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Trump and the Pharisees

By Ben Voth

The recurring effort to subordinate Christianity to the reactionary public ethics of those who do not like Republican presidents is enjoying another resurgence. The recent editorial in *Christianity Today* and editorials in places like the *Christian Post* basically assert the following: President Trump is an exceptionally immoral President and unethical model and therefore any Christian who supports him is as bad or worse than him. This is a profoundly flawed argument and deserves to be soundly rejected by the public.

An important insight into Christianity's intrinsic meaning can be found in a relatively sophisticated critique of Christianity: What do Moses, David, and the apostle Paul all have in common? Minimally they share a common tradition of being major authors of the Bible as well as personal authors of murder. Skeptics of Christianity utilize this irony to attack the credibility of Christian origins. It is however an important purpose that God has in redeeming the unredeemable and acting out His plan in acts of ultimate irony. Of course, Trump has not committed anything close to the crimes noted by these examples, despite the hyperbole of his antagonists like the Pope, who compared the President to King Herod. Even Jesus himself was found guilty of crimes by multiple forums all too sure of their own arrogant judgments. The fact that immoral figures take leading roles in the Bible is not only unsurprising, it is rather expected. Christians taking the time to read Jesus' genealogy for Christmas will find multiple prostitutes in his lineage and Mary's own pregnancy caused moral concern for her fiancée. The idea that God cannot use immoral human beings for a glorious purpose betrays a complete lack of attention to the most important truths of Christian hermeneutics as suggested by Biblical texts.

This aims squarely at one of the most squeamish claims offered by Trump supporters such as Rick Perry and Nicki Haley. In essence, they offer that God has in some sense appointed President Trump for this role. This makes the Christian reactionaries howl -- how can anyone say such a ridiculous thing? Of course the political leadership of Israel and pagan states is regularly described as deriving from plainly secular and theologically antagonistic sources. This ought to give the President's critics pause, but it does not.

More to the point is the two-horned attack of reactionaries: abortion and sexuality. Anyone who does not agree with legalized abortion violence or rejecting human sexuality as idealized in a male and female marriage is targeted by this reactionary community. This reaction movement is increasingly characterized by Jacobin fantasies and actions of violence. The [violent attack](#) on the Family Research Council where the shooter had a long list of "hate groups" provided by SPLC and he hoped to make his victims eat some Chick Fil A sandwiches he had in a backpack while they lay dying at his violent hand. Sarah Palin's [church was burned](#) around its entire perimeter with women and children trapped inside and temperatures 20 below zero in 2008 one month after she dared challenge Barack Obama's ascendancy to the Presidency.

I have worshipped in evangelical Christian churches in Texas, Kansas, and Ohio. In every setting I knew relatively secular academics who became agitated anytime a Republican became President and heightened these arguments. Nonetheless, the President's supporters among Christians continue to behave in a way that is more compassionate than their counterparts in the public sphere. This [fact was acknowledged](#) by former Democratic primary candidate Marianne Williamson.

President Trump is not a conservative movement. He is not a Republican movement. He is a zeitgeist against corruption of our truth-telling functionaries. Does the media tell the Truth? Does the FBI tell the truth? Does Hollywood tell the truth? Does academia tell the truth? How many of these elites abhor Christianity as a transcendent moral ethic where the truth should set us free? This reality offends flyover country. Trump has tried to encourage Christian pastors who are afraid to preach politics because of the blue privilege that says only Democrats can be publicly promoted as 'good Christians.' Trump promotes judicial appointments favorable to the broader concerns of religious liberty and human rights for the unborn. This country's reactionaries know this and their anger encourages an overzealous self-righteous anger among his critics. Christians can certainly agree or disagree with the President or his policies. The practice of gaslighting Christians and pretending they are too stupid to understand their own faith and interests is unethical and inappropriate. This type of self-righteous attitude is exactly the kind of behavior that Jesus aimed his remarks most sharply at in the first century. Jesus gave many incredible arguments back to the self-righteous pharisees who would ultimately play a key role in putting him to death. Among his best responses was that those judging ought to pick the log out of their own eyes before plucking a speck out of their opponents. Our public



sphere is brimming with unflinching public teaching of hatred of the President. This hatred is unethical and has blinded too many authorities throughout our public sphere. Hopefully this hate will subside but if it does not, there remains a grace that supersedes it all no matter how violent it may become.

I recently returned from a three-week mission to teach young people and teachers about debate in the small African nation of Rwanda. I had the pleasure of teaching more than 400 students and teachers how we can talk through political differences in the way of arguments as opposed to violence. I had the opportunity to worship with Rwandans three times while I was there. Some of the most meaningful moments in those times were the singing in Kinyarwanda -- the native language of Rwanda. At the Kigali Convention center I saw a Rwandan worship team sing “Hari icyizere” before Hillsong United took the stage. The song extols God’s grace in the time of the terrible genocide of 1994. Though I could not understand the words, I could feel the spirit and the passion of God in their responses and collective singing. The passion of politics in 1994 took more than 1.4 million lives in a nation of only 6 million people. The grace of God is intended for all and we ought to not let our political differences incite us to hatred, because hate is a dangerous thing. Jesus embodied grace and trying to use him to force our political will results in a rope made of sand. The Rwandans believe today that God saved their nation from annihilation through his grace. We ought to aspire to the same today.

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