

Trump appeals to fundamentalists and fascists

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President Donald Trump's appearance at the ultra-right Values Voter Summit on Friday was a further step in his effort to create a fascistic movement outside existing political structures, directed against both the Republican and Democratic establishments.

It was Trump's third appearance at the annual Washington assembly of Christian fundamentalist extremists, hosted by Tony Perkins and his Family Research Council. In 2015 and 2016, Trump appeared as a candidate for the Republican nomination and then as the nominee. In 2017, he became the first sitting president to address the group, whose views are so extreme that even George W. Bush stayed away and sent surrogates.

Trump does not read the Bible (or any other book) and his three marriages and penchant for vulgar boasting of his sexual exploits would under other circumstances make him *persona non grata* to the censorious moralizers of the Family Research Council and its co-thinkers. He would be an incongruous, even ludicrous, figure at a convention of Christian fundamentalists if his purpose were not so reactionary and dangerous.

White House speechwriters gave him prepared remarks that flattered the ultra-right Christian audience and sought to mobilize them behind a thoroughly secular agenda of tax cuts for the wealthy, elimination of regulations on business, destruction of social benefits, and imperialist war.

Trump spat on the genuine traditions of freedom of religion—and from religion—that are bound up with the liberating example of the American Revolution, in favor of a completely bogus presentation of the Founding Fathers as religious zealots, moral prudes and national chauvinists.

"America is a nation of believers," he declared,

although a recent Pew survey found that atheists and the non-religious are the fastest growing section of the population, particularly among the younger generation.

The president added later, "This is America's heritage, a country that never forgets that we are all—all, every one of us—made by the same God in Heaven." Actually, the First Amendment to the US Constitution bars the establishment of any religion, making the government officially neutral on the question of the existence of a creator, let alone the specific creation myths postulated by the various strains of Christianity.

Trump paid tribute to "religious liberty," which is interpreted by the fundamentalists not as freedom to worship as one chooses, but as freedom to impose one's religious precepts on everyone else in the form of discrimination against gays, lesbians and others whose sexual orientation or family structure is deemed in violation of Biblical injunctions. Those in attendance at the gathering treat restrictions on such forms of discrimination as attacks on their religious faith.

The heart of Trump's speech was to boast that his administration was turning back the clock on the social progress made since the 1950s—greater sexual freedom, equal rights for women, the erosion of bigotry based on race, ethnicity, language or sexual orientation. "The American Founders invoked our Creator four times in the Declaration of Independence—four times," he said. "How times have changed. But you know what, now they're changing back again. Just remember that." The audience gave him a standing ovation.

Trump boasted of keeping his election campaign promises to the fundamentalist groups, mainly through the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch to replace the arch-reactionary Justice Antonin Scalia, as well as executive orders undermining abortion rights and access to contraception for women.

He also praised himself for promoting an atmosphere of public religiosity through such trivialities as saying “Merry Christmas” instead of “Happy Holidays.” He described such actions as “stopping cold the attacks on Judeo-Christian values,” although the “Judeo” part is a sham. Trump has close associations with anti-Semites like his former chief political counselor, Stephen Bannon, now returned to his position as executive chairman of Breitbart News.

Trump was silent about his own encouragement of the white supremacists who rioted in Charlottesville, Virginia two months ago, where they mobilized in defense of Confederate war monuments. After the neo-Nazis marched with torches chanting “Jews will not replace us,” and killed an anti-fascist protester, Trump declared that there were “many fine people” in the ranks of the racists.

On Saturday, Bannon followed Trump to the speaker’s podium at the Values Voter Summit, where his contribution to Christian “values” was a thinly veiled call for the removal—by any means necessary—of Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. He described McConnell as the Julius Caesar of Capitol Hill, and said the Senate Republicans were in turmoil because “They’re just looking to find out who is going to be Brutus to your Julius Caesar.”

A public speaker who made such a comparison in relation to President Trump would be visited by the Secret Service and probably locked up. Evidently suggesting that the Senate majority leader should be done in is not taken quite so seriously. Nor did the good Christians at the Values Voter Summit object to the suggestion, which was hardly of the “turn the other cheek” persuasion.

Bannon also denounced another Republican senator, Bob Corker of Tennessee, for suggesting that Trump is unfit for office and could lead the country into World War III. “Bob Corker has trashed the commander in chief of our armed forces while we have young men and women in harm’s way, right?” Bannon declared, claiming that this was “the first time in the history of our republic” that a senator has “mocked and ridiculed a commander in chief when we have kids in the field.”

The former White House political adviser is apparently ignorant of the public attacks on Truman, Johnson, Nixon, George W. Bush and Obama, limiting this to modern history. These presidents were all

criticized and denounced, deservedly so, while directing foreign military interventions.

Bannon suggested that any Republican senator who did not publicly condemn Corker’s comments could face a primary challenge. “Right now it’s a season of war against the GOP establishment,” he told the fundamentalist conference.

There is an apparent division of labor between Trump and his former chief political aide, who left the White House less than two months ago. Bannon is openly corralling racist, neo-fascist and Christian fundamentalist groups behind a program of extreme nationalism and militarism, threatening to run candidates against “mainstream” Republican right-wingers, even if that damages the party’s prospects for maintaining control of Congress in the 2018 elections.

While Bannon openly targets McConnell, Trump combines occasional vilification, usually by Twitter, with public flattery, as on Monday after a closed-door luncheon meeting, when the two appeared side-by-side on the steps of the White House.



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