

## I WAS WRONG

Ken Olson

Emerson wrote that “In order to hit the mark, you must aim above it.” He urged us, “Hitch your wagon to a star.” He also said that “The mind of a country taught to aim at low objects eats upon itself,” referring to self-destructive behavior that will come back to bite us.

Trump won the election. I was wrong. I thought he would lose, because I thought that most Americans were better than this. I thought most people would reject a campaign aimed far beneath us, one consisting of fire-hosing blatant lies, a frontal assault on the very idea of Truth, as well as stoking hate, fear and division. I thought most people would recoil from such low-minded appeals. But I was mistaken. It’s now clear that most of Trump voters must actually like all of this. --About the saddest thing that anyone who loves both Truth and Country could say.

Circumstances reveal our disposition, high or low. It has been said that character is what you are when no one is looking. One of those solitary times is in the voting booth, where, one by one, millions voted against common decency and the common good.

What did they vote for? For an election-denier who fomented an insurrection, whose priority is to undermine our institutions and our trust in one another. For placating an angry billionaire who thinks rules don’t apply to him, who, time and again, has demonstrated profound contempt for the free press, the legal system, the Constitution, and our military.

Of his strongman friend, he says that “Putin can do whatever the hell he wants in Ukraine.” Cutting aid may lead to the horrific deaths there of tens of thousands of men, women and children, and that blood would be on every Trump ballot cast. But it would not bother him: such are the ways of amoral sociopaths and malignant narcissists. (Both terms absolutely fit; you can look it up.)

Thus, I’ve been wrong, not just about many who voted for Trump all across the country, but even about some of those in our own “community,” whom I thought I knew.

So, to those people reading this: when you see me on the street, flag me down and tell me just how it is that you came to believe that “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” is irrelevant to politics and to the rule of law. I want to know why the deluge of thousands of lies by Trump and his accomplices are acceptable to you. Is it “the ends justify the means” --which is what every dictator, bank robber and murderer says, too.

And tell me whether you like his unholy use of the holy book --the Grifter In Chief selling “Trump Bibles,” something that would send every one of the nation’s Founders spinning in their proverbial graves. Give me reasons for honoring with your sacred vote his utterly dishonorable and corrosive character --the polar opposite of the Christian one he claims-- because I can’t imagine a single one.

So, let’s remind ourselves of the actual teachings of Christ, which are truly radical, in the original sense of the word, in that they go to the “root” of things. They are thoroughly counter-cultural, going completely against the current of “doing what comes naturally.” So, how about personal Enemies? “Hit them back twice as hard?” No. Rather, Pray for them and turn the other

cheek. Wrongdoers? Retribution? Instead, Forgive them. Strangers? Welcome them. The Hungry, the Naked? Feed and shelter them. Love your neighbor as yourself and do unto all others as you would have them do unto you.

Radical stuff, indeed, and challenging. Does that sound like the Faith you know? If so, good. But Trump and enablers have simply hijacked the name of religion to paper-over his mean, vile, and heartless inner self before the election, because Lies Work. If that's what you like, then stop pretending otherwise.

As President, Trump will have a thick new policy playbook called Project 2025, a frightening document that almost none of those who voted for him have read. With this, and with his toddler tantrum-type emotions, he will be "in charge," surrounded only by applauding hand-picked bootlickers. In a complex, rapidly changing world, what could possibly go wrong? Think of a car going at high speed down a very steep and winding road on a dark rainy night and driven by a five-year-old child. His supporters have placed signs along the way that are all marked "Progress."

This election will have no end of extremely grievous consequences for our nation. We'll all find out, won't we? Buckle up, America.

Ken Olson lives in Lewistown. He has a B.A. in Philosophy and a four-year M.Div. in Theology. He is the author of *Lens to the Natural World: Reflections on Dinosaurs, Galaxies, and God*.