

The Political Captivity of the Faithful

A Public Lecture by Dr. Nathan O. Hatch

Seigle Hall L006 at Washington University in St. Louis

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7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Prof. Marie Griffith:

Well good evening everyone, and welcome to tonight's program, sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. We do have a couple more events this semester, to which I'd like to call your attention for the future. On April 7th, we will welcome Dr. David Pelcovitz to deliver the Boniuk-Tanzman Family Memorial Lecture in Medical Ethics, on the topic "Identifying Depression: Jewish and Psychological Perspectives," and this will be followed, the next day, by a panel discussion among Dr. Pelcovitz and some faculty members at the Brown School of Social Work on the topic "Global Perspectives on Child Wellbeing." And then, on April 16th, we will welcome Professors Robert George and Cornel West to public conversation that will range widely across many issues pertaining to religion, politics, and liberal arts education in our time. I think that the title that they wanted, and that we gave it, is "Liberal Arts Education: What's the Point?" So, if you've ever seen the two of them—either one of them—or the two of them talk together, it's something not to be missed. And further information on all of this is available on the welcome table outside of this room and we hope you will join us for some or all of these events. And just a quick mention, a couple things that have not been announced publicly yet, coming this fall, we have rescheduled our event with Amy Chua and Senator Danforth, as well as scheduled a public lecture by the Princeton University Professor and MSNBC contributor, Eddie Glaude, so stay tuned for more information on those.

But tonight, we are delighted and greatly honored to welcome distinguished scholar and Wake Forest University President, Dr. Nathan O. Hatch. President Hatch is currently in his 14th year in that role. During his years at the helm, Wake Forest has assembled a remarkable team of leaders, made significant realignments in business and medicine, developed new programs to educate the whole person, reinvented the 21st-century liberal arts education with personal and career preparedness, built a greater community through a 3-year residency requirement, and launched the largest fundraising effort in Wake Forest University's history. And not only that. In fact, Nathan Hatch has been regularly cited as one of the most influential scholars in the study of the history of religion in America. As an exceptional young scholar, he joined the faculty at Notre Dame in 1975. In 1989, he published a truly field-changing book in American religious history called *The Democratization of American Christianity* and this was widely—it has been widely hailed as perhaps the most important study of the Second Great Awakening ever published. I can attest that this book has been a must read for generations of graduate students

and scholars and won numerous prizes, including the John Hope Franklin Publication Prize for the best book in American studies. I really can't stress enough the impact that this book—and arguments about the claims made in this book, the sort of generative discussion—the impact that these have made on the historical study of Christianity in the U.S. I cannot think of another single book in the field with that much influence. In 1996, Dr. Hatch was named Provost at Notre Dame and became the first Protestant ever to serve in that position at the Catholic university. He moved to his current role at Wake Forest in 2005 and I would just invite you to look at his bio on the Wake Forest website for a more specific list of his extraordinary accomplishments during his presidency there. Throughout his career, he's been an active leader in American higher education, much more broadly, including having served as chair of the Division I Board of Directors of the NCAA, where he led the transformative restructuring of the top division's governance system. In 2014, Dr. Hatch was honored by his election to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. And finally, I hope you will be happy to learn that it all started here, as President Hatch received his PhD in History from Washington University in St. Louis in 1974, under the direction of the renowned historians John Murrin and J.G.A. Pocock, I think you got both Master's and PhD degrees here, and I told Dr. Hatch earlier that I had secured his PhD dissertation. I think he might say a word more about that. I'm just going to show you a photocopy of the cover page of his dissertation, August 1974, St. Louis, Missouri. So, we're glad to welcome you back. We're also very glad to welcome his wife, Julie, back to St. Louis and very much hope you both enjoy your stay here. The subject of President Hatch's lecture is "The Political Captivity of the Faithful," please join me in welcoming him now.

President Nathan O. Hatch:

Thank you. Thank you, Marie, for that gracious introduction. It is, indeed, wonderful to be back at Washington University, a place so formative in our own development. And it's a great privilege to be at the Danforth Center, a place that I so deeply admire. Their work has never been a more important and I really commend Marie and the faculty that have made this Center really the epicenter now for the study of American religion and politics. So, my talk tonight is not really an academic lecture. It will be, in part, autobiographical, paying respect to the very significant intellectual formation I received here, but it's also something of a jeremiad, to use an old Puritan trope, a kind of lament about the state of religion and politics in early 21st-century America. In between, I'll also use some lessons from the life and work of H. Richard Niebuhr. So, in some ways, these are musings about the present, drawn against the backdrop of my own formation. It is really a delight to be here. So, I want to begin with something about my own formation in these very halls, in fact, where the Center is located now, as a graduate student, the four of us were in an office up at the top of that building, in the early 1970s. I do this because there were certain formative lenses through which I viewed how religion and politics operate that I learned in those years and I think I can still apply them today. I do think we face huge danger today, both among those who adhere to more orthodox belief, Evangelicals and Catholics, and those mainline believers of more progressive inclination.

So, I entered graduate school here in the spring of 1970, of wild and contentious time on universities. President Nixon had just expanded the Vietnam War into Cambodia and campuses

exploded. On 25 university campuses, including this one, students burned down the ROTC building. I recall walking into Holmes Lounge and seeing it seething with angry students, plotting what they would do next. One morning, heading to John Pocock's graduate seminar on the political rhetoric of the English Civil War, I found him standing in the doorway, debating a student radical about whether classes should be canceled. Pocock, almost like a 17th century commonwealth man, argued for freedom of student choice. What I remember most about that seminar was a visit by Quentin Skinner, also a distinguished student of that era. While we graduate students were trying to just learn what the English Civil War was about, who was Oliver Cromwell or John Penn, Pocock and Skinner argued back and forth about the nuances of 17th century political rhetoric, as if they were figures more of that era than our own. Watching these two intellectual giants did give us a keen sense of how much we had to learn and a compelling sense of what it was to be a historian, almost the mystery, the aspiration of what you could do as a scholar. And then there was the abiding question that Pocock would always ask you: what is it possible for a given generation to think? What languages and meanings were available to them, not 30 years before that, not in the next century, but what languages and meanings were available at that time? The same semester, I also sat in on John Murrin's lecture course on the American Revolution. Murrin was a fascinating lecturer, he, at times, was like an actor, and on the first day of class, almost 200 undergraduates would show up. Then Murrin would hand out his 25-page syllabus and he would say, as he winked to his graduate students, this is simply to scare away the faint of heart. I'm deeply grateful to this university and the history department for the opportunity to study here. Murrin and Pocock were captivating for their individual work, but also, they were involved in other colleagues like Rowland Berthoff, Richard Davis, William Nesbet Chambers in thinking through the emerging concept of republican thought in Great Britain and early America.

Princeton historian Daniel Rodgers has written that the concept of republicanism was probably the most protean idea in the cultural history of 1970s and 80s. He said it was everywhere, organizing everything like a nova entering its giant red phase. Rodger suggests that there were actually two strains of the development of republican thinking, one was at Harvard in the work of Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood, and the other was St. Louis republicanism. And it really came out of the nexus of those faculty members and particularly culminating in the work of John Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*. What came to fascinate me, learning from these master historians, was what's the mood—what's the intellectual climate of a certain generation? How and why did views change over time? Why did certain popular ideologies take hold? Why did others lose their plausibility? I read deeply in the sociology of knowledge, Clifford Geertz, Thomas Luckmann, Peter Berger, one of whose fascinating articles from the late 1960s was called "A Sociological View of the Secularization of Theology." John Murrin was a great intellectual influence. He was something of a devil's advocate. He always questioned conventional explanations. He would often turn theories on their head. His great theory was that the people thought that the American Revolution came about when Americans had grown more divorced from British ways of thinking and at a certain point, they were so different that they said we should have a revolution. Murrin turned it on its head and said rather the revolution came about when these dispersed colonies actually picked up English rhetoric, and using certain kinds of opposition could together argue against the mother country. My thesis at

Washington University attempted to put together the emerging paradigm of republican thought with the religious thinking of that whole Puritan tradition, what Perry Miller, Alan Heimert, and others had charted. So, I learned three things about how the thinking of these New England clergymen changed over the course of the 18th century. First, their views didn't show secularization by a contraction of religious influence. What they showed instead that religious concepts were expanded, transferring to the political realm, some of the transcendent values that had been applied principally to the church. Thus, the cause of New England became not just vitality of churches, but the sacred cause of liberty, civil and religious. The second thing I noted is that political convictions did not follow the traditional fault lines that historians had talked about. The great divide of the Great Awakening that separated Evangelicals, like Edwards and Whitfield, from more of the Armenians, people like Charles Chauncy. That had been the interpretation of people like William McLaughlin and Alan Heimert. My own conclusion that they missed a towering feature before them, which was really the political views of the New England clergy stayed pretty much—they changed, but they were together over time. There wasn't this huge Evangelical rational divide. A third conclusion was that these clergy were being swept along by currents of thought, with little self-consciousness of what was happening to them. The images and myths of traditional Puritan forms renewed that vitality by deferring to certain prevailing republican intellectual currents. Calls of liberty became sacred and the meaning of New England became sustaining political and religious liberty. But there was little evidence that they understood or self-aware of the changes that you can—that one can trace. So, what does all of this have to do with today?

My text today could be a statement by a young Robert Wuthnow, a sociologist of religion at Princeton, some thirty years ago, that the basic intellectual and cultural divide among Christians in America is not a fault line of theology, but between a conservative and progressive view, a chasm deeper and more formative than any theological debate. I agreed with him in the 1980s and I think today his point should be made with much greater emphasis. A divide has become a chasm. Dominant political and cultural values, left and right, have washed over churches and come to dominant their respective world views. There are certain things like oxygen which become most noticeable by their absence. So, just to take a glimpse of certain leaders from the 1980s. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin whose moral views were always difficult to pigeonhole. In 1983, he developed the consistent ethic of life or seamless garment approach, but held that a wide—that addressed a wide spectrum of issues: abortion, capital punishment, militarism, euthanasia, social and economic justice, racism, all demanded a consistent application of moral principle. He also drafted a pastoral letter on the morality of nuclear deterrence in the 1990s and launched the Catholic common ground initiative, which sought to bring together conservative Catholics and progressive Catholics. Father Theodore Hesburgh of Notre Dame was similarly difficult to characterize. He could befriend Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. Conservatives called him liberal and liberals called him conservative. At Notre Dame, he was a great champion of the importance of ROTC, had more ROTC students than any other school, and he launched a significant Peace Studies Institute. He stood for traditional Catholic values and he was a major civil rights leader. 1980s, the United States Senate also saw the prominence of two Republican mainstays: Mark Hatfield and John Danforth. Both were explicit in their religious convictions, but very eclectic in political outlook.

Hatfield had opposed the Vietnam War on moral grounds and was an early advocate of civil rights. He was a prominent Evangelical, yet he opposed government-sponsored school prayer and he favored nuclear disarmament. He was pro-life, both on the issues of abortion and on the death penalty. In this audience, I need not spend a great deal of time on the splendid senatorial career of John Danforth. He was a moderate Republican who could support Clarence Thomas, a longtime friend, but he could also oppose capital punishment. He was also one to say that people of faith are not of one mind on a whole set of moral and political issues, from stem-cell research to complicated end-of-life issues. Most compellingly, he was a person whose own moral reasoning seemed to be the primary lens through which he framed political issues, not vice versa.

Possibly the most striking contrast between the 1980s and today is to compare Billy Graham with his son Franklin, the current leader of the Graham organization. The senior Graham, after a self-confessed ill-advised alignment with Richard Nixon, became far more nuanced in his political judgments and was greatly influenced by international travel, particularly on things like nuclear disarmament. Grant Wacker's biography describes Graham's views on a variety of social and political issues as flexible and evolving, capable of some complexity and nuance. By contrast, Franklin Graham seems to revel in being a culture warrior and makes virtually no distinction between his Evangelical faith and a predictable right-wing agenda. Today, I look in vain for religious leaders whose theological convictions creatively bridge the chasm between conservative and progressive views of the world. One regularly sees this point made about the conflation of Evangelical and conservative values, but I think there's much the same pattern among mainline and progressive Christians. When mainline churches develop an agenda on social policy, it is typically gravitated to those issues, however worthy, that have been defined by other social justice, environmental justice, criticism of Israel, and immigration reform. It seems to me, what one witnesses today, like the 18th century, is the politicizing of reality for all of us, conservatives and progressives. Some of this is understandable, aren't the stakes high: our judges to be appointed, what immigration policies obtain, what happens with abortion laws, what happens with affirmative action policies, can government support religious schools and nonprofits, what does one think of the movement for LGBTQ rights and how does religious freedom intersect with such rights. The media doesn't help. The media climate in which we live drowns us with outraged stories. We are encouraged to jump into advocacy without fully understand the best arguments of both sides. As someone has said, we live in a culture of contempt. The result is a powerful undertow that pulls all of us, believers included, into believing that the civic arena is the most important one in which we have to play, or a very important one which we have to play. There's no other reason we are like the New England clergy of the 18th century, as believers today choose to play in the public arena. They have few languages and practices different than those dictated by the larger culture. I don't think the church does much forming and teaching all of the patterns of what we see all around, and all too often, both Protestants and Catholics, they're consumed with their own internal struggles and failures. But a third comparison can be made with the 18th century, among today's conservatives and progressives, there seems to be little self-consciousness of their own situation, from where our positions being derived. Why do certain moral positions rise to prominence and not others? As we have increasingly self-sorted ourselves in ideological islands,

there's little chance to see the validity of the other side, little chance to understand our own blinders. In short, there's little humility and honest self-examination about the positions we take.

An interesting article in *New York* magazine by Andrew Sullivan called "America's New Religions," he suggests that as the voice of the church has been muted, more people look to politics for ultimate meaning and political cults develop that demand total and immediate commitment. Now look at politics, he says, we have the cult of Trump on the right, a demagogue who among his worshipers can do no wrong, and we have the cult of social justice on the left, a religion whose followers show almost the same zeal as any born-again Evangelical. The sharp moral polarization, even among those who are secular, makes it far more difficult for people of faith to think of politics in any nuanced or theologically coherent way. Seems to me, the political orthodoxies are so entrenched and so rigid, left and right, that few people have the courage to make religious claims that would brand them in their own group as heretics. So, what can be done? I have no easy answers and ready program to address what I'm calling the political captivity of the church, but I want to bring to bear some reading that I've recently done from H. Richard Niebuhr, another figure from the past. He and a set of colleagues in the early 1930s became convinced that the American church was captive to the temper of the times. As a young pastor and scholar, actually first at Eden Seminary here in St. Louis, later as a very young man he was president of Elmhurst College, and then as a graduate student at Yale, he was very much rooted in the liberal tradition of the social gospel. But in 1930, he spent a sabbatical year in Germany, where he studied with Karl Barth. Several years earlier, Barth had begun advocating a radical monotheism, particularly in his "Epistle to the Romans," which someone has famously said, was like a bomb on the theological playground. Barth's genius was to notice that modern theology had effectively ceased speaking about God. Barth attacked using God to explain or justify positions held on secular grounds. One cannot speak of God simply by speaking of man in a loud voice. Much of the inherited liberalism Barth equated with a certain kind of idolatry. Niebuhr took this message to heart and came home and tried to apply it to the American context. He and colleagues like Wilhelm Pauck, a recent German immigrant, began a studied attack upon the establishment and articles such as "Towards Emancipation of the Church," 1935, a book of essays *The Church against the World*, same year, and the book *The Kingdom of God in America* 1937. Famous quote from that: "a God without wrath brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgments through the ministration of a Christ without a cross." Niebuhr argued that the primary work of the church needed to be vertical: confronting the divine, rather than instinctively trying to reform society. Before one could assume any broader role, the church had to undergo silence, humility, repentance, and the naming of idols. He argued that zealous advocacy needed to be replaced with humility and self-criticism. The church needed to admit mystery and often remain silent. He gave one speech late in the 1930s, the grace of doing nothing, instead the church needed to focus on its own distinct internal work. He said, "the question of the church is not how it can measure up to the expectations of society, nor how it can save civilization, but how can it be true to itself, that is, to its head."

I think the church today would do well to take Niebuhr's criticism. It should return to the work that only it can do. On one front, scholars of faith should be laying the groundwork for the church to pursue different paths forward, one less captive to dominant contemporary mores

and good work is being done on that front, such as Professor James Hunter, or your own Professor John Inazu. That scholarly work must continue on many fronts, but it also must be translated to ministers and to the faithful in the pew. The church itself must renew its calling to allow the divine to encounter individuals and groups gathered as the church. What is that divine calling? The still small voice amidst the din of so many shrill and competing voices that bombard us. This is particularly true in a culture which—in which so many mediating institutions have been hollowed out and left people as self-constructed and self-actualizing individuals, unmoored from any larger community and tradition. In his fascinating book *The Fractured Republic*, Yuval Levin argues that in an age of hyper individualism, we need to renew the middle layers of society, where people see each other face to face. Increasingly, he says, society consists of individuals and a national state, while mediating institutions: family, community, church, unions, and others fade and falter. Levin suggests that the ethic of expressive individualism, which is magnified by the digital world which—in which we all live, is uniquely dangerous to institutions of moral formation, like the church, because the function of our popular culture is to reflect our desires, to cater to our every whim, or as I've heard a media company advertise just yesterday, tuned into you. A church, by contrast, is in the business of forming habits, shaping desires, instilling loves that are appropriate, as Augustine said, appropriate rather than disordered. This is the opportunity for the church to be the church, to return to the task of religious and moral formation, to build communities that bind people together, to instill a deep conviction that life can actually have transcendent purpose, and it's not all about individual wants and desires. I often disagree with Stanley Hauerwas's and anabaptists' frame of reference, but I do like the term the alternative polis that he uses, that is, communities of people whose purpose is to embody, to look like the kingdom of God among normal people, teachers, doctors, lawyers, stay-at-home moms, and the homeless. But I wouldn't want to suggest that we should retreat from engagement and I certainly don't agree with the pessimism and reactionary posturing reflected in a work like Rod Dreher's *The Benedict Option*, I don't know if you know that book, but basically, we have to have parallel institutions. It's pretty pessimistic.

I would argue for much more positive commitment, more Augustinian Calvinist or Niebuhrian, an engagement with the world as we seek to fulfill our callings. But it seems to me much of that responsibility and opportunity comes on the local level, as institutions of moral formation have been hollowed out. The opportunity for the church to serve as a rich community of formation has never been greater and in a similar vein, it is on a local level that churches can move to make a difference to bring educational equity, to fight poverty, to promote interracial understanding. As a recent book published—written by James and Deborah Fallows called *Our Towns: a 100,000 mile journey into the heart of America*, they fly around on a small private plane and visit middle-sized communities. It's a very optimistic book, although they really do fail to deal with religious institutions, which is unfortunate, but what they see on a local level is many good things happening. They see that against the backdrop of a poisoned, dysfunctional national political scene, that what's happening on the local level is all often inviting and heartening, the political divides break down, real communities are enriched, real neighborhoods are revitalized, something like the purpose-built communities which started in Atlanta, comprehensive views of neighborhood development which now has spread to 25

cities. I think, most of all, our nation needs communities of faith that give meaning, dignity, and love to 21st-century people who are lonelier, more stressed, and with less sense of hope than any time we can remember. People need acceptance for who they are, not what they do and forgiveness for the stray paths into which all of us tread. Let the church be the church in concrete places, in specific places and neighborhoods. Let it be renewed and manifest its primary reason for being: “by this, shall all men know that you’re my disciples if you have loved one another.” It is the same spirit impulse that Martin Luther King exemplified and articulated when he said “we have before us the glorious opportunity to inject a new dimension of love into the veins of civilization. There is still a voice crying out in terms that echo across the generations, saying love your enemies, bless them that curse you, pray for them that despitefully use you, that you may be the children of your father, which is in heaven. Thank you. I’m happy to take questions about my history or my current analysis.

Griffith:

And please wait for the mic, if you’d raise your hand, we’ve got a mic that we’ll get to you.

Audience Question #1:

Hello. Hi. Thank you for your talk, I thought it was great. I just had a question about a specific thing that you said right at the end. You said that popular culture is in the business of appealing to our every whim and desire, whereas the church is in the business of instilling moral values. So, I feel like the rhetoric of “in the business” was—it’s a colloquialism and not necessarily an appeal to capitalism, however, I want to ask you about what you see the relationship between the church and capitalism in the United States and how the church can’t really be divested from the American concept of accumulating more and more capital and that churches are actually operating more as institutions of popular culture in appealing their word and the quote-unquote “word of God” to the masses. So, I was just wondering about if you think through this rhetorical move of “in the business,” perhaps that shows how, maybe, the church is being corrupted by the capitalistic nature of American democracy.

Hatch:

Yeah, I mean that’s an unfortunate—I should have used the word in the work of, yeah, I mean that was a colloquial expression which I use. I really—I wasn’t referring to capitalism at all, but I do think our society suffers from a decline in corporate responsibility and people—corporations living out purposes other than the maximization of shareholder values, the sort of agency theory. I think the whole culture has shifted in that direction. I think the rise and dominance of private equity is a good example of that, so that you don’t have—I mean, traditionally when you had large institutions, in Winston-Salem you had Haynes Textiles or if you had General Electric or something like that, these were stable institutions that paid good, living wages. I mean, private equity tends to have a six to seven-year cycle, so a company is bought and it’s a

financial transaction. So, I think, I mean I admire thoughtful businessmen who were saying capitalism is in deep trouble if it doesn't reform the way it thinks about its responsibilities to society. Yes?

Audience Question #2:

So, I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about kind of thinking about religion as communities versus individuals because, again, thinking about American culture, we're incredibly hyper-individualistic, and the church has tended to fall into that, and so it's very easy for a religion to be, ultimately, individual with, again, the consumeristic mindset of individuals within a church being like shareholders, so what do you think it looks like for the church to recover that kind of vision. You know, you said you clash a little bit with Hauerwas on his ideas, but what are some ideas that you think it looks like for the church to like pull people back into that tradition of a community?

Hatch:

I mean I think it's very hard work. But I do think communities of faith have to pull people in, they have to accept everyone. They have to build structures which give people meaning and purpose and that can take a variety of forms, but it's—I think there has to be sound and interesting teaching about what is the purpose of the church and that the faith is not an individualistic enterprise, so in that sense to inform people about what's our overall purpose and I think that has to be done in a variety of ways and it can be expressed in sacramental traditions or in free traditions, it can be expressed in small churches or larger churches, but I think scholars and pastors have to renew the vision of what is it to build formative communities. I think of it in particular in terms of young people, so, I mean when I was brought up in a Presbyterian church would memorize the catechism. I mean, things like that are gone by the wayside. How do you form young people so that they have some framework in a society that is just preaching them every day fulfill yourself? It's all about you and the means of communication just reinforce—I mean think of what we say: it's the iPhone. Think about—you know, we just accept it is the iPhone. Life is about me. It's what I want to do and this device keeps me from—it allows a million places in the palm of my hand. It allows me to do anything I want anytime, and I think the church has to try to counter that and talk about what community is. So, I don't—that's not a coherent answer, but...

Griffith:

Thank you so much. I've got my own microphone so I think this will work. So, you focused on the church, and I'm, of course, a lot of folks here and in our overflow room, we know you guys are there, too, are secular, and even, some of us at the Center, you know, are more secular and I guess I wondered how you would translate this for the folks who really are not part of religious communities. The rise of the nuns, you know, we know is an enormous development

in our society today, so are you talking about other types of civic institutions. You're the president of a university, we're here at a university, what role might universities have to play in what you're describing, just thinking about a little beyond the church.

Hatch:

I think, in a sense, all those kind of mediating institutions, I think need to be strengthened on a local level, and I think neighborhoods—I mean, I've been so impressed, we're starting one in Winston-Salem, but with the purpose-built communities, started at the Green Lake Community in Atlanta, and it's spread. It's been such a successful model at the central administration is now funded by Warren Buffett, but it has to do with a neighborhood setting goals to have really—real quality education to have mixed housing that has a health and wellness, so it's a comprehensive neighborhood revitalization that's certainly one thing. But I think there are other kinds of community organizations that have to be fed and nurtured, whether they are religious or secular. But, I do think—I mean, reading to Fallows' book is encouraging that there are a lot of wonderful things happening on local levels and people, sort of taking their problems into their own hands and I do think the danger is for us to think that the main part of life is—has to do with our political scene, which I don't think is going to be corrected anytime soon at a national level.

Audience Question #3:

Would you agree or disagree that there's a greater divide among—between the progressive leaders and conservative leaders and the majority of the American people at this particular time, greater divide between, you know, between that group as such and at the same time that, what you were just saying, maybe, before the church—the church leaders are not speaking to the hungers of the people in the pew or the people who are not even in the church.

Hatch:

I mean, I do think there's a deep frustration with this sort of polarism and there are a lot of people in the middle, maybe it is, to use an old frame, maybe there is a silent majority, but the striking thing is how difficult it is for leaders to emerge in any sector, political or religious, that can speak languages that empower that middle. Somehow our culture doesn't seem to allow that and maybe someday the—I mean there are a few politicians who occupy that space, but at least my sense—and I tried to compare it with an earlier time, it's harder and harder. Oh, I'm sorry, yeah, go ahead.

Dr. Charlie McCrary:

Hi, this is gonna sound like an overly-critical question or like a gotcha question, I don't mean it that way, but I noticed in the talk that was about community reengagement and about like revitalizing local communities and listening to both sides and so on, I think that citational politics are important, and I noticed that, unless I missed something, with the exception of Deborah Fallows and Martin Luther King, everyone who was cited or discussed at any length was a white man and I'm wondering why or why not that's relevant.

Hatch:

I think I could've used many other voices. I certainly like King for a variety of reasons, but his call for love and not as sort of the main framework that he uses, but I think one could use many other African American voices or Latin voices who are doing serious community work and community engagement. Yes?

Audience Question #4:

Thank you for your talk. I was wondering how what you discussed can help us understand this increasing culture war that seems to be going on and where seems to be a greater affinity between more traditional groups and traditionalists within religions versus progressive adherence in that religion, especially on the political level.

Hatch:

State that again, I don't quite follow.

Audience Question #4:

Basically, about the issue or the evolution to where now there seems to be, in many ways, affinities between traditional people in different religious groups that is greater than the affinity between people in the same religious group who are more traditionalist versus progressive, and particularly in the political.

Hatch:

Yeah, I mean the point that Bob Wuthnow always raised, I think it's, in some ways, it's evidence for where the deepest beliefs are coming from and so, I don't know any answer to that issue, but it's—I think it's further evidence for the idea that there are certain dominant categories that we have a hard time breaking out of and essentially I could have used some examples from Jewish community, at least on our campus, the tension between progressive Jews and

conservative Jews is intense, particularly about issues related to Israel and I think some of the same tensions are there. Yes?

Audience Question #5:

We've been talking about America, and this may be beyond your expertise, but can we look beyond ourselves, to go along with your theme, and comment on this internationally, the perspective on these same issues in other countries, how they are or not playing out?

Hatch:

I don't know. I've always thought the Canadians were a little more sane than we were, but... At least, I don't think they have sort of the same extreme—and I think it does come from a deeper, in some ways, a deeper sense of community and a deeper—a more positive view of pluralism and immigration, but I think it's a more conservative view of society and how society needs to cohere than our more radically individualistic world. I don't—I mean you do see the deep polarization playing out in Europe, Great Britain, obviously the Brexit issues, the deep tensions about immigration policy and how it gives rise to sort of populist voices, you see that all over Europe, so those trends are broader than this culture.

Audience Question #6:

There seemed—you talked about the captivity of the church and during recent decades you also see a progressive weakening of mainline denominations and perhaps of Christianity in general. They seem to me to be correlated. Would you agree with that or is there any kind of causality relationships that you see there to the extent that a historian can?

Hatch:

Yeah, I'm not—at least, I don't trace direct causality. I do—I think that there are some churches that have—conservative and progressive—that have focused too much on politics in a self-defeating way, but I think the problems of the mainline have more to do with the decline in our culture of what it is to build powerful communities on a local level, because there are wonderful examples of mainline churches that are thriving, building powerful communities, but they seem to be more the exception than the rule.

Prof. Lerone Martin:

Hi, thank you again for your talk. I want to ask you a funny question, somewhat. It's historically and sociologically 50 years from now, if you can imagine that, right, how do you think historians will try to account for the political captivity of certain groups of Christians to the current

administration? What will be the books, the causes, the forces, like how do you think that will be written about 50 years from now as historians try to tackle this?

Hatch:

I mean, I think the judgments will be pretty severe, comparable to two periods when, whether in Italy or Germany, people of faith become captive to certain ideologies. So, I'm trying to think exactly how it will be played out, but I think there are certain—there are such deep anomalies that—yeah, I think that historians' judgment will be severe.

Audience Question #7:

Hi. I'm wondering, you mentioned a bit—you talked a bit about this me culture that we live in, and as someone who was raised in that me culture, and who has been, for their entire adult life, immersed in the culture wars that we're talking about, I'm wondering what role you think that young people or millennials play in this vision that you have?

Hatch:

Well, I mean, in some ways I'm optimistic because of your generation, because I think you do have hope and commitment and you're willing to change. I think you will—we all will have to come to terms, but you most particularly, with the impact of this digital world on our own selves and on community. We've started something at Wake Forest, I mean, as have others, in some ways, like a Jeffersonian dinner, but we call it a call to conversation where we are putting together a group of about a dozen people over dinner to look each other in the eye and talk and for people to tell their stories and that kind of thing is increasingly rare in our culture. We're doing that symbolically and really to say, I mean, some of the studies, particularly in adolescent young women, the tie of depression to screen time is a direction correlation. The sort of isolating effect. I mean, young men with computer games, I just think we will have to come to terms with that or it will—our society will pay a heavy price, but at the same time, they're wonderful, so it's not—Julie criticizes my screen time all the time, mea culpa. But, it's the sort of—I did a talk several years ago about eye contact. Do you know that a child does not develop without it? I mean the eyes are really the windows of the soul. A baby does not develop unless there's regular eye contact and it is—that's true throughout our life. I mean, that kind of face-to-face contact is so central to our development. It's central to the building of community and you know, we see it at a place like Wake Forest. It used to be known as a place where—that you spoke to anyone that you passed and now, that's very hard because everybody's looking down or talking to someone else, so I think it's a big issue.

Audience Question #8:

In the current day, the association of Protestant Evangelicals with the conservative politics is taken for granted, but I've seen it asserted that globally and historically, Protestant Evangelicals were more on the left of center than on the right of center. Do you have—feel like you want to agree or disagree with that and if you want to explain?

Hatch:

Yeah, I mean it's both and. Protestant Evangelicals were leaders in the abolitionist movement and they were the greatest defenders of slavery. So, it can cut both ways. So, I don't think there's—I think religion takes many forms and is too often politically captive. But certainly, there are great stories of sort of reform that grow out of Christian things. There are also tremendous stories of terrible oppression done in God's name.

Audience Question #9:

So, as recent political science research is starting to show that among self-identified Evangelicals, the most ardent Trump supporters are not regular churchgoers and what kind of implications do you think that has both for your thesis and the long-term role of the church and society?

Hatch:

Yeah, I think that's true, maybe it's hopeful that people who actually are serious believers have a little more nuance when they—you know, you read J.D. Vance or something about cultures that once were pretty religious that aren't. I mean, I do think that's the high calling of religious groups, is to call people to be of sound mind and...

Audience Question #10:

I was wondering if you could comment maybe on the—I don't know how to put this exactly—but there's been an explosion of 12-step recovery groups across the United States for addictions to a variety of things, and these are people who encounter each other face-to-face often in meetings, often in church basements, not a worship so much, but as sharing their stories and having face time, with a heavy dose of humility and brokenness admitted. Do you see that reformation of 12-step groups and recovery groups as helpful to this thing or is this taking away from church strength or is it just kind of a non-factor because they're anonymous?

Hatch:

I mean, in general, I think those are wonderful programs for people who've faced addiction. I don't—and there's some—there's a recent book that is an attempt to have churches do more of that for people who have been deeply troubled. I don't—I think that at all is sort of in tension or in competition with religious groups.

Audience Question #11:

The definition of who God is seems to be owned by both sides and that's probably—if you keep asking—that's where some of the deepest chasms lie. You know, on one side it makes out God to be the God of law and order, or justice and truth. This is an individual, kind of vertical experience with God and I think this sense of rugged individualism plays directly into it. It's one-on-one, myself with God. The other side, though, it's that God is dynamic. God is love. God is mercy. God is always changing and we find God in the horizontal level in those faith communities you talk about. So, you know, somebody has said one time that we don't go to heaven individually, but as a community, very challenging to, you know, the other side. So, not even having a single definition of who God is, I just want to kind of ask you: who is God to you and secondly, you know, what should our relationship with God look like, based on that?

Hatch:

Yeah. I mean, I think I would repair to H. Richard Niebuhr to say what we have to do is stop and reflect on our own assumptions, prejudices, impulse to act, and we have to, with great self-criticism, rethink what we're doing. We need to do that as communities because it is true that, particularly in a culture as religious as the United States has been, God has many different meanings, and as I've said, I mean, Harry Stout's book on religion in the Civil War is, in some ways, a depressing tale of a kind of bloodlust in God's name on both sides. It's a very depressing story. So, I don't think it's easy. I don't think I can sort of define God or it's not necessarily my place to say what my view of God is tonight, but I think we need humility and self-criticism, careful reading of the past and a willingness for things to stand in judgment of our current instincts.

Audience Question #12:

Thank you for your talk. Just to kind of, I guess, circle around to American history again, one of the things that I've noticed and I think is, maybe not a new idea, but something that's certainly going on in our current political and social climate is, kind of the adoption of certain narratives of American history by these, you know, varying groups, you know. So, Evangelical Protestants have a certain narrative of American history that they kind of firmly hold to, progressive Christians might have, you know, a completely different narrative of American history and I guess I'm just kind of interested in what your perspective is on that, as a historian of American

religion, and is there kind of—I guess, what would be the way forward for those in the church who are not necessarily trained historians, but who are, you know, pastors or church leaders to kind of confront this within their own tradition?

Hatch:

One of my favorite books of all time is Edmund Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom: the Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* because he talks about both realities in Virginia, Jefferson, Madison, the heights of thinking about liberty, it was done on the basis of a slave society and that is the deep contradiction of America. There are good things. There are positive things, in a sense, when you compare it with Europe what happened here, and there are terrible things and we have to look at both, and I think you can have narratives that are way too positive and narratives that are too negative, but it seems to me for—at least to have both those in mind when you're teaching, whether in educational institutions or religious institutions, so that people will confront those realities. I think too often, particularly white Americans, have had only optimistic views of our past. One has to come to terms with the cost, as well as the achievement.

Audience Question #13:

Thank you. If I may, a follow-up to the previous question, with the theme of American history and looking specifically at a lens of what it means to conserve or preserve our natural resources versus to exploit them for personal gain. In other words, if we're all in this together, whether it's climate change or resources, pollution, health, if it's that sense of the harm done to the whole, to society versus the individual gain, I wonder if you have some thoughts on that if that's a way for us to realize what Cloninger here in the medical school would refer to that character trait of self-transcendence, that sense that we are all in this together.

Hatch:

Yeah, I mean I think that is a call that can resonate across political boundaries and I think the growing sense of that in our country, but it certainly is against a very dominant strain of individualism in this country. Okay, great.

Audience Question #14:

Sorry, just one more question. So, you, in your thesis, are stating that the church is in contradistinction to this rugged individualism we're seeing in America today, but my question is about, perhaps, the relationship between the church and individualism in history, so thinking about the Protestant Reformation and its role in triggering, influencing, causing modernism as we understand it today and the direct line between Luther and Calvin's claim that you can have

a direct relationship with God and get to heaven without the intermediary of the church and then Hobbes's later claim that of the war of all against all and the rugged individualism that is the precursor to what we see today in America, so how can the church, as a unit—as, you know, and overarching claim of religious communities, really be in contradistinction to individualism, when the Protestant church specifically is so deeply tied in this individualist notion?

Hatch:

It's a good question. It's one that Catholics have always argued. So, we told you what would happen. But, seriously, I mean, certainly, Protestantism was the—it unleashed the genie out of the bottle on individualism, although in early modern times, their view of society was not individualistic. I mean, I think it takes—it's a whole evolution. I mean, I think 19th century America, we've got time to get to Emerson, I mean the individual, the exaltation of the individual was something that would've shocked Luther and Calvin, I mean—but, I agree the genie was out. If the individual unmediated is confronting God, it is a deep, I mean, it's just such a deep part of our character. I don't—I mean, the church, often, reflects that individual conversion narratives, all that, reflects that kind of individualism and I think churches have to counter it.

Audience Question #15:

In this context, can you reiterate what you were contrasting when you said not the Dominican parallel institutions, but would you reiterate that for us?

Hatch:

Well, I think that book argues that things are so terrible for people of faith, that you sort of have to retreat, like start a monastery, and it even suggests you set up independent businesses, you know, you're not doing—you're not interacting, you don't have engagement and I find that far too pessimistic, and I guess I have a much more Augustinian or Calvinist sense of that one has to—our responsibility, our to society after we fully reflect on what that should be. But that is a very pessimistic book. It's like get on an ark, everything is collapsing and...

Audience Question #16:

I just wanted clarification, mainly. Thank you for your talk, I appreciate it very much. Is this something, you know, religious people, the faithful, are captivated, held in captivity, by the political—I wanted to clarify, you don't mean that we don't get involved with the political in any way, it's more of the captivity, I think of Paul's, the apostle Paul's words in but not of and maybe what you're saying is the faithful have become of politics, as opposed to just in it, and

I'm thinking there's a time when politics can get to the point where it's very very serious, very critical, if it slips from democracy into autocracy, for example, or fascism, which I think is a real danger these days, by the way, not only in our country, but in others. So, I just wanted to clarify what—if that's what you meant...

Hatch:

No, I'm not saying don't have political engagement, I'm just saying that your deepest convictions should be informing that political engagement and it may be like with Senator Danforth that it confounds the categories or the whole Cardinal Bernardin said—so, he was, just as an example, he was for fighting for the poor and he was against abortion. So, in essence, it may lead you to places where, in some ways, you don't have a political home the way things are now divided.

Dr. Cyrus O'Brien:

Thanks so much, I enjoyed your talk and I like—I'm very attracted to your solution of a reinvestment in civil society at the local level and I'm thinking about obstacles to—what obstacles there are that prevent that and I am thinking about Jean-Jacques Rousseau's civil religion in which he says it's impossible to live with someone who you think is damned or condemned and we saw this recently in a Trump nominee hearing, I forget exactly who it was, but I think it was Chuck Schumer asking him, you know, do you think everyone who's not an Evangelical Christian is going to hell and the answer is yeah, you're going to hell. We also, you know, on the other—on sort of the other side, we see similar obstacles to sort of face-to-face communication in terms of call out culture and things like that. None of those—those things both have new characteristics, but the theology of people who aren't saved are going to hell has been around a really long time, and so, what is new about this and what are ways, maybe, around these obstacles that you can think of?

Hatch:

Yeah, I mean, I think it takes nuance and complexity, and our world does not allow much of that, but I do think it's building real relationships. It's building real communities and the most positive thing is when you see that happen on a local level and when you see people crossing boundaries, when you see real interracial reconciliation, as hard as that is, happen on a local level. I think there's hope when people confront each other, take off their masks, face-to-face. What impresses me about these call to conversations with students is, you ask a variety of questions, but people tell their stories, sort of people take off their professional veneer and they really get to know each other and empathize with each other. That's just something our society craves. Yes?

Griffith:

This is the last question.

Audience Question #17:

Thank you for your talk, I appreciate it. I want to ask you a very personal question. What's it like to be president of Wake Forest University, upholding very high standards of ethical conduct and being slammed with an indictment on a coach of an athletic team engaged in what is alleged to be academic fraud with admissions being bought? How do you turn that into a teachable moment?

Hatch:

Yeah. I think it's how you handle it, I mean we all live in human flawed communities and it's seeing your problems, not hiding them and admitting it and then making real change, but it's, I mean, a place like Wake Forest is like a small village and we have problems every day, but it's upholding standards and say we're gonna be honest about our problems and try to address them and not hide them under a rug or pretend that we're something that we're not.

Griffith:

Before we thank our speaker, I just want to thank all of you in this room and in our overflow room for being so patient and I want to invite you all to the reception that's going to be held right out here and let's say a final thank you to Dr. Nathan Hatch.

Hatch:

Thank you.

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