

Inquiring Minds topic – 22 February 2019

Moderator, Riv Swartz

Right Wing Christians and their Devotion to President Donald Trump

For the most part, many Christian Evangelicals have been solid members of President Trump's political base. But who are these Evangelicals?

There seems to be some misunderstanding when referring to the terms: **Christian Right, Right Wing Conservatives, and/or Right Wing Christian Evangelicals.**

Wikipedia attempts to untangle these terms by offering the following statement:

The Christian Right are conservative Christian political factions that are characterized by their support of socially conservative policies...In the United States, the Christian Right is an informal coalition formed around a core of Evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics...The Christian Right draws additional support from other conservatives including Orthodox Jews and Mormons.

For the most part, these strong political conservatives have basically devoted themselves to Trump to form his staunch political base. For purposes of accuracy, the term Right Wing Evangelicals will be used when referring to this informal coalition. However, please note that Michael Gerson's article below, falls back to the over-simplistic term, "Evangelicals." Nevertheless, it is felt that Gerson's arguments are both illuminating and sound.

Right Wing Evangelicals seem to flock to Mr. Trump despite his notorious behaviors including adultery, lying, attacks on the U.S. Constitution, cruelty at the border, and alleged corruption. How do you explain the position of a devout and G-d fearing people who now place their trust in the flawed character of our President? In fact, these Evangelicals seem to give up their

moral high ground to follow the questionable antics of President Trump.

Grappling with the questions below may shed light on the convergence of the unlikely bedfellows of President Trump and the Right Wing Evangelicals:

- 1. Many suggest that these Evangelicals are hypocritical in their devotion to President Trump. Do you agree or disagree? Why?**
 - 2. Why is winning the Court System of the United States so important to these devoted people?**
 - 3. Why is the issue of abortion so high on their agenda?**
 - 4. What can be done to appeal to the Evangelical sense of morality once Trump is not on the scene?**
 - 5. What would it take for Trump to lose the devotion of the Evangelicals? Can Trump truly shoot a man in the middle of Manhattan without losing his base? WHY?**
 - 6. Do you feel that these Evangelicals have been deceived by President Trump?**
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Michael Gerson: Evangelicals falsely believe they have found a champion in Trump

newsok.com/article/5619302/michael-gerson-evangelicals-falsely-believe-they-have-found-a-champion-in-trump

By Michael Gerson - Washington Post Writers Group - January 4, 2019

WASHINGTON — By all indications, the reluctant support by white evangelicals for Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton in 2016 has solidified into something like devotion.

In his analysis of the 2018 midterm election results, political journalist Ron Brownstein found many groups plagued by second thoughts about their support of Trump. But not evangelicals, who display a "hardening loyalty" toward Trump's GOP. Evangelical support for key Trump policy priorities such as the border wall has jumped. When asked recently if there was anything — anything at all — that Trump could do to forfeit evangelical allegiance, Jerry Falwell Jr. replied: "No."

In an era of strange political alliances and events, this one remains notable. Headed into a possible impeachment battle, the most ethically challenged president of modern times — prone to cruelty, bigotry, vanity, adultery and serial deception — is depending on religiously conservative voters for his political survival. And, so far, it is not a bad bet.

Trump has understood something about evangelicals that many are unable to articulate themselves. White, theologically conservative Protestants were once, not that long ago, a culturally predominant force. Many of their convictions, on matters from sexuality to public religiosity, were also the default settings of the broader society. But that changed in a series of cultural tidal waves — the Darwinist account of human origins, the application of higher criticism to the text of the Bible, the sexual revolution — that swept away old certainties.

When conservative Christianity became re-politicized in the 1970s and 80s, the secular world — the world of federal judges, public schools, major universities and liberal politicians — was viewed as an aggressive threat to Christian ideals, institutions and identity. Over time, that struggle has taken on apocalyptic proportions in the minds of many believers. For some, it is nothing less than the end-times conflict of good and evil, which somehow culminated in fights against the Obama administration.

In this struggle, many evangelicals believe they have found a champion in Donald Trump. He is the enemy of their enemies. He is willing to use the hardball tactics of the secular world to defend their sacred interests. In their battle with the Philistines, evangelicals have essentially hired their own Goliath — brutal, pagan, but on their side.

It doesn't take much biblical research to discover that this isn't quite how God accomplished things in the original story. He actually employed a scrawny Jewish boy, using unconventional tactics, in order to demonstrate that His favor mattered more than worldly measures of strength. From a purely political perspective, however, the hiring of a Goliath is what interest groups generally do.

In this case, there is also a predictable political cost. The employment of an unethical, racist, anti-immigrant, misogynist Giant is not likely to play well with women, minorities and young people, who are likely to equate conservative religion with prejudice for decades to come.

This is true enough. But it is, fortunately, not the end of the story. At least it has not

been the end in similar cases before. During the 19th and 20th centuries (and before) conservative religion was often used to justify slavery and segregation. Pastors and theologians blessed white superiority and urged African-American acceptance of the existing social order.

The Christian faith, however, was something more and different than its most visible defenders made it out to be. Even in a distorted form, it contained the seed of a revolution. After his Christian conversion during the Second Great Awakening, Frederick Douglass said, "I love the pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ: I therefore hate the corrupt, slaveholding, women-whipping, cradle-plundering, partial and hypocritical Christianity of this land." Douglass was driven by Christian principle to challenge the Christian practice of his time.

Over the centuries, Christian faith (like other faiths) has been used to justify exploitation, oppression, imperialism and the persecution of minorities. But as its true precepts have taken root in reformers, Christian faith has also been a powerful source of criticism of those practices. And for a simple reason. Christianity inevitably raises the question: What if everyone we favor, and everyone we fear, and everyone we help, and everyone we exploit, and everyone we love, and everyone we hate, were the reflected image of God — unique, valuable and destined for eternity?

This Christian vision of human rights and dignity has grabbed men and women by the collar in every generation — the William Wilberforces and Dorothy Days and Martin Luther Kings. A hypocrisy becomes unsustainable. A seed gets planted. And a greater power emerges — revealing new leaders, and shaming those who reduce Christianity to a sad and sordid game of thrones.

For Further reflection:

<http://time.com/5161349/president-trump-white-evangelical-support-slaveholders>

<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/04/white-evangelicals-cant-quit-donald-trump/558461>

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2018/07/08/evangelicals-support-donald-trump-out-fear-nostalgia-column/748967002>

<https://religionnews.com/2018/12/17/how-can-christians-support-donald-trump>