

Is Donald Trump a Spiritual Danger?

It's one thing when the left-wing media bashes Donald Trump, seeing him as a menace. But how should we respond when 30 evangelicals write a book titled *The Spiritual Danger of Donald Trump: 30 Evangelical Christians on Justice, Truth and Moral Integrity*?

While working on my new book *Evangelicals at the Crossroads: Will We Pass the Trump Test?*, I familiarized myself with some of the most important, bestselling, anti-Trump books, including:

–Bob Woodward's *Fear: Trump in the White House*, which was a No. 1 *New York Times*' bestseller.

–Philip Rucker and Carol Leonnig's *A Very Stable Genius: Donald J. Trump's Testing of America*, which was also a No. 1 *New York Times*' bestseller.

–Michael Wolf's *Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, a No. 1 *New York Times*' bestseller as well.

–Joshua Green's *Devil's Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump and the Nationalist Uprising*, with an emphasis on the alleged alt-right connection, and yes, this too was a No. 1 *New York Times*' bestseller.

–David Frum's *Trumpocracy: The Corruption of the American Republic*, which was a *New York Times*' bestseller, although not No. 1.

–There was even *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump: 37 Psychiatrists and Mental Health Experts Assess a President*, yet another *New York Times*' bestseller.

I devoted a chapter to *Christianity Today*'s call for Trump to

be removed from office, written by senior editor Mark Galli, as well as chapters to two other major Christian calls for Trump's removal, including one from the Bonhoeffer Society.

So I am quite familiar with the arguments against Trump's fitness for office, including concerns raised by evangelical Christians.

For the first time, though, a whole book has been compiled by evangelical Christians raising grave concerns about Trump.

The authors include respected professors, psychologists, psychiatrists, philosophers, historians, songwriters, lawyers, theologians, missions leaders and pastors, many of them highly respected in their fields. And while some of the authors are known for their left-leaning positions, it would be an error to dismiss them all out of hand.

The book is divided into three parts:

- 1) On Trump.
- 2) On Evangelical Support of Trump.
- 3) On Theological, Historical and Constitutional Issues Regarding Trump.

Authors like professor Stephen Haynes, a Bonhoeffer expert, argue that the evangelical embrace of Trump is similar to the Nazi embrace of Hitler. Professor George Yancey makes clear that he understands evangelical concerns about Trump fighting for our religious freedoms. But he writes, "Trump cannot fix what troubles Christians, because at best, even if he is competent, he can only offer a political solution. The issue is the culture. What Trump can do is make the situation worse by turning the culture against us further."

Psychologist Chris Thurman argues that Trump is a pathological liar (and more). Napp Nazworth, former editor with the Christian Post, who holds a Ph.D. in political science, penned

a chapter titled, "Race-Baiter, Misogynist and Fool." He argued, "What makes Trump particularly dangerous for evangelicals was the manner in which he campaigned for our vote. He promised to be our protector and to make us successful by filling our pews. Trump's promises to evangelicals was similar to Satan's offer to Jesus."

Ronald Sider, an influential evangelical author who edited the collection, contributed an article critical of the president's handling of COVID-19. Other authors critiqued Trump's pride, the reproach he has brought to Christianity and his immigration policies as compared to Scripture, just to give a sampling.

All of which leads us back to a simple question: Is Donald Trump a spiritual danger?

The simple answer is: 1) only if we put our trust in him rather than in the Lord (see my recent article, "Christ, Not Trump, Is the Solid Rock on Which We Stand"); 2) only if we defend him when he is indefensible; 3) and only if we are known more as Trump supporters than as followers of Jesus.

Otherwise, I do not believe he is a spiritual danger, either to the nation or to the church.

After all, with the constant concerns we have heard about his alleged instability for the last four years, has he provoked an international war? Did his relocation of our Israel embassy to Jerusalem spark a massive response in the Muslim world? Did he start a nuclear battle with North Korea?

As for him keeping his promises to evangelicals, has any president in recent history been as loyal to this constituency? Has any president stood up more for our freedoms? Has any president kept the door open to us the way Trump has? Has any president dared to take the public, pro-life stands he has taken, including speaking at the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.? Has any president

appointed as many quality judges to the federal courts?

As for the predicted mental breakdowns, they have not happened yet. If you want to brand him “crazy,” then he’s as “crazy” today as the day he was elected.

As for him asserting dictatorial powers over the nation, he has done no such thing, even during the current pandemic.

To the extent we have looked to Trump as some kind of savior or defended him at every turn, we have tarnished our witness. That, to me, is undeniable and something we must correct.

On the other hand, evangelical leaders have not sided with Trump in a cultlike, blindly loyal manner. Just think of the backlash he received from leaders like Pat Robertson and Franklin Graham when he pulled our troops out of Syria, thereby endangering our Kurdish allies. The warning from some of these evangelical leaders was quite intense.

That’s why I am fully convinced that if Trump were to abandon the values of his evangelical base, we would not stand with him. We are not part of his cult.

To be sure, some of the authors in the *Spiritual Danger* book are more nuanced in their critiques of Trump, and I do believe there’s much we can learn from some of their writings. It would be a mistake to write all of them off or dismiss them entirely. Evangelical support for Trump is a complicated issue, which is the whole reason I wrote *Evangelicals at the Crossroads*.

But in the end, as long as we keep the cross before the flag and are even-handed in our evaluation of the president, showing our support when deserved and making known our displeasure when merited, he will not be a spiritual danger to us.

Trump certainly *could* be a spiritual danger, so I suggest we

take these warnings seriously. But Trump *need not be* a spiritual danger at all. On the contrary, he could continue to prove a strong ally, though a totally unlikely one.

And come November, should the choice be between a vote for Donald Trump, Joe Biden or an unelectable third-party candidate, for many of us that will be an easy choice to make.
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