Christians in a 'Post-Christian' America
The Challenges and Opportunities of Living
In a Postmodern and Politically Correct Culture

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Introduction

When the foundations are being destroyed,
what can the righteous do? – Psalm 11:3

Preface

When the apostle Paul first visited Athens, he was taken to the Areopagus, the place where philosophers and others gathered to debate ideas and discuss the issues of the day. In his comments, Paul made an astonishing declaration:

> The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth... He gives to everyone life and breath and everything else. From one man he made everyone, that we should inhabit the whole earth; *and he determined the times set for us and the exact places where we should live.* God did this so that we would seek him and reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being." [Acts 17:24*ff*]

"And God determined the times set for us and the exact places where we should live." Have you ever wondered why God chose for you to live right here right now – in America in the late 20th and early 21st century? Why weren't you born, and why didn't you live, in some other place at some other time in history?

Why did God choose for you to live right here right now rather than in Jerusalem in the days of the early church, or in a squalid hut in a filthy village in northern England in the 9th century, or in a dilapidated apartment building in Venice during the time of the Black Death, or in Calvin's Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, or in Seville during the Spanish Inquisition, or in remote Tibet in the Middle Ages, or in an impoverished Ukrainian farming village during the Stalin era... or in America in the 1950s?

Each age has its unique challenges, and it is incumbent upon us to seriously consider the issues of our day that warrant our time, our attention, and our involvement. America has changed drastically in the past several decades, and we face unique challenges that Christians in the 1950s never imagined.

As Christians, we have moral responsibilities that extend beyond just our personal spiritual life and the welfare of our family. We are part of a larger community – a society – and we are impacted by the health and welfare of that society. If that culture is toxic and polluted, we cannot help but be affected. It's hard to live a clean and upright life – let alone raise children and grandchildren who have decent values – in the midst of an 'X'-rated society that not only tolerates perversion but actively celebrates it.

Ours is a culture in crisis. An old Chinese curse states, "May you live in interesting times," and our time is certainly that – *interesting*. Never before has American society been so pluralistic; never before have so many different worldviews, philosophies and ideologies competed for dominance in the public square; never before have the standards of morality and ethics been so low; never before have so many Christians been so perplexed and confused by all the moral, theological, philosophical and scientific challenges to the Christian faith; and never before has it been so imperative that Christians be prepared – not only spiritually but intellectually – for the challenges that currently confront us. The recent economic chaos, the unprecedented levels of political corruption and incompetence, and the periodic media feeding frenzies over the deaths of degenerate celebrities such as Anna Nicole Smith and Michael Jackson are merely symptomatic of a culture that has lost its moral bearings.

Ours is a society that celebrates narcissism, materialism and hedonism, and one in which the forces of secularism and "political correctness" are waging an aggressive culture war against morality in general and Christianity in particular. The deterioration of our society and culture is evident in virtually every area of life, including:

- The breakdown of the family, as exemplified by the divorce rate and the prevalence of domestic abuse and violence;
- The illegitimate birth rate and the abortion rate;
- The epidemic of violent crime;
- The proliferation of drug and alcohol abuse and addiction;
- The pornification of popular culture in movies, music, TV, and the Internet;
- The aggressive promotion of homosexuality as a valid practice and lifestyle;
- The transformation of education into indoctrination in secular humanistic values;
- Declining standards in virtually every area of American life; and
- A general breakdown of public civility as our society becomes ruder and cruder all the time.

As Bob Dylan sang years ago, "The Times, They Are A-changin'," but no one in the mid-Sixties could possibly have imagined just how far America has strayed from it religious, political and cultural heritage over the past 45 years. As philosopher J. Budziszewski has remarked, we are truly living in a strange and unprecedented time:

> We are passing through an eerie phase of history in which the [moral truths] that everyone really knows are treated as unheard-of doctrines, a time in which the elements of common decency are themselves attacked as indecent. Nothing quite like this has ever happened before. Although our civilization has passed through quite a few troughs of immorality, never before has vice held the high *moral* ground. Our time considers it dirty-minded to treat sexual purity as a virtue... [and] a sign of impious pride to profess humble faith in God. The moral law has become the very emblem of immorality...." [*What We Can't Not Know*, p. 10]

As Christians, we have a stake in the health and welfare of our culture. We are the body of Christ in this world, and we are called to be the "salt" and "light" in the midst of our society. To carry out our mission we need to be working toward a society and a culture that is most conducive to sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In other words, we should work toward a society and a culture that is as free, open, just, civil and decent as humanly possible. In terms of our civic responsibilities, the ultimate issue is this: In what kind of culture do we want to live and raise our children and grandchildren? Do we want a culture that at least superficially supports the ideals of decency, civility and justice, or one that actively promotes moral and ethical degeneracy?

Course Guidelines

This course is for Christians who realize that our culture is disintegrating, and who are seriously concerned about it. Furthermore, this course is for people who want to understand *why* this is happening and, as Francis Schaeffer put it, "How shall we then live?" This course is *not* for people who want to debate any of the above. If anyone doubts that things are falling apart and that all moral standards have collapsed, just take an evening and watch the prime time TV programs on the major networks, or turn on your FM radio for an hour or so and listen to the latest rap, hip-hop, heavy metal, and pop songs that the music industry is turning out these days. Are we really content to live in a society that glorifies degenerate celebrities, celebrates mindless

consumerism and wasteful consumption, and reduces even our political elections to the level of mass entertainment? Surely, we should have higher standards.

Regarding the format for this course, many of our Areopagus classes in Christian history and apologetics are lecture-based, supplemented by a considerable amount of class discussion. This course is formatted differently and is structured more along the lines of a seminar in order to facilitate even more interaction. Each week we will read an article (or articles) and devote the class time to processing it together. Although lectures and PowerPoint presentations can be informative, stimulating and effective, the optimum format for in-depth learning has always been the seminar format. By reading material in common and then coming together to discuss it, we broaden and deepen our understanding of what we've read and, in the process, teach one another.

The Essential Terms

In this course we use several terms that require a brief explanation. When we refer to "**society**," we simply mean the people that make up a nation (usually, the American nation). The term "**culture**" refers to a society's heritage, traditions, institutions, arts (music, movies, etc.), entertainment, sports, etc. – all of which reflect a society's values, beliefs and priorities.

A "**worldview**" is a fundamental orientation – expressed either as a story or as a set of basic presuppositions (or assumptions) – that one holds regarding the realities of life. Although relatively few people have an articulate philosophy, everyone has a worldview, although it may be unconscious and inconsistent. A worldview is a philosophical and theological matrix by which we make sense out of life, and it informs our beliefs about such fundamental issues as...

- Why is there something rather than nothing?
- What is prime reality – the source of all that exists?
- What is humanity?
- Is there any purpose and meaning to life?
- How is it possible to know anything at all?
- Is there right and wrong, and if so, how can we know it?
- What happens when we die?

[NOTE: For a good general introduction to the concept of worldviews, including substantive critiques of several non-Christian worldviews, see **James W. Sire,** *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*. Fourth Edition (IVP Academic, 2004).]

In the context of this course, a "**philosophy**" is a belief system derived from one's worldview that sharpens or refines one's understanding of God, human nature, and the cosmos, as well as one's views on philosophy, morality, science, history, psychology, sociology, the arts, etc.

The philosophy of **Secular Humanism** is particularly pertinent to a study of cultural liberalism and Political Correctness. As a human-centered orientation (rather than a God-centered one), Secular Humanism contends that human satisfaction and fulfillment are the greatest good and the ultimate purpose in life. As such, it is an anti-theistic (either atheistic or agnostic) philosophy grounded in moral relativism and subjectivism, and it is best articulated in the *Humanist Manifestos* of 1933 and 1973.

An "**ideology**" is a socio/political system derived from one's general philosophy of life. Ideologies run the gamut from total government control (Totalitarianism) to no government at all (Anarchism), and include systems such as Marxism/Communism, Nazism, Fascism, various forms of socialism, contemporary liberalism, contemporary conservatism, and libertarianism.

"**Marxism**" is an ideology developed by the German philosopher and social scientist, Karl Marx. According to Marx, the driving force in history is "dialectical materialism" – i.e., an economic-based struggle for supremacy by competing social classes. Economic forces determine the course of history, and a society's economic substructure determines its cultural superstructure. Marx believed that the interests of the proletariat (the working classes) and the bourgeoisie (the capitalist class of bankers, industrialists, investors, and professional managers) are contradictory and irreconcilable, and that only a violent revolution could overthrow the existing order and usher in a more just and equitable communistic society.

"**Neo-Marxism**" is a revisionist form of Marxism developed after World War I that emphasized cultural change as the path to radical socialism. Believing that classical Marxism, with its priority on the economic substructure, was too

restrictive and simplistic, Neo-Marxists adopted a broad-based deconstructionist strategy to undermine the cultural superstructure of Western Civilization. No longer convinced that the proletariat would constitute the vanguard of the revolution, Neo-Marxists sought radical change by mobilizing various marginalized groups in society. Most Neo-Marxists also renounced violent revolution in favor a gradualist approach to cultural transformation via a protracted culture war of attrition.

A 'Post-Christian' America

In the title of this course, the term **'Post-Christian' America** is in quotation marks. The idea that America was once a "Christian nation" and is now "post-Christian" is much debated among Christians. Suffice it to say that very few philosophers and theologians – and virtually no serious historians (Christian or non-Christian) – buy into the "Christian America" theory. America might have been (and still is) "Christian" in a superficial or a nominal sense, but *nominal* Christianity is *not true* Christianity.

There has never been a truly Christian nation in world history, nor will there ever be. Just as a true Christian is a person who has a spiritual relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ rather than merely being a church member or someone who identifies with the Christian religion, likewise a Christian nation would be more than just one in which Christianity is the most popular or predominant religion. Presumably, a Christian nation would be one in which the majority of its citizens were true Christians, as well as one in which the political, legal and social systems are based on New Testament principles.

There has never been a nation that meets these qualifications, including the United States. Even in the earliest colonial times – for instance, in the early years of the Massachusetts Bay colony – devout Christians (which in this case was the Puritans) were in a minority. More than a century later, at the time of the American Revolution, only about 10% of the colonial population were even church members, let alone committed Christians. Although most Americans identify themselves as "Christians" in public surveys today, most conceive of Christianity as a religious identification rather than a lifestyle of discipleship based on New Testament principles. Throughout his career, the evangelist Billy Graham often

commented that the majority of church members in America have never experienced a true spiritual conversion, and in recent years surveys by the Barna Group reveal that only a very small portion of the American people – less than 10% – have a consistent Biblical worldview.

In terms of the second qualification – i.e., that a truly Christian nation would be one in which the political, legal and social systems are based on New Testament principles – America likewise fails the test. Keep in mind that a truly Christian nation would not be an Old Testament-style theocracy governed by the Mosaic Law but rather a New Testament theocracy governed by principles that apply to the Kingdom of God. This would include the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, including ethics such as sacrificial sharing, "love your enemies," and "turn the other cheek."

The media often focus on right-wing Christian theocrats who want to impose specifically Christian moral values and behaviors on mainstream society, but in fact there are also left-wing Christian theocrats who want to do the same thing when it comes to specific social, political and economic values and behaviors that are in keeping with their view of social justice. For example, there were Christians following Nine-Eleven who argued that the United States, rather than retaliate against the Muslim Jihadists who killed over 3,000 Americans, should instead "turn the other cheek" and forgive them. In fact, they argued, the U. S. should apologize for its foreign policy indiscretions that caused the Jihadists to hate us. Their argument was based on the erroneous belief that America, as a "Christian nation," should respond according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, which is as misguided as when right-wing Christians declare that adulterers, prostitutes and homosexuals should be publicly punished for transgressing God's moral laws.

As Christians, we are called to a higher level of moral and ethical behavior than mainstream society, and the principles that apply specifically to the church were never intended to be forced upon society in general. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament does it even hint that secular governments should legislate Christian morality and enforce compliance with Christian ethical standards. On the contrary, the New Testament actually sanctions secular governments – even the corrupt and oppressive Roman Empire.

Historically, America was founded on two great principles: Judeo-Christian (i.e., Biblically-based) morality and ethics, and Enlightenment political theory. Unfortunately, many Christians focus exclusively on the first factor, while secularists tend to do just the opposite and emphasize the second factor to the exclusion of the first. Both views are seriously skewed and distort the realities of America's heritage.

(1)Judeo-Christian (i.e., Biblically-based) morals and ethics – as mediated primarily through 17th and 18th century Protestant Christianity. This included personal values such as self-discipline, honesty, sobriety, hard work and industry. In the social realm, the Biblical standard is summarized succinctly in Micah 6:8 – "God has shown you... what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

Regarding civil government, the New Testament emphasized respect for the rule of law:

- Titus 3:1-2 – "Remind the people to be subject to rulers and [governing] authorities, to be ready to do whatever is good... to be peaceable and considerrate, and to show true humility toward all men."
- Romans 13:1ff – "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.... Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.... Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing...."
- I Peter 2:13-17 – Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a coverup for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king."

Christians who were involved in the founding of some of America's first colonies understood that we must look after not only our own private welfare and that of our family, but the common good of society as a whole. This principle was articulated perhaps most eloquently in John Winthrop's sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," in which he exhorted his fellow-Puritans...

> We are a company professing ourselves fellow members of Christ..." For the sake of the work at hand, we must covenant together... and "the care of the public must oversway all private concerns....
>
> The end is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord....
>
> We must love one another with a pure heart fervently. We must bear one another's burdens. We must not look only on our own things, but also on the things of our brethren....
>
> Thus stands the cause between God and us. We entered into covenant with Him for this work.... [If we obey God, he will bless us; if not...] the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us....
>
> Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck ... is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work... We must delight in each other, make other's condition our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us as His own people.... For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us....

(2)Enlightenment political theory – based on the principles of Classical Liberalism. Any relatively good system of government must take into account the realities of human nature, and in Enlightenment political philosophy the basic guiding principle was the dignity of mankind.

But America's Founding Fathers were not as naive in this regard as some of their European counterparts. They understood that human nature is not simply (or simplistically) good, but a complex mix. They acknowledged that human beings are capable of great acts of kindness, charity, compassion, benevolence, and civic-mindedness, but they also recognized the darker

side of human nature, including mankind's propensity for gross selfishness, exploitation, tyranny, and even brutality. Accordingly, they designed a system of government that accounted for the complexities of human nature, and many of the beliefs that guided their thinking are set forth in the essays of the *Federalist Papers*, written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay.

Classical liberal ideology was based on several key tenets:

- **A social compact theory of government**, based on the belief that human beings are capable of self-government within proper parameters. The social compact theory holds that legitimate government is a creation of the people – a social contract between citizens and their public officials – and that government should function as a servant of the people, not their master.

  In this regard, the Founding Fathers understood that self-government requires a relatively moral and civic-minded citizenry, or as John Adams stated, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to govern any other."

- **The principle of minimalist government**, which was articulated succinctly by the English political theorist, John Locke, in his statement: "That government is best which governs least."

- **A constitutional republic** based on a written constitution that limits the power and scope of government. A written constitution is necessary to guarantee basic civil liberties which are, in the words of Thomas Jefferson, "inalienable" (i.e., God-given) rights.

  The American system of government was established as a republic, not a democracy. While avoiding a pure democracy, which is based on the principle of majority rule, the Founding Fathers established a representative government that was quasi-democratic. Once again, considering the complexities of human nature, they established a separation of powers between the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government, and built into the system various checks and balances to ensure that one branch would not dominate the others.

The concept of a "Christian" nation is part of the Constantinian legacy, and it harkens back to the age of Christendom (or Christian sacralism) when state churches sought to co-rule society along with the political authorities. Christendom was the tyranny of nominal Christianity, and it was disastrous in terms of perverting true Christian faith. Most of the Christian leaders who were influential in the founding of the American colonies still operated out of a Christian sacralistic mindset, but a few, such as the Baptist, Roger Williams, understood that state-sponsored and coercive Christianity is antithetical to the very spirit of the Gospel. Eventually, around the time of American Revolution, the concept of separatism – or the separation of church and state – became widely accepted, although of course the understanding of the concept of separatism was quite different than what secularists mean today when they use the term. Although officially neutral on religious matters, the political system the Founding Fathers established was not hostile toward the Christian faith, nor did they intend to exclude God and religious-based values from the public square.

So the bottom-line point regarding the controversy over "Christian America" is this: **There is no question that America was *uniquely influenced* by Biblical values and the Christian faith, but to call America a "Christian nation" seriously distorts reality**. In fact, it is sacrilegious because it perverts the very meaning of the word "Christian." Equating the Kingdom of God with any nation-state is one of the most egregious forms of idolatry, and Christians need to be most adamant about this.

The problem today is not that America is "post-Christian" in the Constantinian and sacralistic meaning of the term. Instead, our problem is that the *Christian influence* in our society and culture has withered over the past several decades. And precisely because of this erosion of Christian influence, we are suffering the consequences today in virtually every area of American life.

The Theme

The theme of this course is that our culture is in crisis. It is in a serious state of decay because of the erosion of Christian influence, and primarily because of the growing influence of insidious anti-Christian philosophies and ideologies that have succeeded in infiltrating and taking control of key sectors of our culture. Although these influences operate under various names, in general we might refer to this trend as cultural liberalism – or to use the more popular term, "Political Correctness." The ideology of Political Correctness is actually a form of cultural Marxism, and its roots can be traced back through the philosophy of Secular Humanism and a Naturalistic (Atheistic) worldview.

Throughout the 20th century secularists have largely succeeded in infiltrating and taking over the "commanding heights" of our culture, and in this course we'll examine this phenomenon in detail, including the historical origins of cultural Marxism and Political Correctness.

In assessing our current situation, we'll use the following operating assumptions:

- All human societies and cultures are flawed and imperfect, but of course some are much better and much worse than others.
- As Christians, we should work toward creating a (relatively) good society in which we can live "peaceful and quiet lives." [I Thess. 4:11]
- Although we understand that persecution can purify and strengthen individuals and the church in general, we know that evil and suffering and persecution are not God's ideal. They are the consequences of sin. God can certainly use evil, immorality and injustice in a redemptive way, but they are never God's intention – either for us individually or for our society.
- As Christians, we are called to be the "salt" and "light" in our society and culture. Obviously, a free and just and civil society is more conducive to this mission than a tyrannical, harsh and brutal socio/political system.
- Christians should value freedom and justice and civility not only for ourselves, but for the sake of everyone.

Yin or Yang?

In this course we deal with some serious and weighty and troubling issues. This makes some Christians uncomfortable who believe that they should avoid thinking about and discussing anything that is considered negative or pessimistic. But whether something is positive and optimistic or negative and pessimistic shouldn't be the issue. All that matters is truth and reality – not how things make us feel – and the reality of our present situation is that our culture is collapsing all around us.

As responsible Christians, we should be concerned about the condition of our culture, but not to the point of despair. We should strive to be informed and engaged, but it shouldn't become an obsession. As Augustine noted in his masterpiece, the *City of God*, the fate of the Gospel is not dependent upon the success or failure of any nation-state. Whether America survives or falls in the coming years, the Christian faith will ultimately prevail because it is true. However, America's demise would of course be a great tragedy because this nation has been in many ways a source of freedom and liberty in the world since its founding over 200 years ago.
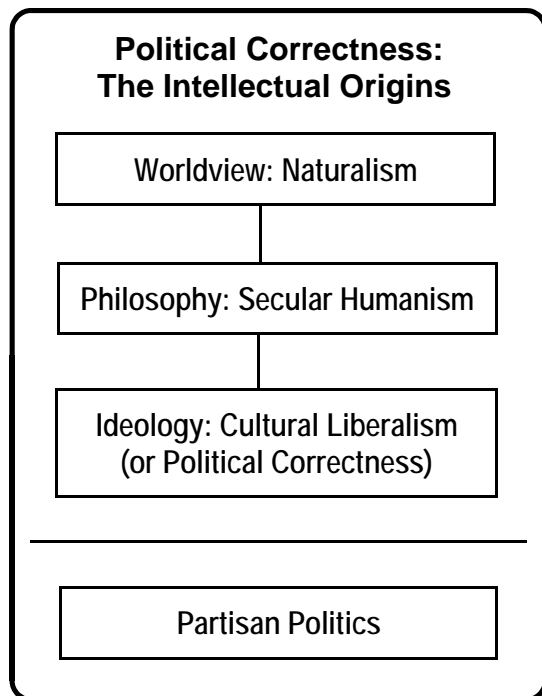
The Problem of Politicization

A course such as this deals with sensitive and controversial issues at the very time in our nation's history when we are the most polarized philosophically, ideologically and politically. Partisan tensions, rivalries and conflicts are becoming more acute all the time, and Christians are not immune from these tense divisions.

The most efficacious way to deal with issues related to cultural liberalism and Political Correctness is via a top-down approach (per the following graphic). In that sense, we start at the worldview level, comparing and contrasting Christian Theism with a Naturalistic worldview to show how utterly incompatible these orientations are. Next, we critique the philosophy of Secular Humanism based on Christian principles, and then move down the scale to the level of ideology. Here, we show how cultural liberalism, being derived from a Secular Humanistic philosophy and a Naturalistic worldview, is fundamentally antithetical to Christian values.

Dealing with worldviews, philosophies and ideologies is integral to cultural apologetics, and informed Christians need to be familiar with these concepts. However, at this point we must draw a

line, and this is where our analysis and critique must end. Below the line is the lowest level, the realm of partisan politics. Certainly, Christians need to be actively involved at this level, but morally and ethically, it is undeniably a murky and muddled morass of manipulations and machinations that can seduce, confuse and compromise even the most well-intentioned and public-spirited people who immerse themselves in it. For a course in Christian cultural apologetics that is based on Biblical moral and ethical principles and sound reasoning, the critique stops at the ideological level. To descend into the pit of politics is inappropriate and, frankly, unnecessary. For Christians who have a solid foundation in a Biblically-based worldview, philosophy and ideology, the political ramifications are usually rather obvious. Virtually all that is necessary is to heed the slogan, "Vote Your Values."

culture war and the slash-and-burn realm of politics, we must operate in the Spirit of Christ and exude the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, humility and self-control. We must truly believe that in the end, Truth will prevail.

For Further Reading...

As mentioned previously, a good general introduction to the concept of worldviews, including Christian Theism, Naturalism, and the philosophy of Secular Humanism, is **James W. Sire,** *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue.* Fourth Edition (IVP Academic, 2004).

**Political Correctness:
The Intellectual Origins**

Worldview: Naturalism

Philosophy: Secular Humanism

Ideology: Cultural Liberalism
(or Political Correctness)

Partisan Politics

In our current political climate that is increasingly tense and confrontational, the tendency of many is to politicize everything. Christians need to avoid this temptation (actually, obsession), keeping in mind that everything we think, say and do – including our political opinions and involvements – must be Spirit-led. If our opponents resort to propaganda, slander, lies, distortions, exaggerations, intimidation and *ad hominem* (personal) attacks – regardless of how effective these tactics can be – we must not respond in kind. Even in the midst of a ferocious