

A Radical Politics: Saying Yes to Love
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Days are growing shorter; the farm harvest is in; the Winter Solstice is near at hand. In times of old this was a time of mending, conserving, putting food by, slowing down, offering thanks.

Now, things have changed. December has become a time of rushing, shopping, spending.

As I make purchases these days I am challenging myself to ask the question: If I choose to buy this product, what will I be saying “yes” to? Indeed, each purchase that we make, however trivial, is a political act in so far as we are supporting—saying “yes”—to something.

By way of example, put yourself in the place of a local homeowner who just this week decides that it is finally time to purchase a rake to rid his lawn of leaves. So, you go to the store and once there you locate a sturdy, top-of-the-line bamboo rake selling for \$35. It seems like a lot of money to spend. As you stand there trying to decide, you notice the leaf blowers and discover that you can buy one of these, on sale, for just \$59, not much more than the bamboo rake. You pause, unsure which one to buy.

Now, let’s imagine that you decide to ask the question, “What am I saying ‘yes’ to if I buy the rake instead of the leaf blower?” For me, buying the rake would mean saying yes to quiet (instead of noise); yes to self reliance (instead of machine reliance); yes to natural pace (instead of speed); yes to thrift (instead of unnecessary spending); yes to simplicity (instead of complexity); yes to vigorous exercise (instead of labor-saving devices); yes to clean air (instead of pollution); yes to durability (instead of built-in obsolescence). Of course, for someone else, this discernment process could go in the direction of the leaf blower. The important thing, in my view, is to engage in this process and in so doing to make purchasing decisions that square with one’s values.

In this vein, I think the Amish members of our community have much to teach us. Before saying “yes” to any technological innovation, they first consider what impact the new adoption could have on the integrity of their community for it is community that is more highly valued than convenience or speed or efficiency.

This process of values clarification is as challenging as it is rewarding. I think, for example, of the times I have spent standing in front of a vending machine trying to decide what to buy—e.g., the chips, the Snickers bar, the nuts, the gum? Absent the filter of my

values, I am likely to go for the Snickers bar, saying “yes” to sugar, convenience, processed food, and, in the process, giving my money to some remote corporation I know little about. Alternatively, I might stop and ask myself, “Do I really want to put this high sugar, processed who-knows-what into my body?” This little pause might be enough to help me clarify what I truly value—my health and, by extension, wholesome food.

Now, putting all this in the context of holiday shopping, family and gift giving, I am asking myself, How I can say “yes” to my loved ones this holiday season? Like most people, I have been conditioned to believe that the way to do this is to buy presents for them. But what if less is more? What if giving stuff is actually an obstacle that gets in the way of giving what truly matters? What if, instead of giving my loved ones presents from China, I gave them my in-the-flesh presence? In other words, what if I gave them something of myself—my time, my creativity, my ear, my touch—my full undivided presence? What if instead of generously giving stuff, I extended a generosity of spirit?

Indeed, what if we all had the courage to face and understand that what we are longing for is a deep sense of being loved, valued, accepted, appreciated.... and that the only thing that will fill this hole is the loving kindness that we extend to each other? This would be tantamount saying yes to what truly matters—saying yes to a radical politics grounded in love.