

The Hypocrisy of Those Accusing White Evangelicals of Hypocrisy

Since President Trump was elected in 2016 with the help of white evangelicals, we have been told that in voting for him, we compromised our ethics and can no longer be taken seriously. The latest alleged evidence for this is found in reports that black evangelicals are leaving white evangelical churches because of the latter's support of Trump. What are we to make of this?

The charge of white evangelical hypocrisy has been leveled most recently by Michael Gerson, writing in the *Atlantic's* April edition. The title and subtitle of his major, nearly 7,000 word article read: "The Last Temptation: How evangelicals, once culturally confident, became an anxious minority seeking political protection from the least traditionally religious president in living memory."

According to Gerson, who speaks positively of his own experience growing up as an evangelical Christian and who claims to be jealous of our tradition, "One of the most extraordinary things about our current politics—really, one of the most extraordinary developments of recent political history—is the loyal adherence of religious conservatives to Donald Trump. The president won four-fifths of the votes of white evangelical Christians. This was a higher level of support than either Ronald Reagan or George W. Bush, an outspoken evangelical himself, ever received."

He notes that, "Trump's background and beliefs could hardly be more incompatible with traditional Christian models of life and leadership. ... Trump's strength-worship and contempt for 'losers' smack more of Nietzsche than of Christ. *Blessed are*

the proud. Blessed are the ruthless. Blessed are the shameless. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after fame."

In spite of this, "According to Jerry Falwell Jr., evangelicals have 'found their dream president,' which says something about the current quality of evangelical dreams."

To be sure, I share some of Gerson's concerns, and I have raised them frequently myself. See [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for relevant examples.

But what Gerson seems to have missed—quite glaringly so—is that many of us who voted for Donald Trump did so because a vote for him was a vote against Hillary Clinton. In other words, we were not so much voting *for* Trump as *against* Hillary. Yet, in a 7,000-word article, the name Hillary Clinton does not occur once. How can this be?

I'm currently conducting polls on my Facebook and Twitter pages, asking if those who voted for Trump did so primarily because they were voting *for* him or *against* Hillary. Of the votes which have come in so far (about 2,000 on Facebook and 500 on Twitter), the Facebook vote is 56 percent for Trump and 44 percent against Hillary, while the Twitter vote is 40 percent for Trump and 60 percent against Hillary.

Now, go back to the last two elections and ask Democrats who voted for Barack Obama: Were you primarily voting *for* him or *against* his opponent. I'm confident the numbers would be overwhelmingly in the *for* Obama column, in stark contrast with the Trump numbers. This makes Gerson's omission of Hillary Clinton all the more surprising.

It also underscores a major blind spot in his article, namely, his failure to recognize how deeply many white evangelicals feel that our nation has lurched in a very dangerous direction, which calls for some extraordinary measures. That means that when we see a candidate (now, a president) who has

the potential of changing the makeup of the Supreme Court (and perhaps helping to overturn *Roe v. Wade*), who is genuinely concerned about our religious liberties, who is in the process of relocating our embassy to Jerusalem, we say: That man will have our support, despite his many flaws and failings. What is so hypocritical about that?

As Roman Catholic columnist Monica Showalter noted, "Evangelicals (and most Catholics—something [Gerson] forgets to notice) voted for Trump because not only does he *not hate* them, but he is willing to defend their values."

In the confused and troubled days in which we live, that goes a long way.

As David French, himself a Never-Trumper, pointed out, "While Gerson ably explains that Evangelicals feel as if they're under siege, he doesn't give an adequate explanation as to *why*. He communicates the reality that Evangelicals feel embattled without providing sufficient explanation for that belief, belittling their concerns as hysterical and self-pitying. The effect is to make Evangelicals appear irrational when, in fact, Evangelicals made their political choice in response to actual, ominous cultural and legal developments that jeopardized their religious liberty and threatened some of their most precious religious and cultural institutions."

I ask again, against this backdrop, what makes our vote for Trump an act of hypocrisy? And isn't it the height of hypocrisy to accuse us of betraying our values when Gerson, according to Showalter, voted for Hillary? Is this not a classic example of the pot calling the kettle black?

This brings us back to the question of black Christians allegedly leaving white evangelical churches because of the latter's support of Trump. According to African-American pastor Van Moody, "The exodus of blacks from white evangelical churches is real and understandable. People tend to gravitate

towards communities that they can identify with and that they believe identifies with them. Unfortunately, the political positions many white evangelical pastors and churches have taken have eroded that sense of identification for many black people.”

Now, I’m not aware of any major studies that back up the anecdotal evidence supplied by *The New York Times*, and to my knowledge, most white evangelical pastors do not get into politics that much from the pulpit.

But even if these reports are true, doesn’t the sword cut both ways? Haven’t black evangelicals consistently voted for pro-abortion, pro-LGBT candidates like Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton? Haven’t some African-American mega-churches even prayed by name for the election of candidates like Obama and Al Gore? Why then weren’t *they* called on the carpet for hypocrisy? Why aren’t *they* guilty of tarnishing the evangelical tradition?

Personally, I believe we all have blind spots and there’s more than enough hypocrisy to go around. And I think leaders like Van Moody and Franklin Graham would profit greatly by spending time with each other, if they haven’t already. Let us hear one another out, let us share our respective perspectives, and let us commit to being holistic in our ethics and concerns, with the help of God.

But I’m a little suspicious whenever left-leaning Christians (and/or the leftist secular media) raise charges against white evangelicals, people who just happen to be strong social conservatives.

Perhaps the bigger issue is not our alleged hypocrisy but rather our counter-cultural convictions? Could this be where the conflict really lies?