

Talking Turkey: Let's Look at the Christian Evangelical Aspect of Trumpism

By JIM SMITH

At a recent open house, I had an interesting exchange with a professed Christian woman and Trump supporter. I asked her if she was concerned about the anti-democratic and fascist actions and statements coming from the Trump wing of the Republican Party.

She replied that she was not concerned because ***“God is in control. It will all turn out fine.”***

Really? Is Jesus' hand on the wheel, and he'll keep us from crashing and dying? (Oops, I forgot — our afterlife with Jesus will be better, so why worry about dying?)

But let's say we ***don't*** want us, our country, or democracy to die. Can we really count on being saved by divine intervention? I don't think so, and my answer is, like hers, rooted in my Christian and spiritual training. It has to do with “free will.”

I was taught that ***God may forgive us for our sins, but he gave us free will to commit them.*** Jesus certainly didn't have his hand on the wheel when Hitler implemented the “final solution” of exterminating all Jews.

I believe, for example, that God charged us with stewardship of the our planet, but we are free to destroy it. And therefore I believe that those fighting to address pollution and climate change are the ones doing “God's work,” ***as he commanded us to do.***

When asked by the wife of Philadelphia's mayor at the time of the constitutional convention whether we have a republic or a monarchy, Benjamin Franklin famously replied, ***“A republic, if you can keep it.”*** The mayor's wife, Elizabeth Powell, shot back, “And why not keep it?” to which Franklin replied, ***“Because the people, on tasting the dish, are always disposed to eat more of it than does them good.”***

Social media have supercharged that “over-eating” because it allows and encourages our God-given free will to spread lies that destroy trust in government, blur or purposely distort facts, and, when combined with the current misinterpretation of the 2nd Amendment, embolden the kind of armed insurrection we saw on January 6th and likely will see again.

Karl Marx famously called religion ***“the opium of the people,”*** and there is no better manifestation of that dictum than the Christian right and “Christian nationalism.” ***As with opium, they can't be talked out of their addiction.***

To quote the headline of my May 28, 2020, “Talking Turkey” column, ***“Forgiveness is an important trait, and Trump supporters get to***

practice it a lot.” They have forgiven Trump, I wrote, for failing to criticize the Charlottesville demonstrators who chanted “Jews will not replace us.” They forgave him for the Access Hollywood tape and having his fixer pay off a porn star with whom he committed adultery. And that was just the beginning of his trespasses for which he never attended church to confess his sins — ***only losers would do that!*** — and seek God's forgiveness.

But it does no good to criticize the man. We need to focus on those who propagate his insanity, like Steve Bannon, or who, as elected officials, refuse to disavow Trump's Big Lie because they fear retribution if they acknowledge the facts as they know them.

We have countless Republican candidates running for election and re-election who are committed to the Big Lie, and committed to lying about the next election if they lose. I recall that shortly after the 2020 election, when Donald Trump began asserting the election was stolen, one astute TV commentator said that what he feared most was that Trump would run again in four years, lose again, and say again that the election was stolen.

We have always trusted our electoral system — until one president with a cult-like following said it could not be trusted. Enough people believed his lie that a statistically significant percentage of the population no longer trusts our electoral system. And those people are armed to the teeth with assault weapons! We “trusters” haven't seen the need for assault weapons, so we are at their mercy if they assert the next election was stolen and choose to stage a coup.

God may save the King, but only we can save ourselves. When the “other side” controls the courts (they already control the Supreme Court) and get elected to the positions responsible for certifying elections, we are all screwed. They'll call it God's will. Yes, because it will be man exercising the free will with which God endowed them.

[End of column as published in Denver Post]

Comments by my minister, who has a Doctorate in Theology:

For me, the assertion that “God will work it all out,” is the height of irresponsibility and spiritual immaturity. You are absolutely spot on when you write that God's great gift to humankind is our free will, our ability to be self-reflective and to choose creatively. These are

vital components of every person's spiritual nature. To apathetically claim that God will fix our messes is like a spoiled, egocentric child waiting for Mommy or Daddy to make everything okay. No good parent would put up with that for long but would instead seek to teach them that there are consequences for their chosen thoughts and actions, and that they are fully responsible for them and for embracing the lessons generated by the situation. Wise and appropriate action to remedy things indicates that the lesson is learned and that there has been genuine growth in the child.

It's been said that much of current fundamentalist Christianity is “kindergarten religion.” I so agree with this, not in a judgmental sense but because fundamentalism bases its theology on unexamined and unevolved notions. In *The War of Art*, Steven Pressfield writes of the difference between art (humanism) and fundamentalism, and it applies to what you're calling out. Here is a sampling of some of his assertions about fundamentalism: For the fundamentalist, humanity has fallen from a higher state, and that it is “the philosophy of the powerless, the conquered, the displaced and the dispossessed.” The fundamentalist “cannot find his way into the future, so he retreats into the past.” “The fundamentalist hates and fears women.” “When fundamentalism wins, the world enters a dark age.”

In contrast here's what Pressfield writes about the humanist: “The humanist believes that humankind, as individuals, is called upon to co-create the world with God. This is why he values human life so highly. In his view, things do progress, life does evolve; each individual has value, at least potentially, in advancing this cause. The fundamentalist cannot conceive of this. In his society, dissent is not just crime but apostasy; it is heresy, transgression against God himself.... It may be that the human race is not ready for freedom. The air of liberty may be too rarified for us to breathe.... The paradox seems to be, as Socrates demonstrated long ago, that the truly free individual is free only to the extent of his own self-mastery. While those who will not govern themselves are condemned to find masters to govern them.”

I would add that ***fundamentalists don't like to engage in deep and demanding questions. They like pat answers, black and white dogma that allows them to villainize their detractors and celebrate their bombastic spokespeople.*** They easily fall prey to hero worship to assuage their pervasive sense of inadequacy and insecurity. They whip up a false sense of power by loudly proclaiming the party line with little or no

evidence or reasoning. In many respects, in the human development spectrum, fundamentalists are like self-centered out-of-control teens. The problem is that there are so many who are irresponsible and steeped in a sense of entitlement rather than responsibility.

I could go on and on but will just add these thoughts for now.

It would thrill me if the preponderance of humanity could accept and live the declaration of II Timothy 1:7: ***“For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”***

Comments by retired Lutheran pastor Don Marxhausen:

In the best of Roman Catholicism and the best of Protestantism, God's word is done by our hands. For one wing of Lutheranism, that is one of their mottos: ***“God's Work, Our Hands.”***

The whole theology from John I is called “Incarnational Theology.” Briefly, ***God works through people. God was in Jesus. We follow Jesus. Therefore we care about the poor, those in prison, those who are sick, the weak, etc.***

We are to tend to the earth as it were a garden. We are to tend to our neighbors and strangers as we would want to be treated.

The great debate of the Holocaust was the absence of God. Or absence of God's people? Where were all those German Christians? I can't remember who said it, but ***Christianity is a nice religion but too bad so few have tried it.***

My cynicism is that the more churches you see in the south (giant Southern Baptist churches) the less the Christianity. They were the home of slavery, Jim Crow, Confederate flags, subjugation of women, etc.

Bottom line: God works through us. God is not a fairy godmother in the sky. My wife scrubbing pots for 14 years in a soup kitchen in Denver is God working. Salvation Army is God working. People trying to save the planet is God working. Totalitarianism or Fascism is ***NOT*** God working. It is some humans having power over others of their own self-gratification. (The argument here is does one fight evil with more evil as with violence or pacifism?)

My favorite text in the bible is John 13: Jesus washing the feet of the disciples and calling us to be servants of one another. This is also the best of Judaism and Islam.

Sitting by and hoping God is going to just do something is absurd from every angle. WE ARE GOD'S HANDS.