance
of the flame that burns within,
Then our promise finds fulfillment
and our future can begin.

Our hymn is #1028 in the teal hymnal.