

Voices: Christian cancel culture damages us

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This past summer, conservative Christian and legal scholar David French was disinvited from participating in a panel discussion titled “How to Be Supportive of Your Pastor and Church Leaders in a Polarized Political Year.”

The panel, hosted by French’s denomination, was to discuss toxic polarization and how churches could deal with political tensions. However, toxic polarization and political tensions led numerous individuals to complain about the inclusion of French in the panel discussion.

As [French described](#): “I am now deemed too divisive to speak to a gathering of Christians who share my faith. I was scheduled to speak about the challenges of dealing with toxic polarization, but I was considered too polarizing.”

It was politics—specifically his criticism of Donald Trump, not theology—that deemed him off-limits: “When I left the Republican Party, I thought a shared faith would preserve my denominational home. But I was wrong. Race and politics trumped truth and grace, and now I’m no longer welcome in the church I loved.”

How cancel culture damages

What happens to a church when political agreement is more important than theological agreement? What does it say for the maturity and discipleship of a church when one is “canceled” not for theological or factual error, but for partisan political differences?

As Stephen L. Carter warned two decades ago in *God's Name in Vain*: “A religion that becomes too settled in the secular political sphere, happily amassing influence and using it, is likely to lose its best and most spiritual self.”

When politics becomes king, truth and theological commitments, including open dialogue and understanding, are sacrificed to the partisan political god.

While Carter's use of “religion” may help insulate individuals from his direct accusation, it is clear 20 years later that individuals within the church body have sought to cancel political dissent within their ranks, all while claiming the desire of unity within the body.

As French writes: “I was sacrificed on the altar of peace and unity. But it is a false peace and a false unity if extremists can bully a family out of a church and then block the church from hearing one of its former members describe his experience. It is a false peace and a false unity if it is preserved by granting the most malicious members of the congregation veto power over church events.”

Churches unwilling to listen to theological truth from a speaker they differ with politically are churches that make politics of greater importance than faith, perhaps distorting the teachings of Christ for temporal politics. As tragic as that sounds, it is a reality found in many churches today, and one that must change for the church to live out her calling.

Effects of hyper-partisanship

Throughout his book *The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory*, Tim Alberta references the threats against those who fail to conform politically. Even Alberta himself was attacked within his own church, a church pastored by his father.

At his father's funeral, no less, Alberta was hounded by parishioners who questioned whether Alberta "was truly Christian" due to his criticisms of Donald Trump, who these churchgoers had described as "God's ordained leader of the United States."

To be clear, this type of hyper-politicalization within the church began prior to Trump, as Russell Moore, who knows something about being canceled, tells Alberta: "It was easier to get an argument going in the church parking lot over whether there were death panels in Obamacare, than it was over the Trinity or the inerrancy of Scripture. Trump just took it to a new level."

One who can speak to this decade-in-the-making unhealthy partisanship is retired pastor Joel Hunter, who was named as president of the Christian Coalition in 2006, the conservative political interest group.

Prior to beginning the role officially, Hunter was removed for desiring the Christian Coalition to expand its focus into broader Christian concerns, including the environment, poverty and war, which while scriptural, were all deemed not to be sufficiently conservative.

Hunter's emphasis on these broad issues as pastor led some to leave his congregation, as certain members were unable to reconcile their pastor disagreeing with the conservative talk radio they listened to throughout the week.

It was challenging and continues to be challenging to lead a Christian church or organization in these highly politically partisan times, when politics overrides faith and people are judged by their voting decisions more than their biblical fidelity.

What's more important?

The question perhaps playing out in many churches then is this: Is political

agreement more important than theological truth?

The Christians ostracized for their political dissensions might be tempted to remain quiet, to keep a low profile or give in to the politically partisan tribe. However, one should not succumb to bullies.

Christian leaders face loud, vocal headwinds when delving into issues that challenge the congregants' political status quo. These disgruntled voices spread misinformation and subtle threats very quickly through a congregation.

However, [Hunter calls on leaders](#) to rise to the challenge and speak truth: "Every time you do something that you know is right, you should always know it will cost something ... there will be a reaction, and you need to be prepared for that. And you need to not let that specter make you a coward. I pray for courage from the pulpit."

Christians must be willing to stretch their minds beyond the partisan political toxicity they ingest throughout the week.

Christians are diverse. That should be celebrated, not lamented. We each can read Scripture and find various ways to apply it in society. Sometimes we will agree, sometimes we will not. But the practical application, even when it comes to political voice, should not be a disqualifier from hearing the truth and wisdom from those who hold differing points of view.

For those not able to handle diversity, heaven is going to be a shocking place.

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