

5 Faith Facts About Lawrence Lessig Every Christian Voter Needs to Know

Harvard professor Lawrence Lessig made good on a promise to run for president after crowdfunding his \$1 million goal from more than 8,000 donors in the month leading up to Labor Day. Lessig wants to be America's first "referendum president," holding the top job only as long as it takes to pass his proposed Citizen Equality Act of 2017, which would reform the voting process, campaign finance rules and congressional representation. Achieving that, his veep-candidates include comedian Jon Stewart and astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson—would take over as commander-in-chief.

Lessig may be a long shot, but with the improbable Donald Trump still dominating polls, we're not ruling anyone out ... Here are five faith facts:

1. He was a choirboy.

As a kid, Lessig sang in his church choir in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and went on to attend the nonsectarian American Boychoir School in Princeton, New Jersey, where a choir director sexually abused him and other classmates. In 2006, Lessig defended before the New Jersey Supreme Court a fellow alum, succeeding in stripping some immunity from nonprofits that fail to prevent abuse. Lessig criticized the Catholic Church in 2008 for defending its own immunity, a move he said "will guarantee more kids are abused in the future," and accused the church of protecting its own self-interest during the clergy sex abuse scandal.

2. He lost his faith in England.

Lessig says he grew up a church-going “right-wing lunatic Republican” and entered Trinity College at the University of Cambridge as a “libertarian theist” in his early 20s. One year studying philosophy soon snowballed into three, and Lessig left England “no longer much of a theist” despite the school’s Christian name and heritage.

“He came back a different person,” Lessig’s sister Leslie told Wired in 2001. “His views of politics, religion, and his career had totally flipped.” Lessig has been vague on his personal faith in public interviews ever since.

3. He clerked for the Catholic Scalia.

After ditching his Republican roots and earning a law degree from Yale, Lessig clerked for Judge Richard Posner in Chicago and conservative Catholic Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia in Washington, D.C.

“I was the Christian, and this was the coliseum, and the lions were called in,” he said of being the liberal outlier among Scalia’s conservative clerks. “That experience had depressed me beyond measure. I had idolized the (Supreme) Court; it turns out humans work there,” he wrote.

Friends jokingly say Lessig resembles Oedipus, the mythical Greek king who killed his father, because of Lessig’s legal and ideological disagreements with Scalia. Despite these dramatic portrayals, Lessig left the job with “enormous respect” for Scalia and describes their ongoing relationship as “cordial.”

4. The man loves freedom.

Lessig is a founding father of the free culture movement, which opposes excessively strict copyright rules, on the grounds that they restrict creativity. He co-founded Creative Commons to promote the free sharing of cultural content online and has served on the boards of Free Software Foundation, Software Freedom Law Center and the Electronic Frontier Foundation.

“I am a libertarian in the context of free speech issues,” he said in 2006. “I believe there is something fundamentally wrong with regulation that can’t be justified. So I am motivated by a desire to defend that freedom, and by a deep skepticism about regulations that interfere with that freedom.”

5. His top veep picks span the faith spectrum.

Lessig may be mum on his own faith, but the 11 candidates he’s shortlisted for V.P. and eventual president have been more vocal about their beliefs.

First there are his five Democratic rivals for president: Hillary Clinton (Methodist), Bernie Sanders (secular Jew), Martin O’Malley (Catholic), Jim Webb (Christian), and will-he-won’t-he Joe Biden (Catholic). Among the others are Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren (Methodist), Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg (Jew), Stewart (secular Jew) and Tyson (agnostic).

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