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January 20, 2010: Love Driven Politics

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Title: Love Driven Politics

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1/20/2018—Dr. Kathy Glass gave a wonderful Martin Luther King, Jr., Day Address on Friday. Her goal was to reintroduce us to the life and basic teachings of Dr. King. The striking image I took away was the love-driven politics of Dr. King. That is something we don't do now, of course. What did Dr. King mean? Well first of all, he meant agape love—in the Christian tradition—let's say unselfish concern for the welfare of others I do not know. To have concern for the other at the heart of my politics. And Dr. King meant in particular not just love for the stranger, but love for my enemy. That is, actual concern for the welfare of those who oppose me and seek to do me harm. That is obviously precisely what Jesus practiced, if the Gospels are reliable at all. This is the foundation of Dr. King's famous saying—Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. This is why Dr. King never sought to defeat his enemies, but to convert them. Not to Christianity per se, but convert them to more loving lives themselves. In Dr. King's hands, these were purely practical matters, not a matter of an ideal. If you want to see a very simple and direct version, look at his 1957 sermon here. There are three basic steps to practicing loving the enemy. First, know your own faults and how you have contributed to breakdown of community. After all, in the loving community, we don't have enemies. We are at fault is the number one requirement. If you cannot see your own hatred, you can't help anything. Second, know the good in your enemy. If you think there isn't any, you are just dealing with caricatures, not people. Your enemy is trying to accomplish something that is not itself pure evil. (Hard to believe with President Trump, but we are instructed to try). Third, when you have a chance to defeat your enemy, don't do it. Don't take your revenge when you can. This is agape love. A creative force for good in the universe. Dr. King ended the sermon with the question of why we should love our enemy. Three reasons. Love reduces the chain of hate in the universe. Hate warps the person who hates. And finally, love redeems. It is the only thing that actually improves our situation. Dr. King gave this sermon in 1957. His life over the next ten years demonstrate the power of his message, and its truth.