

## God, Life, and Everything Trump, Sanders, and Syrians

I have a theory, and it's not even a conspiracy theory.

But it does have to do with what's going on in our whacky presidential elections as well as what's happening in the cruel world of refugees.

What's more, they both have something to do with God.

If you listen to political pundits talk about the surprising, even baffling rise of Donald Trump on the right and Bernie Sanders on the left, you will hear the same refrain over and over: People are sick of politics as usual. They are sick of the Washington insiders. They want people who will tell it like it is.

Most of the polls see something very disjointed in these messages. Most of the people don't believe that either Bernie or the Donald are electable. They don't believe that Trump has enough experience or the temperament to actually govern. They don't believe Sanders can create the coalitions across the aisle he'll need to get anything done.

So, they love these two so-called political outsiders (Trump has never held elected office but has been involved in political circles for years. Sanders is in his first term as a Senator but has been in Congress since 1991), but they don't actually believe in them as potential presidents.

What gives?

From the best polls so far, it seems people truly do want experienced politicians who can navigate the complex world of government. At the same time, they don't want anyone who is caught up in that system.

And that's the point. People hate the system in which politicians have to work. If you get down to it, most politicians at least *think* they're getting into this line of work because they want to be public servants. BUT, the system they work in doesn't allow it. They have to play the games in order to get anything done. They have to suck up to the donors if they want to get elected. They have to give undue attention to the lobbyists of those donors if they want any legislation to get through. They learn very quickly that, unless they want a very short career in congress, they must play the game.

People want to change the rules of the game to benefit the majority of people again, not just those who have the money to buy their own private member of Congress. THAT, I believe, is what's behind the popularity of both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders.

The problem is, the system they will be elected into is still the same. It is still a pay-to-play system where money equals free speech and only the very wealthy have a voice. Where laws are written by contributors rather than lawmakers. Giving the Donald or Bernie high poll numbers won't be enough.

This brings us to the problem of the Syrian refugees. Totally unrelated? I don't think so. Here's what I mean:

If you look at the news, you see the focus on the horrible plight of the refugees themselves. How many will die in their flight to Europe? How many will Germany take? How many will the eastern versus western countries take? Will Hungary allow them to traverse their borders?

But what they're ignoring is the root cause of the refugee crisis in the first place. While it's important to give safe haven to all refugees, it is more important to address the issues that force these countless children of God to flee their homes.

This issue has deep roots, and some of them lead right back to US interventionism, where we jump in to give military assistance to anyone who fights against people we don't like - or where we jump in militarily ourselves. The US is known world wide for trying to force others to do things our way. Sometimes it works, often with unintended consequences. After all, Fidel Castro was put in power by the US.

Now, Syria is not the sole fault of the US. It is much more complex than that. But unless we can unravel the knot in that disaster, we will never stop the flow of refugees. It's like the old story of a man fishing at a river when he sees a baby floating down. He rescues the baby, but as soon as he does, he sees another. He rescues that one only to see another and another. Finally, he goes up river to find out - and stop - whoever is throwing the babies in.

My point is that we love to look at the symptoms of a problem - outsider candidates, refugees, babies - but we are loathe to tackle the systems that create them. Yet that is our challenge.

In religious terms, this is what Jesus did. People were so caught up in the minutia of observing the laws that would keep them in good standing with a prickly and grumpy God, that they never had a chance to know God. Jesus attacked the system of religious merit at its root. God's love, he said, just is. You get it whether you deserve it or not.

Of course, the Christian Church has in many quarters and for a very long time taught this while creating a merit-based system that directly contradicts it. We love making people feel guilty and beholden to the church.

Systems are hard to change.

Not that I want to depress you or anything, but the church's experience teaches us that changing our political system will not happen quickly. Nor will changing the root causes of refugee crisis (whether Syria or anywhere else).

And yet, systemic change can happen. It has to be well-thought, intentional and done with the long view in mind, but it can - very slowly - happen.

So, love Trump. Love Sanders. Deplore the plight of the Syrian refugees. But look deeper into what is going on behind them. There's much work to do.