

Politics and Religion We'd Be Better Off Without

Perhaps the most scathing words in the New Testament Gospels are directed toward those identified as “hypocrites” – in this case, people of religious and/or legal authority who exempt themselves from their prescriptions for the lives of other.

Whether or not Jesus himself railed against hypocrisy, some of his followers certainly did. Their targets were the “scribes and Pharisees,” among the most important custodians and interpreters of the religious laws and traditions of the people. Apparently they did not always practice what they preached.

It is commonplace in public life that people who commit unseemly acts, whether moral indiscretions or violations of public trust, typically get themselves in big trouble less for the actions themselves than for lying about what they have done and trying to cover it up. They dig themselves into deeper holes whenever they try to maintain the pretense that they are innocent. Bad enough that they may have done wrong, even worse that they have pretended to be above reproach. This is a sort of hypocrisy after the fact.

Nobody likes a hypocrite. Nobody wants to be told how to live by some religious leader, or governed by some public official, who has not held him/herself to the same standard.

In this intensely political season, hypocrisy abounds! Think about who might govern us, and ask yourself: 1) has the candidate admitted to obvious mistakes? 2) does the candidate's own life exemplify the values and policies he/she advocates? 3) is the candidate's campaign consistent with his/her stated values?

Hypocrisies I have noted: 1) candidates who promote military action but have never rendered military service and have maneuvered to exempt their own children from combat; 2) candidates who celebrate public education but send their own children to private schools; 3) candidates who tout campaign finance reform but continue to solicit big donor money; 4) candidates who talk equality, fairness, and justice, while doing business as usual, mistreating employees, or exploiting legal loopholes in labor, tax, and commerce laws.

Worst of all: candidates who profess to be Christian, who demonize enemies, shun neighbors, viciously attack opponents, prefer the clenched fist to the open hand, and voice support for families and working people while pushing tax breaks for the wealthy, regressive tax policies, and gutting of social services and support systems that sustain those on the margins – all while presenting a self-righteous posture of moral superiority and exclusion of the other.

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