



Pursuing common good first demands equal status in society

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“When class, sectarian, ethnic, gender or any other basis for group identity demands increasing levels of commitment and loyalty, the pressures to belong to the group may well override the individual’s responsibility for independent, critical thought,” Ed Yager asserted last Sunday in his biweekly column. “This is a formula for pluralistic divisiveness rather than the promotion of the common good and national unity.”

First of all, let me express my sincere admiration for Yager and his ongoing efforts to add an informed and rational perspective to the Daily News; the intellectual integrity he consistently brings to the table is refreshing.

Where I may differ from Yager in his most recent commentary, however, regards his contention that when group membership supersedes promotion of the common good, it is necessarily “egoistic, selfish and self-serving.”

Personally, I believe it could be considered disingenuous to appeal to the “common good” when you belong to a group that has historically benefitted from the existing power structure – especially if you have not worked to provide everyone with the same rights and privileges you have enjoyed as a member of the ruling class.

By coincidence, I saw “Birth of a Nation,” this past weekend. This 2016 release features Nate Parker as Nat Turner, the African-American minister who led a slave rebellion in Virginia in 1831. Apparently, the slave owners in Southampton County would pay Nat’s owner to have him speak to their slaves, ostensibly telling them that to remain obedient to their masters was something they should do for the “common good.”

Only when everyone has achieved equal status in society can an appeal to the “common good” become a truly unifying and transcendent ideal. Until then, we have very little chance of eradicating the “identity politics” that have characterized our country since before its founding.

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