

# Editorial: Power is a devilish temptation

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Last week, Donald Trump said a couple of things that raised eyebrows among some Christians. At least one of the things he said must not be ignored, even if the news cycle and campaign trail have moved on.

Even if Joe Biden or any other politician or person said what Trump said, we should be just as concerned. However, it wasn't Joe Biden or some other politician or person. It was Donald Trump—former U.S. president and current aspirant for the same office.

More important than the person, though, are the words. So, let's get into the words.

We should not gloss over Trump saying: "I get in there, you're gonna be using that power at a level that you've never used it before."

Careful listeners familiar with Scripture should hear a warning about the promise of power. But first, I will put Trump's statement in context. Wanting to be sure I quote Trump accurately and in context, I listened to [his entire address](#).

## Setting the stage

Trump was addressing attendees of the National Religious Broadcasters annual meeting on Feb. 22 in Nashville, Tenn. It was a typical campaign speech tailored for the audience at hand. This time, that audience was mostly evangelical and conservative Christian media.

In his opening remarks, Trump gave a particular shout-out to Robert

Jeffress, senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Dallas.

Referring to Jeffress' assessment of him before the 2016 campaign, Trump recounted: "He may not know the Bible as well as some. He may not know every passage. He may not know it, actually, so well at all, but he's the greatest leader, and he is a believer, and a strong believer, and he's gonna take us to places that we would never have been taken before."

"And he [Jeffress] turned out to be right, he turned out to be right," Trump said.

Reading from the teleprompter, Trump turned to "the greatest threat" to the United States at present. It "is not from the outside of our country. ... It's from within," he said.

"It's the people from within our country that are more dangerous than the people outside. We can handle China. We can handle Russia. We can handle all of 'em if you have a smart leader. But the inside people are very dangerous. They are very *sick* people, in my opinion, in many cases. They are *sick*."

Trump was referring to who he later called "the radical left," "Marxists," "Communists" and "fascists."

"To achieve victory in this fight," Trump said, "we still need the hand of our Lord and the grace of Almighty God. We have to have that."

Most of Trump's address is patently political. But it's a political speech tailored for a religious, specifically Christian, audience that pits them against people with opposing political and religious views.

# Promising power

As the “radical left” tries to shame Christians, “to shame *us*,” Trump said he has “been very busy fighting and, you know, taking the bullets, taking the arrows. I’m taking ‘em for you, and I’m so honored to take ‘em, you have no idea. I’m being indicted for you, as I say.”

He repeated this later, saying the “enemies” within the country “want to take away my freedom because I will never let them take away your freedom. I’m never gonna let it happen. ... In the end, they’re not after me. They’re after you. I just happen to be standing in the way.”

Whether one identifies with Trump’s position or those he calls “enemies,” he clearly sets himself up with these remarks as a messiah, a savior. One can be forgiven for wondering if Trump is still speaking politically here.

Trump then recounted voiding out the Johnson Amendment, which he blamed for muzzling religious people from endorsing political candidates. “For four years ... you were able to speak,” Trump said, because he “got rid of” the Johnson Amendment.

“The people in this room are the people we want to hear from, and they have to have a political voice,” he said.

He then grouped the citizenry into men, women and religion, saying religion has more power than men and women.

“You have such power, but you really, you weren’t allowed to use that power. And you’re now allowed to use it. I get in there, you’re gonna be using that power at a level that you’ve never used it before. It’s gonna bring back the churchgoer.”

Ah, yes, the hook. Trump knows we want to “bring back the churchgoer.” He knows Christians of every stripe have lamented the decline in church

attendance and membership. Wouldn't we like to have the power to turn that around?

Don't take the bait, no matter who but Jesus makes such a promise.

## The devilish temptation

Jesus was hungry, really hungry. It was a devilish temptation to turn rocks into warm, fresh-from-the-oven bread. Jesus kept his head in the game and didn't take the bait.

I'm not entirely sure why temptation thought Jesus might want to throw himself off the highest point of the temple, but temptation thought it was worth a shot. Jesus didn't take that bait, either.

But I'm sure every would-be messiah is tempted to want the world. It was devilish to promise that kind of power. Jesus simply needed to bow to temptation. Jesus knew better and said, "No."

But politicians don't ask us to worship them. They just ask for our vote. Some will even promise us power and the use of it "at a level that you've never used it before." In a way, we're genuflecting at each other—the politicians toward us to get our vote, and if we give our vote, us toward them.

Whatever our reasons are for voting for whoever we vote for, Christians must not do so to obtain power. It's a devilish temptation in two directions.

In one direction, if we actually gain the proffered power, we will be tempted to think we deserve it, and if we give in to that second temptation, we will be tempted to abuse it.

In another direction, if we as Christians—the church—actually gain the proffered power, we will be tempted to *enforce* Christianity rather than *be*

Christians.

Both directions are to bend the knee—even if slightly—to someone or something other than our true Lord. It's the devil's oldest trick and the first bite we took. Instead, we are to follow Jesus' lead and say, "No."

Vote however you're going to vote, but don't take the bait. Besides, it's not Trump's power to promise, much less to give.

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