

Would Evangelicals Vote for a Practicing Pimp?

On Tuesday, the man known as America's most famous pimp, Dennis Hof, died suddenly and unexpectedly at the age of 72. *The Washington Post* described him as "a pimp who gained notoriety for an HBO series about his brothel business and who fashioned himself as a Donald Trump-style Republican candidate for the state legislature."

So, the late Mr. Hof was not only a practicing pimp but a proud one at that. He even became a reality TV star based on his house of prostitution, called the Moonlite Bunny Ranch. (For the record, I am not personally condemning him as the worst of sinners. He gives account to God.)

And, like Donald Trump, another reality TV star who was also known as a playboy, Hof decided to run for political office as a Republican.

But there's more to the parallels, and this is certainly the most surprising part of the comparison between Trump and Hof. Some evangelical Christians were backing his run for a seat in the local Assembly. As Reuters reported on June 22, "In age of Trump, evangelicals back self-styled top U.S. pimp." I'm not making this up.

The article, by Tim Reid, begins with this: "He styles himself as America's best-known pimp, a strip-club owner who runs multiple brothels and looks set to win a seat as a Republican in the Nevada legislature with the blessing of many conservative Christian voters."

According to Hof, "People will set aside for a moment their moral beliefs, their religious beliefs, to get somebody that is honest in office. Trump is the trailblazer; he is the Christopher Columbus of honest politics."

Still, though, it's one thing for the general public to vote for a man like Hof (whom, I do hope, had time to get right with God before leaving this world). It's another thing for an evangelical pastor like Victor Fuentes to support Hof.

When asked about this in June, he said he prayed about it and came to this conclusion: "We have politicians, they might speak good words, not sleep with prostitutes, be a good neighbor. But by their decisions, they have evil in their heart. Dennis Hof is not like that."

Critics of Trump, including some fine evangelical leaders, will surely point to this and say, "This is no surprise, given the ongoing evangelical support for Trump. It's just a little more dramatic, that's all. But in substance, it's the same thing."

After all, the argument would go, "We're not electing a pastor, we're electing a president." (In this case, we're not electing a reverend, we're electing a representative.)

"So," the evangelical Hof supporter would ask, "what does it matter if the man runs a brothel? What does it matter if the man is a pimp? What does it matter if his reality TV show glorified prostitution? What does it matter if he caused others to stumble sexually? He's an honest man, and he will get the job done. The stakes are too high to quibble over moral issues like this."

In truth, I do understand how Trump critics could make this comparison and point to this apparent loss of evangelical conviction. How far will evangelicals go to get their man (or woman) in office? To what extent will they claim that the ends justify the means? Is there no candidate that we would not support if that candidate pledged to defeat the agenda of the radical left?

These are fair questions, and I myself have asked them. (Back in June, the Reuters article got me asking this question

afresh.)

And again, at the risk of being repetitive, these were some of the reasons I opposed Donald Trump in the primaries. (It was a striking experience for me to read out loud some of my old warnings, written during the primaries, while doing the audio narration for my new Trump book. They are reprinted, without change, as part of a three-year journey from the primaries until today, also explaining how I came to support him.)

But here's the big difference between Donald Trump and the late Dennis Hof.

Trump was not actively and openly building strip clubs while running for president. He was not actively and openly involved in adulterous affairs. And he welcomed the voice of evangelicals from early in his campaign, asking them to speak into his life. (He continues to ask for that today, although he's obviously a work in progress. Think "Horseface" for the latest example.)

Had Trump been the reality TV star of *Cathouse* (the name of the HBO, Hof brothel show) rather than *The Apprentice*, and had he been a practicing pimp displaying his naked prostitutes for the world to see (as opposed to being a former casino owner), I believe the percentage of evangelicals voting for him would have been minimal. We probably would have sat out the election and perhaps really pursued a breakaway third party for the future. (Let's not forget that Christian conservatives in Nevada have long decried the state's legalized prostitution, so factor that in as well.)

In the end, this is simply speculation. But what is certain is that we must check ourselves regularly to be sure that we are not compromising our convictions for the sake of political and social gain. To do so is spiritual and moral suicide. (Yes, this is a theme of my new book, which, by the way, is not an anti-Trump book.)

For me, with complete personal integrity, I can say I voted for Donald Trump, and I don't regret it. And, with that same integrity, I can differ with him publicly, with due respect. But I could not have done the same with Dennis Hof, unless he made a change in his lifestyle and profession.

Ultimately, we all must draw the line somewhere.

That's why I respect those Christian conservatives who could not vote for President Trump and who still struggle with the idea of voting for him today. At the same time, I would encourage them to look again and see if it's time to reevaluate.