

Religion Is Often Perverted

Ken Olson

Millions have found religion to be a source of meaning, inspiration, and consolation. It deals with the most profound aspects of the human condition, “matters of life and death,” but those powerful themes also make it open to perversion.

The conservative columnist David French writes, “One of the saddest and most disturbing realities of the second Trump administration is the gap between its Christian rhetoric and its corrupt and lawless actions. ...It wants to be seen as godly while acting godlessly.” French, who self-identifies as an evangelical (in what the term used to mean), said, “Trump’s ‘Christian nationalism’ is neither.” To promote that C/n perversion, Trump created the White House Faith Office, headed by a pastor, Paula White Cain (known for promising “personal angels” for \$1,000). She recently said, “I walk on holy ground...To say no to President Trump would be saying no to God.” (!)

In a passage in Dostoyevsky’s iconic 1866 Russian novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Christ comes back to earth in the 15th century at the height of the Spanish Inquisition, where His presence is seen as a dire threat. The Grand Inquisitor puts Him in chains, declaring, “I tell Thee that man is tormented by no greater anxiety than to find someone to whom he can hand over the gift of freedom with which the ill-fated creature is born. ...In the end they will lay their freedom at our feet and say to us, ‘Make us your slaves, but feed us.’ ...Tomorrow, Thou wilt see that obedient flock who at a sign from me will hasten to heap up the hot cinders about the pile on which I will burn Thee for coming to hinder us. For if anyone has ever deserved our fires, it is Thou. Tomorrow, I shall burn Thee!”

This is fiction, but the horrific heretic-hunting Inquisition itself was not. If Dostoyevsky were here today, he would call out the many distortions promoted in the name of religion. But he’s not, so others must.

Trump and one of many accomplice pastors, Franklin Graham, claim that “the hand of God” directly intervened to save him during the assassination attempts. Speaker of the House Mike Johnson said recently, “God miraculously spared the president’s life. ...His presidency and his life are the fruits of divine providence.” They must have the same privileged pipeline to God’s will as did Hitler; the murderous fascist dictator not only claimed that God chose him to make Germany great again but also saved him from four attempts on his life. --Funny how “God’s will” and those of authoritarians always seem to coincide.

Recall that Trump promoted an AI image of himself as a Christ-figure with robe and halo, revealing that in this White House no blasphemy is off limits. He also said, “I’m all about the gospel. I’m about it as much as anybody can be.” --This from someone who scorns biblical teaching about all-inclusive love, flouts the Commandments, says he has never felt the need for forgiveness, and whose character reeks of moral rot.

Invoking the name of God to promote political agendas has often been disastrous. George W. Bush “knew” that God chose him to be president and blessed his actions in the Iraq War –before

invading the wrong country. Reagan's Interior Secretary, James Watt, a member of a Pentecostal denomination, thought there was no point in protecting the environment, because God was about to bring about The End, anyway.

Christ said that no one, not even himself, knows when history will conclude, but that has not stopped people like Mike Huckabee (Ambassador to Israel) from putting forth predictions and perverted spins on The Book of Revelation. Thus, in fundamentalist far-right religious groups there is much anticipation of a war that would trigger the apocalyptic end-times and the Rapture. This Armageddon features not a loving Christ but a destroyer who delights in slaughtering the unfaithful. It's a horrific image promoted in the "Left Behind" book series, which began in 1995 and has sold some 100 million copies (not a typo). One theologian characterized the warped message of Left Behind as "God so loved the world that He sent World War III."

In a 2003 speech to Harvard Medical School, journalist Bill Moyers, himself an ordained Baptist minister, said, "One of the biggest changes in politics in my lifetime is that the delusional is no longer marginal. It has come from the fringe to sit in the seat of power in the Oval Office and in Congress. For the first time in our history, ideology and 'theology' hold a monopoly of power in Washington." --True now, X10. Kevin Phillips also warned about the frightening trend in his 2006 book, American Theocracy.

There will always be evildoers perverting religion, which is one of the reasons our nation's Founders wrote separation of church and state into the Constitution that Trump so despises. But now he's losing his grip. Anyone can see that he is increasingly desperate, deranged, and panicky, and not even God can save him from those cratering polls.

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