

Is the Church Ready for Trump 2024?

Before you read another word, if you are a Trump hater, you should know that the purpose of this article is not to bash the former president. If you are a Trump lover, know that this article is not here to extol him.

Instead, the focus is on followers of Jesus, not Donald Trump.

Are we ready for another, potential bid for the White House by the former president? Can we remain uncompromised in our ethics and with our Christian witness intact, whether we are for him or against him? That's the question I'm posing here.

Do I believe that Trump, in the midst of his many positive accomplishments, had a profoundly negative affect on much of the church of America? I certainly do.

But I don't blame President Trump for that. That's on us, not on him.

After all, he was the man he had always been: a rough and tumble, often contentious, frequently nasty, quite narcissistic, wealthy New York businessman turned politician. And while many of us hoped he would change, he did not.

But to repeat, that's the man we voted for. He remained in character during his tenure as president and he has remained in character to this day.

The great surprise was that he did so many excellent things and kept his promises to his conservative Christian base. That's what stood out as exceptional. In four short years, despite constant opposition and harassment, he did a tremendous amount of good on both a national and international level.

But if we voted for him hoping he would change and he did not, we can't blame him for that. That's the risk we took or the calculation we made when voting. He simply continued to be who he had always been.

The fact that many of us exalted him as some kind of political savior is our fault.

The fact that we enjoyed watching him belittle and mock his political opponents, often in crude and cruel ways, is our fault.

The fact that we divided over him so passionately, some to the point of literally loathing him and others to the point of talking about him more than they talked about Jesus, is our fault.

The fact that he changed us more than we changed him, with some of our social media pages looking more like political attack sites rather than the pages of Jesus lovers, is our fault.

That is the man we voted for, and it's entirely our fault that many of us were negatively impacted by his negative traits.

To give an analogy, it's as if we elected a comedian famous for telling dirty jokes, hoping that once he was in office, he would stop telling jokes, especially dirty jokes. Not only did he not stop telling those jokes—again, that's who he was—but we started laughing at the dirty jokes. Worse still, we started repeating them ourselves.

Will we do any better with Donald Trump if he decides to run again?

In my first Trump-related book, published in 2018, I devoted a chapter to the subject, "Evangelicals and Donald Trump: A Match Made in Heaven or a Marriage with Hell?" The title of my second, Trump-related book, published in 2020, asked the

question: "Will We Pass the Trump Test?"

By the "Trump test" I meant, "Can we vote for Trump and still preserve our Christian witness?" And, "Can we remain united around Jesus even if we disagree about Trump?"

The answer to these two questions is a resounding no.

In many ways, by our carnal behavior, by our obsession with the elections, by our over-exalting of a man, by our savaging each other over our differences, by our following false prophecies, by our embracing of QAnon conspiracy theories, we deeply hurt our witness to a watching world, becoming better known as the Trump supporters than as the Jesus followers.

What's worse, many of our spiritual leaders were at the forefront of these divisions, railing on those who dared oppose Trump (or support Trump), and focusing more on winning the elections than on winning the lost.

But it's not as if this hit us blindly.

In the first book, I listed seven priorities for the church if we were to get things right when it came to our relationship to politics in general and Trump in particular. And I was hardly the only one sounding this alarm.

In the second book, I listed 10 more priorities for the church, all of them weighty and important. And, to say it again, I was hardly the only one saying these things.

Then, in the last chapter of my brand new book, "The Political Seduction of the Church: How Millions of American Christians Confused Politics with the Gospel," I recapped these 17 priorities, evaluating how we fared.

By my count, we failed on 15 out of the 17 items listed. Yes, 15 out of 17. That is what you call failing badly.

And note the very title of this book: "The Political *Seduction*

of the Church.” Seduction is normally covert rather than overt, looking so attractive before it stabs us in the back. That’s why it is so seductive.

In the case of Trump, there were so many good things he stood for, so many admirable things he championed, so much courage he displayed, so much of our burden that he shared, that it was all too easy for us to get seduced. (By seduced I don’t mean voting for him; I mean acting the way we did.)

In the process, we compromised our witness, put our trust in the political system and divided over the president rather than united around Jesus. Will we do better if Trump decides to run again?

This much is sure: If we don’t recognize our past errors, take stock of our own lives (and/or ministries) and make serious adjustments at the root level, we will not be ready for Trump 2024.

To repeat: that’s on us, not him. (And to be clear, the purpose of this article is not to advocate voting for him or against him if he decides to run. My purpose is to call the church to be the church in the midst of election fever.)

*No sooner had I written the last words of this article than I opened a new email sent to our ministry by a pastor who wrote: “We would be honored to have you speak regarding your new book as it pertains to what I have been trying to preach to this congregation for the past few years after I watched politics seduce and divide our people and even break up families.” This is why we must do better, in 2022, in 2024, and beyond. {eoa}

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