

Freedom's View

A Commentary on Government from Atop the Capitol

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IMPEACHMENT? WTF!

TRUMP LEAVES TOWN. FIRST MEETING OF W.T.F. IS CONVENED

May 21, 2017

WASHINGTON, DC ~ *Armed Freedom*

WTF: The Week Too Full drew to its oppressively hot and humid close (93° with nearly matching humidity) in this politically and climatically swampier-than-ever town. There have been so many awe-full political revelations this past week that you could be forgiven for thinking that some doom-saying prophecy of the Apocalypse of St. John was coming to pass. Of course, there *are* those Christians who take that colorful book quite literally. For them, its prophecies are about to be realized each and every day. (Whether or not *they* should be for-given for the interpretive violence they do to the Good Book is a topic for another day, and no doubt for a commentator other than myself.) But certainly *you* could be forgiven.

WTF: What Tremendous Fortune! The beginning of the end of the Trump presidency might be taking place before our eyes. There are partisan sorts who wax gleeful at the thought. I'm not one of them, although the sooner the President moves on and is out of the nation's governance, the better. Freedom and our Republic will fare far better once he has left.

When events stun me into incredulity, I find it essential not to be alone, but

in the company of those whose views are such that I always learn something, and whose hearts are such that, in their presence, I feel hopeful.

So yesterday I once again contacted Father Newel Post and Brother Levo Cetirizini and we agreed it was time to convene the first meeting of our small think tank: Watchers of Trumpian Follies (WTF). We are disparate sorts but a Venn diagram would show a certain trinitarian type of overlap, I suppose. As you might recall (*see Editions 8 and 12*), Father Post is an Anglican clergyman attached to the National Cathedral and Brother Levo Cetirizini is a gifted pastoral Franciscan who stays at the Franciscan Monastery when he's in town. Since the gospel they articulate and live out is all about an inner and relational freedom, the three of us have a natural thematic affinity.

We've been watching Trump's follies for what seems like an eternity now. We're watchers in the sense of being "sentinels" posted on the walls, ready to call out in *alarm* or *joy*. If this is, indeed, the beginning of the end for Trump's presidency, we will have to cry out in *both* those ways. Hence this post: to tell you why we are feeling substantial joy *and* a foreboding sense of great danger. WTF: Watching Trump Fail is *just* that sort of mixed bag.



WTF: When Three Friends gather to share their innermost truths – be those truths hopeful or dreadful – you can be sure there is a Fourth One present.¹ At least that's what my two ordained friends maintain and I'm inclined to agree. Surely it was something other than the result of a few glasses of Christian Brothers wine (for them) and a couple of tankards of Samuel Adams Boston Lager² for me.

Father Newel led off our discussion with his well-informed take on the President's psychology. "From what I can tell, and as others have argued, the President is an "infant" – consumed by his drives and desires, animated by his fight-or-flight *amygdala*, showing little or no mature prefrontal cortical activity with which to maintain a sense of propriety, defer gratification, and make accurate judgments about consequences. His is a textbook example of a narcissistic character disorder: grandiose, self-involved, manipulative of others for

CHARACTER CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

¹ Matthew 18:20

² Of course. What else?

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his own selfish ends, lacking in empathy, and demanding that others *always* agree with him.”

Brother Levo nodded in agreement. “Father Newel,” I interjected, “I remember our conversations about why some folks need an inordinate amount of adulation from others. As I recall, you said that if people didn’t get enough love *just for who they are* early on in life, they develop a terrible sense of emptiness: that they simply aren’t ‘enough.’ And you said some can engage in all sorts of twisted contortions, trying to fill up a bottomless hollow leg of need.’ Are the President’s character traits you’ve been describing examples of those ‘contortions?’”

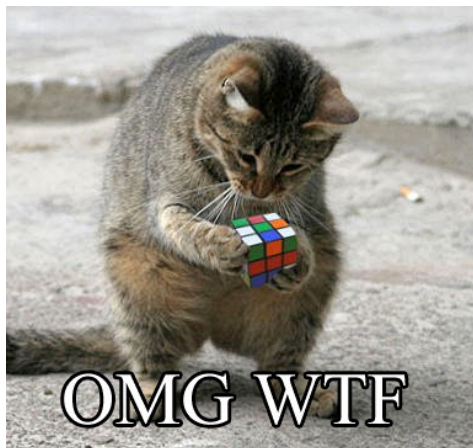
Father Newel smiled warmly at me which, I must admit, made me stand a foot or two taller – speaking of filling up a hollowness.

“Yes, Freedom, I think you’ve got it. The tragedy of people like the President is that the very things they do to fill themselves up drive away those that might truly love them – and that love is what’s missing in their lives. It’s a vicious cycle.

“I think that’s why our President surrounds himself mainly with family members and just a few other people who swear loyalty to him. I believe he sees the world as dog-eat-dog; that the only solution is to prevail at all costs, in short, to dominate others and the situation.

“The President can’t afford to think he’s failed, since then he’d have to admit he wasn’t ‘enough.’ *That’s his psychological third rail.* He uses blame, conspiracy theories, and self-pity to protect himself from that, and to keep the adulation machine going.

“What is keeping me up at night, dear friends, is the thought of his being impeached, which I consider more likely than his being removed by using the 25th amendment.



“It was Machiavelli who said that ‘the injury that is to be done to a man ought to be of such a kind that one does not stand in fear of revenge.’ Ralph Waldo Emerson more pithily rendered it, ‘When you strike at a king, you must kill him.’ Fortunately, impeachment is not violent.

Unfortunately, though, it is deliberately *a slow process*. If it happens, it will give Mr. Trump ample time for another WTF: a Wicked Tweet Fusillade wherein he threatens people, industries, institutions and reputations. That would be the best-case scenario. Don’t forget that he has immense power, and that, to

date, few people in his administration and Congress will say ‘no’ to him, thereby perhaps moderating his impulses. It is in the nature of people wired like Trump to throw huge temper tantrums when they don’t get their own way. The greater the ‘no,’ the greater the tantrum. His Wicked Tweet Fusillade might incite his base to use violence against Mr. Trump’s supposed enemies. Civil unrest could become widespread. That’s the nightmare ending I fear.”

We unanimously agreed that Father Newel’s vision needed to have its terrifying edges rounded off by the questionable mercy of another drink. After we each poured another, Brother Levo began.

“I agree completely with Newel’s analysis. His frightening description of Trump’s denouement may very well come to pass. Truthfully, it is far more likely than the alternative scenario I want to put forth. If you’re going to place your bets, consider Newel’s scenario a probable winner.

“That said, I think it would be useful to indulge in a form of “fake news” and “alternative facts.” In fact, good friends, just for today I want to rescue those phrases and give them more respectable meanings.”

“What on earth are you saying, Brother Levo? Is this what happens to you when you’re on your third glass of wine, or have you been listening to Kellyanne Conway?” I asked with maybe too much snark.

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NEW FANGLED GOD-TALK. WTF!

BROTHER LEVO CONTINUED FROM **PAGE 2**

“That’s rich, Freedom!” exclaimed Levo. “Actually, I want to go where angels fear to tread and present another WTF: a Wonderful Therapeutic Finale. Again, this may be a riskier option on which to bet the farm, because Newel has described Trump’s psychological realities very well. I want to develop a more imaginative, theological perspective. Actually, I’m being redundant because *all* theological thinking must use the imagination and metaphor.

“From the absolutely valid and indispensable perspective of science *and* accurate news reporting – both of which depend upon multiple sources agreeing upon empirically based observations - what I’m going to suggest are indeed Kellyanne-ish ‘alternative facts.’

“Taken together, these “AFs” weave into “Fake News” that may, however, be quite true in another frame of reference. Ours is, after all, the quantum era. In physics, we no longer insist on a Newtonian sort of “certainty” and have come to appreciate just how paradoxical our world is. For example, the ordinary sunlight coming through our windows is both a particle and a wave: photons and various wavelengths. Like the song says,

You'd never think they go together
But they certainly do,
The combination of English Muffins
And Irish Stew.

“In progressive theology, we realize that when it comes to transcendence, we can only point with metaphors and humility about what we think we ‘know.’ Just as quantum physics embraces Heisenberg’s ‘uncertainty principle,’ so theology is once again appreciating the fundamental Mystery that suffuses the universe: a Mystery that *grows larger* the more we know.

“When we think of God, many of us no longer think of a celestial Being-God but more as a Song that plays everywhere throughout the universe, always. Furthermore, we discover that this Song also echoes in our deepest selves. That Song is also *who we are*. If we want to find God, we must find ourselves.

“So we no longer think of God as a Being out there that we expect to do certain things for us. Rather, if this incomprehensible God is the Song outside and inside of us, the issue then is whether and how we will enter the dance. The Song is about love. Those who enter the dance inevitably find themselves caring both about the “enemy” *and also* about social justice for *all* people everywhere.

“All this talk of mine³ about God is necessary because, if we change our metaphors for God, we change our behaviors and our very being. If we are rooted in the Song, the Song changes us and how we are in the world. If we are dancing to the Song, surprising, even miraculous-seeming things can happen to us and through us.

³ See *Rethinking Our Story: Can We Still Be Christian in the Quantum Era?*, Doug Hammack, Resource Publications, 2014. An excellent book for seekers.

“Now let me return to Mr. Trump. As we know, he is on his first foreign road trip: an ambitious one that will take him to the cities that in many ways “anchor” the three Abrahamic faiths. Today he gave a speech in Riyadh which, while short on specifics, was a real turn-around from his previous anti-Muslim, divisive and hateful rhetoric. Next, he’ll go to Jerusalem. The last of the three cities is Vatican City where he’ll meet with Pope Francis. And we know that Francis has been openly critical of Trump, even saying he wasn’t much of a Christian.



“So now we come to the ‘what-if’s.’ Francis is an excellent dancer to the Song. He gets it and allows it to get him! Therefore, unexpected possibilities may open up. What if Francis were to tell Trump of *the power* of acknowledging error and apologizing. He could cite the Vatican’s owning up to sowing the seeds of anti-Semitism for so long, how it held the Jews guilty of being ‘Christ-killers’ and how it made heartfelt apologies for that.

“What if Francis told The Donald that who he *really* is is not the real estate

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ON THE ROAD. AGAIN? WTF!

ON THE ROAD CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

mogul, the billionaire, the President, but – *quite apart from any of these accomplishments* – very much enough! What if he showed Trump that the way to real personal freedom and power is to realize that truth, and therefore to begin to empty himself of his bravado, grandiosity, and the need to dominate. He could afford to go without it, to be flawed, and to acknowledge it.

“What if, like Saul on the road to Damascus, Trump met the Pope and experienced something of a soul-discombobulating confrontation? To be sure, Francis would have to balance confrontation and reassurance. I’m sure he couldn’t figure out by himself how to do it. But the Song is playing inside of him. He knows that. He dances to it. If it happened at all, it would come as ‘gift’ . . . a new step initiated by his dance Partner.

“The ‘miracle’ would be that Trump, whose ‘earthly’ father never did nor could bless him, might experience that blessing from the ‘Holy’ Father. This would be healing, for *the absence of that loving blessing is the root of Trump’s dysfunction and pain. Unless the unloved child in Trump is blessed, he cannot heal.* What if Francis could open up just a small, hopeful crack in Trump’s armor by singing to him the Song?

“When I hear myself say this, I have to fight my own cynicism. But I know that I indulge my cynicism because it is more comfortable than my risking a hopefulness which may again be disappointed. But still, I think we need to *simultaneously* anticipate Newel’s prediction *and* lean into some sort of hopefulness such as I’ve tried to present.

“Again, surely, what I’ve said is ridiculous. *Great!* The world needs more hopeful fools. Impossible? Maybe. But none of us thought Trump would become President. *No one* could have predicted all that has happened in his first 120 days. We all know you simply can’t make up the stuff that’s been happening. So, who’s to say this can’t happen, too?

“And if it doesn’t? Well then, WTF?”

After a longish pause, Father Newel and I looked at one another, nodded our agreement and, in unison, said, “WTF, indeed!”

The day was getting late, so we wished one another well and promised to continue our Watching the Trumpian Follies . . . but this time with an ear peeled for “the clear yet far-off song that hails a new creation.”

"How Can I Keep From Singing?"

Robert Wadsworth Lowry, 1968
Last two stanzas by Doris Plenn, 1950

My life goes on in endless song
Above earth's lamentations,
I hear the real, though far-off hymn
That hails a new creation.

Through all the tumult and the strife
I hear it's music ringing,
It sounds an echo in my soul.
How can I keep from singing?

While though the tempest loudly roars,
I hear the truth, it liveth.
And though the darkness 'round me close,
Songs in the night it giveth.

No storm can shake my inmost calm,
While to that rock I'm clinging.
Since love is lord of heaven and earth
How can I keep from singing?

When tyrants tremble in their fear
And hear their death knell ringing,
When friends rejoice both far and near
How can I keep from singing?

In prison cell and dungeon vile
Our thoughts to them are winging,
When friends by shame are undefiled
How can I keep from singing?

