



**CIVILITAS**

# **Civilitas**

**Civil Conversations  
for the Common Good**

**Vision | Strategy | People**

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The Civilitas Group**

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*Civilitās* 1) Civility, 2) Civilization, 3) Citizenship

## **Introduction**

*E pluribus Unum*, “Out of Many, One” has served as the de facto motto of the United States since 1782. American culture has long been a symbol of freedom and a model of democracy. And American Christianity has been a source of strength and inspiration to the global church. Both American culture and Christianity are at a crossroads of historic magnitude.

Our society is increasingly characterized by competing special interests and fragmentation while the church is too often associated with the Culture Wars which serves to intensify its unprecedented experience of marginalization.

Researchers, sociologists, and journalists are increasingly speaking of America’s future in categories of polarization and decline.

Historians have developed theories with respect to the rise and fall of great nations. History is replete with examples of civilization after civilization that has followed this pattern. However, historians can also point to societies that have experienced renewal, revitalization, and renaissance.

Though our culture faces problems that are economic, political, global, structural, environmental and technological in nature, the ultimate problem of our culture is the crisis of the human spirit. Will we produce a new generation with hope or despair? Will the cultural inheritance our children receive be one of decline or the dawn of a new era informed by biblical ideals?

At this current crossroads in our history, the gospel presents the ultimate and best hope for renewal. Only the church has a theology of the new humanity, along with a theology of shared humanity, which provides a model for cohesion in the context of pluralism, a model that can help to produce a new dynamism and vibrancy.

Only the power of the gospel with the essential qualities of faith, hope, and love can provide redemption in the context of skepticism, gloom, and vulgarity. The church is the largest social entity in the country with upwards of 100,000,000 people who meet regularly in over 300,000 houses of worship all across the country.

These 100,000,000 people include men and women of every generation, every social class, every ethnic/language group in America, and every field of human endeavor. This dynamic mixture of people has the potential to bring renewal and hope.

## **The challenge of vision, courage, and collaboration**

Civilitas represents a foundational commitment to strengthen the influence of the Bible and the role of the church as a means of bringing healing and cohesion to our fragmenting society. This will be accomplished by bringing together the top echelon of our church leaders and the most influential leaders of our culture for the purpose of civil conversations for the common good. Secondly, Civilitas will network top Christian leaders to mobilize and unite our communities for sacrificial service to the needy in our broken world.

Civil conversations will work to change the tone of our society by supplanting vitriolic public discourse with respectful listening, constructive exchange, and positive partnerships.

Dan Cathy, President and CEO of Chick-Fil-A developed an improbable model of such civility in a surprising friendship with Shane Windmeyer, national director of the LGBT group Campus Pride.

After Dan Cathy was vilified by gays and lesbians in 2012 for his support of traditional marriage, Dan took a simple but courageous step of reaching out to Shane. He invited him to dinner so that they could meet and discuss the nature of their differences and explore matters of common interest. To the surprise of both Dan and Shane, they had a pleasant evening and they developed a friendship. A short time later, Dan invited Shane to be his guest and to sit with him in the owner's box for the Chick-Fil-A Bowl in Atlanta, Georgia.

Shortly thereafter, Shane wrote an op-ed piece in the *Huffington Post* entitled, “Coming Out as a Friend of Dan Cathy.” In the article he gave praise to Dan for taking the initiative, for listening respectfully, for sharing his convictions honestly, and for seeking first to understand rather than to be understood. Shane wrote, “We learned about each other as people with opposing views, not as opposing people.”

As a result, Shane made the decision for Campus Pride to discontinue a nationally organized protest to boycott Chick-Fil-A. A Civil Conversation paved the way for discovering the common good.

### **The Civilitas Model**

Civilitas will use a simple model to convene Civil Conversations in some of America’s most influential cities. In places like New York, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Seattle, Chicago and Boston, Civilitas will facilitate dinner meetings with a group of five or six Christian leaders meeting with five or six cultural elites.

In a city like New York, this would include Christian leaders like Tim Keller, Cardinal Dolan, Gabriel Salguero, A.R. Bernard, and Rich Mouw. The cultural elite would be represented by people like journalist and presidential aide, George Stephanopoulos; New York Times writer, David Brooks; the president of New York University; the chief of police; the superintendent of public schools and the mayor.

Civil conversations among leaders of this caliber, in New York City and in cities across the country could produce a national network where people of widely divergent backgrounds and points of view become friends, develop trust, learn to collaborate, and join forces to serve the common good.

This was the impact of William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect who worked with the societal elites of their day to bring about the abolition of the British slave trade and the renewal of British culture and Christianity.

We find inspiration for this model in Scripture. Nehemiah is a Civilitas exemplar. Upon discovering his city and nation to be in a state of serious disrepair, Nehemiah wept. Then he prayed. Next he did a survey of the city. From that he developed a plan, obtained favor from the cultural elite of a foreign ruling nation, raised resources, mobilized his people, organized them into productive working units, provided safety and defense in the midst of a precarious context, and then led them to successful renewal of the city.

They did this in such a short amount of time that their neighbors were terrified. Nehemiah then brought in Ezra to read the Law of God. Upon hearing the word of God once again at the center of community life and in the foundational place of rebuilding a culture, the people of God could not stop weeping. They realized that God had done something truly miraculous in their time.

## **Strategy**

Civilitas will seek to build a national network of Christian leaders and cultural elites from among select cities across the country. Through the Civil Conversations and through the networks and dialogues that develop, Civilitas will also work to identify key issues that are of paramount importance for the common good of our culture.

Such issues will likely include the welfare of our children, the crisis in our public schools, the prevalence of violence in our society, the breakdown of family and community life, and cultural cohesion and the future of democracy in an increasingly diverse population.

Civilitas will then seek to connect the best minds and the most creative entities in the country to work on our most intractable challenges in pursuit of solutions for the common good. This will include churches, colleges and seminaries, mission leaders, and social entrepreneurs, together with Christians who have earned trust and exerted influence in every sector of society, to collaborate in pursuit of the common good.

Civilitas is developing the following seven-step strategy:



STEP	FOCUS
One	<b>Conduct</b> research and analysis. This research provides a baseline from which we understand the nature of fragmentation, polarization and incivility in each of our 25 major cities. This research is being designed together with the <i>Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture</i> at the University of Virginia.
Two	<b>Convene</b> “mediated conversations” in each of the 25 cities. These will be dinner gatherings to include six Christian leaders and six leaders of culture and shapers of public opinion in each city. They will represent the spheres of government, business, education, the media, the arts, entertainment, NGO’s, and the philanthropic community.
Three	<b>Develop</b> Shared Vision and Strategy for collaborative initiatives to deal with the most pressing and accessible social and cultural challenges in each city.
Four	<b>Mobilize</b> volunteers from among the grass roots of our churches.

<b>Five</b>	<b>Implement</b> the process of collaboration on projects that meet needs while also building trusting relationships. During the time of making progress towards civility, our Civilitas Theory of Social Change – developed in partnership with sociologists at Princeton, Yale, and UVA – will be used to guide and refine the actual practice and progress of change.
<b>Six</b>	<b>Assess</b> the process to ensure that progress is being made and to ensure that adjustments are being made.
<b>Seven</b>	<b>Celebrate</b> progress and outcomes with an annual “American Celebration of Civility” gala.

Civilitas is committed to building a network of partners with groups of shared conviction such as Veritas Forum, The Trinity Forum, James Davison Hunter and the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (University of Virginia), The Centre for Ethics and Public Policy, The Center for Public Justice, The Brehm Center for Worship, Theology and the Arts, the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities, the Christian Community Development Association, private Christian foundations, national student organizations, and institutions of higher learning.

We believe that a by-product of this strategy will be a significantly enhanced public perception of the value of the church and Christian organizations in our society. This was the means by which the early church “turned the world upside down,” and it was the fruit of the social transformation brought about by William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect in England.

### **Metrics**

Currently we are working with social researchers and focus groups to develop a “Civility Index.” This project will provide precision to our understanding of civility. The process will also serve to gain ownership among the many groups who will be involved in the “Our Ideal City” focus group project.

### **Incentivizing and Celebrating Civility**

Beginning in 2017, we plan to hold an annual “**American Celebration of Civility**” gala. This will serve to incentivize cities, organizations, churches, and individuals to work for the common good. Recognition and prizes will be awarded to those who are providing models of effectiveness in advocating and advancing the work of civility in each sphere of society.

**2026:  
Focal Point for Renewal**

The year 2026 will mark the 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of our country. The horizon of 12 years leading up to that marker affords the opportunity to reflect on our history, to assess our current condition, and to dream and plan for our future.

In the words of George Bernard Shaw, some will look at things the way they now are and ask “why?” Others will dream about what might be and ask “Why Not?”

Civilitas will be a group of people, inspired by the gospel, strengthened by prayer and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit, informed by the lessons of history, and propelled into the future with an eschatological vision. It will be a group of people who ask the “Why Not” question.

**Christian Convictions,  
Cultural Engagement**

The ideals and vision of Civilitas are rooted in the Bible and grounded in Christian theology. The impetus comes from those within the evangelical movement, which takes seriously the responsibility to share the Good News of the Risen Christ with the entire world, while at the same time seeking the welfare of all who live in our great global cities, as well as those who live in small towns, farms and fishing villages. It is a commitment to be salt and light in our world as we contribute to the common good.

Civilitas is not an agenda to “take America back to a Golden Era.” Rather it is a new expression of commitment to Christ, the Church and the World of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It takes into account the new realities of our time and sees them as opportunities rather than threats. It takes into account the new composition of our society with all its complexity and calls us back to the mission and vision of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

It was a church that ministered through weakness and humility in the context of amazing diversity and complexity. Its strength was not found in political influence, economic power, or military show of force. Its strength was expressed in love and service, and in a way of life that was so compelling in its authenticity that it turned the world upside down.



Civilitas Leadership

Board of Advisors

List of Major U.S. Cities

Spheres of Influence

Giving Information

## Civilitas Leadership

**RICHARD MOUW**, *Founding Honorary Chair*, is regarded widely as the most influential Evangelical voice in America. Mouw has had a distinguished career as an author, speaker and professor of ethics, philosophy and theology at Calvin College and Fuller Theological Seminary. He served as the President of Fuller for 20 years from 1993-2013. He is the author of 19 books, including *The God Who Commands*, *Culture and Common Grace*, *Praying at Burger King*, and an expanded and revised edition of *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*. In 2007, Princeton Theological Seminary awarded him the Abraham Kuyper Prize for Excellence in Reformed Theology and Public Life. He is admired around the world for his magnanimous spirit which finds expression in building bridges of trust with Catholics, Chinese Church leaders, Jews, Mormons, and Muslims.

**DOUGLAS BIRDSALL**, *Founder and President*, has served the global mission of the church for thirty-five years. Doug and Jeanine began their cross-cultural work as missionaries in Japan in 1980 where they served for 20 years with Asian Access, an organization that Doug led as President and CEO. In 2004, Doug was appointed to serve as the Executive Chairman of the Lausanne Movement. He convened the Third Lausanne Congress in Cape Town, South Africa in 2010. The Congress drew 4200 leaders from 198 countries. Christianity Today referred to it as the most representative gathering of Christian leaders in history. In 2012, Doug Birdsall was appointed to serve as the 27<sup>th</sup> President of the American Bible Society in New York City. Doug is a graduate of Wheaton College, Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary, and Harvard University and the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, UK. Doug and his wife Jeanine live in Boston, Massachusetts. Doug and Jeanie have three adult children.

**BOBBY RYU**, *Founding Partner and Vice President for Research and Operations*, is the son of first generation Korean immigrants; Bobby was born in South Korea and educated in the United States and England at UCLA, Loyola Law School, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and the University of Oxford. He began his career as an attorney in the Los Angeles office of Squire, Sanders & Dempsey LLP (now Squire Patton LLP), specializing in litigation and intellectual property matters, before moving on to doctoral research in England followed by seminary teaching and faith-based work in Japan. Bobby has contributed to books on biblical archaeology and world religions. He is the author of *Knowledge of God in Philo of Alexandria* (Mohr Siebeck, 2015). He serves as Visiting Professor of New Testament at Nagoya Theological Seminary in Japan, where he also co-founded and led the Asia Center for Faith and Society. Bobby, his wife Claire, and son Sam live in Wenham, Massachusetts.





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**David Young**

Founder and Chairman, Oxford Analytica

## **25 of America's Most Influential Cities**

New York City  
Washington, D.C.  
Los Angeles  
Boston  
San Francisco  
Oakland  
Chicago  
Seattle  
Dallas  
Atlanta  
Miami  
Houston  
Philadelphia  
Austin  
Orlando  
Charlotte  
Detroit  
Nashville  
San Diego  
Minneapolis  
Portland  
Columbus, OH  
St. Louis  
Kansas City  
Denver  
Phoenix  
Raleigh/Durham

## **Spheres of Cultural Influence**

Academy/Education

Arts

Business

Churches and Faith-Based Organizations

Entertainment and Sports

Government

Media

NGO's / Social Services

Philanthropy

## Giving Information

Gifts for the support of the work of Civilitas may be made to the ProVision Foundation, a supporting organization of the National Christian Foundation. Dr. Terry Douglass is the founder and chairman of ProVision Foundation. Mr. Ned Kiser served as Executive Director. He can be reached by phone, 865-691-6756; email, [ned.kiser@pvnetwork.net](mailto:ned.kiser@pvnetwork.net)

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