

Trump Card

A specter is haunting America - the specter of Trumpism. All the powers of old America have entered into a powerful alliance to exorcise this specter: GOP and Democrat, Lindsey Graham and Bernie Sanders, Fox News and NPR.

Seriously, have you noticed what's going on? Donald Trump is bringing in huge crowds to his rallies. He's rising in the primary polls. He's all over the news, drowning out the other fifteen candidates for the GOP presidential nomination. This is a man who has never held elective office, never had to work a day in his life that he didn't want to (he was born rich), and never had to worry when his businesses went bankrupt, which they have done more than once.

So, what's so appealing about Trump that he is surging in the polls? And why am I writing about a politician (if that's what he is) in a religion column? Well, first of all, remember that the column is called, "God, Life, and Everything," so I can write about whatever I want.

More importantly, this particular candidacy is not really about the policy differences between Republicans and Democrats. It's not about policy at all, as far as I can tell. Donald Trump has yet to articulate a coherent policy on anything more than, "Mexican immigrants are rapists and murderers." Oh, and those protesters in Ferguson? In an interview with Talk 1065 FM, he said, "You know, a lot of these gang members are illegal immigrants. They're gonna be gone. We're gonna get them out so fast, out of this country. So fast." Never mind the vast majority of the protesters are neither gang members nor immigrants.

But I digress. This isn't about policy because Donald Trump has changed his stance on many of his policies. Even Republican pundits are condemning his flip flopping on issues as diverse as taxes, universal health care, and abortion.

No, this candidacy isn't so much about policy. It's about style. What's more, in several interviews, supporters of Trump have said as much. One supporter in New Hampshire said, "He's not afraid to say what everybody's feeling and afraid to say. He doesn't have a filter." Another in Michigan said, "Even if he doesn't win, he's teaching other politicians to stop being politicians. He comes on strong. He could say it gently. But I think no one would listen."

What we can draw from this and many other similar interviews is that more people than you might think want someone who says whatever they want to whomever they want to say it, and damned by the consequences. He's so rich, he doesn't have to listen to anybody because he just doesn't care. They like that he's saying the things they often feel but are afraid to say.

In other words, he is what they want to be. Rich, abrasive, indifferent to anyone else, and completely upfront about it. Don't like women? Just say so - I'm too rich to face any consequences. Don't like blacks or latinos? Spit it out because there are a lot of folks who don't, either. And everyone else is too polite (read politically correct) to be abusive in return. Think everyone else is too stupid and that you're the smartest? Shout it from the rooftops! You are always right because you say so. This is what quite a few people want.

Now, I admit, it would be nice to have a politician who is not bought and paid for by corporate interests, one who feels free to speak his or her mind honestly. It is the rare politician who can cut the cord of big-time campaign contributions and still survive. But there are some things that trouble me about this mindset.

To be a politician, you have to practice the art of getting others to come along with you, to convince them of your position, or at least that the most practical thing to do is give you mostly what you are proposing. It is the art of compromise and persuasion. To successfully do these things, politeness is necessary. Others have learned over the ages that the rude boor will not get far. From the word polite comes the word political - and thus political correctness (which few can actually define)

But politeness is not the enemy simply because politicians exercise it to some degree. In the current climate, many have come to see politeness as dishonest, or at least no fun. Make fun of people! Belittle them, especially if they can't fight back! Make gross generalizations about them! That is the way to treat people if you don't want to live under the yoke of political correctness.

This reminds me of an elementary school class election in which one candidate says "Don't vote for Petey because he's a poo poo head. Oh, and if you do vote for him, you're a poo poo head, too. Oh, and I'm smarter than anyone else, too."

Now I'm all in favor of honesty and courage, but not of bullying and scapegoating. Yet we're already seeing some of this in the case of the Trump campaign. After a Boston rally recently in which Trump blamed Latino immigrants for many of the problems of the country, two supporters accosted a Latino homeless man sleeping on the street. They urinated on his face while he slept, then when he woke up, they beat him with a metal pole, landing him in the hospital with several broken bones.

When they were arrested, they told police, that the assault was justified because the man was Latino and homeless. "Donald Trump was right," he told the police, "all these illegals need to be deported." Donald Trump's response to this was that it would be a shame, but that "people who are following me are very passionate. They love this country and they want this country to be great again. They are passionate."

What troubles me about this specter of Donald Trump is not honest passion. It's not his new-found conservative values. What troubles me is the vulgar chord he has struck with so many. It is an attitude of "taking care of number one," of abusing anyone who gets in your way, and of simply not caring what anyone else thinks. Greed is good. Bullies are winners.

This troubles me not only as a human being but as a person of faith. In Christianity, caring for others is paramount. Treating others as you would have them treat you is central to our faith. Our entire law is summarized by loving God and loving our neighbor as ourself. There is nothing - nothing - about doing unto others before they can do unto you. There is nothing about keeping the poor down because they deserve what they get. There is nothing in our faith about shutting out foreigners the poor or the sick.

Several political analysts, right and left, have noted that the Donald Trump phenomenon is not to be underestimated. He has tapped into a real sense of frustration with voters who feel the old way is not working for them. And they like having someone who is yelling the things they would like to yell if they thought it would do any good.

So, take him seriously, just not for his as yet barely understood policies. Take him seriously for the nerve he has tapped into. It may be vulgar and abusive, but it speaks to a surprising number of people. Some say he will fade away by the end of November. But for now, the specter is still haunting America.