

Daily Meditation 08-05-24

Joe Biden's Vatican II Catholicism vs. JD Vance's Other Catholicism

Good morning.

This morning, I am writing an essay, and I'll be talking about some of it in this video, comparing President Biden's version of Catholicism, and also that of Nancy Pelosi and of Tim Ryan, three prominent politicians of our time who are Catholic, Roman Catholic — to that of JD Vance, who was a convert to Catholicism just five years ago. And Biden and Pelosi and Tim Ryan have been practicing their faith for their lifetimes.

And of course, they find themselves in very different political ground than Mr. Vance. That doesn't mean there aren't Catholic Republicans besides Vance. But clearly these three particular politicians try to live out their faith in a critical fashion.

And I think that the news of the last month has put President Biden in a very good light for a lot of people, as he voluntarily left his position of power, to turn it over to a younger generation, and to the woman (and woman of color) whom he chose several years ago to be his vice-presidential running mate.

Now, who are some of the Catholics that Mr. Vance hangs out with? Well, there's an interesting article in *The Guardian* recently, entitled “Kevin Roberts, Architect of Project 2025.” He has close ties to radical Catholic group Opus Dei. And of course, the Project 2025 is extremely radical and severe — and a rejection, really, of democracy in favor of a more authoritarian, very authoritarian, approach to government.

And of course, it fits very nicely with the Supreme Court's recent decision, that it's okay for presidents to do whatever they want they in their so-called “official capacity,” and they cannot be subject to the law, not only during their presidency, but even afterwards.

A really shocking version of the Constitution, which every constitutional lawyer I've heard speak, is appalled about. And of course, President Biden himself recently proposed that there be a constitutional amendment to freeze and deep-six it. That's a radical idea. Frankly, I don't think that's very practical, given how politics are in America. It would take forever to get that kind of majority votes for a constitutional amendment.

I'm surprised how timid Biden is, since he is leaving office. He could propose to simply expand the Supreme Court from nine to thirteen judges — which makes all the sense in the world, since there are thirteen district courts in America. And how that rule has evolved over the years, and

the number of Court members, has been altered six or seven times in our history. Why not now? Why not before he leaves office, even?

But this article in *The Guardian* makes this point:

“Like Project 2025, Opus Dei at its core is a reactionary stand against the progressive drift of society,” according to an author who's writing a book on Opus Dei. “For decades now, the organization has thrown its resources of penetrating Washington's political and legal elite, and finally seems to have succeeded through its close association with men like Kevin Roberts and Leonardo Leo.”

Of course, most of them are very far right-wing Catholics, and Leo has been responsible for all of the six super-conservative Supreme Court judges. And Kevin Roberts is the architect of Project 2025. So they're both very much in that camp of what I would call neo-fascist Catholicism, and so is Mr. Vance.

Vance has attended and spoken at the Napa gathering, which is a gathering of very rich and wealthy and influential right-wing Catholics that meets in Napa, just very near my county here in Northern California, every year. And people like Cardinal Burke have spoken there, and Steve Bannon. That's the kind of Catholic company that Vance has hung out with, even though he's been Catholic for only five years. So it's pretty clear what camp he comes from.

Now recently, an article was published in the *New Yorker*, entitled “JD Vance's Radical Religion: How might the Republican vice president nominee's conversion to conservative Catholicism influence his political world view?”

So this article takes quite a strong look at that religious dimension to Vance's philosophy. And he points out that, “should Vance become the vice president, Justices Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, Brett Kavanaugh, and Amy Coney Barrett, all conservative Catholics, would have a Catholic ally of like mind in the executive branch.” As he points out, “President Biden's Catholicism leans progressive. It is more devotional than it is doctrinal.”

And this is kind of how he summarizes the relationship of Vance and Trump's ideology: “For now, Vance's presence on the ticket represents the union of Trumpism and a movement that sees Catholicism as the embodiment of tradition, stability, and a top-down ordering of society, which would be enshrined to regime change.” So I think we have a pretty direct statement and understanding of how Vance's position, were he made a Vice President, would be one that could be very influential.

And again, it is the very powerful presence of Opus Dei, in Washington DC specifically, that has dictated a lot of the decisions of SCOTUS in our last recent years. It's interesting to me that this author leaves John Roberts, the Chief Justice, out of his list of right-wing Christians on the Supreme Court. But in fact, Roberts went along totally with this recent decision of the immunity of presidents. And obviously he's done nothing to stop the scandals of billionaire patrons buying Supreme Court Justices with secret gifts, and all the rest. They've put out a document that has absolutely no teeth to it, so that adds up to nothing, and nothing has changed in that regard.

So one political scientist from Pepperdine University, writing in *Commonweal* in 2020, said that the Integralist movement in Catholicism, which is a very far right-wing movement, “seeks to subordinate temporal power to spiritual power — more specifically, the modern state to the Catholic Church.” And one of the theses of this movement is that religion, or church and state should not be separated.

So clearly, this Catholicism, this right-wing Catholicism, is a minority within Catholicism. But it is very well-endowed financially, and it has a lot of power in the media, in politics, in the Supreme Court, in Washington, DC itself. So there are clouds, dark clouds I think, on the horizon of the influence, the excessive influence, of a minority Catholicism, that is, in fact, very often in contradiction to Pope Francis's view of the world and teachings, such as *Laudato Si'*, in supporting Mother Earth and the environment.

So all this adds up to a very interesting consideration, as we move into the new presidential election.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.