

Lyin' Ted Cruz?

An anti-Trump super PAC, Make America Awesome, recently ran a Facebook ad aimed at Mormons in Utah to help defeat Donald Trump in that state. The ad endorsed Ted Cruz but its focus was not on either Ted Cruz or Donald Trump but on Donald Trump's wife, Melania. The ad presented a picture of a half-nude Melania from a photo shoot sixteen years ago in 2000 by British GQ. Melania was a model. The ad included the following text on the screen: "MELANIA TRUMP. YOUR NEXT FIRST LADY. OR, YOU COULD SUPPORT TED CRUZ ON TUESDAY." Although Ted Cruz said that his campaign did not have anything to do with the ad, the ad reflects adversely on Cruz rather than on Donald Trump, or Melania for that matter. Therein lies a fundamental problem for Cruz, a problem that makes him unelectable.

Among Christians there is a well-accepted doctrinal recognition that no person is free of sin, that each must seek redemption by turning to Christ, and that none other than the Lord may pass ultimate judgment on others. Cruz has made it a centerpiece of his campaign that he is an evangelical Christian. Despite that, those who identify themselves as evangelical Christians have voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump rather than Ted Cruz. Why is that?

The answer may rest in the fact that the blunt and honest Trump does not profess himself to be morally perfect, but as for Ted Cruz, he describes himself as the only evangelical Christian candidate, a preacher's son, and the only "consistent conservative." In other words, Cruz implies that he is, well, perfect. He faults Trump for changing his positions on issues, suggesting that he himself has never done so and he condemns Trump for use of foul language, for name calling, and for superficiality. While an evangelical Christian by self-pronouncement, Cruz does not walk in the path of Christ who did not condemn the sinner, only the sin, and who redeems sinners. The problem with Cruz's approach is

that it rests on a false premise, and there are few things more offensive to evangelicals than the hypocrisy that attends a candidate who proclaims himself the only true evangelical yet engages in dishonest politics.

It is a fact that Ted Cruz changed his position on immigration, having initially favored a pathway to citizenship for illegal immigrants and then later opposing the pathway. That shifting position is not "consistent" as he argues but it would not be dishonest either, except for his insistence that he never wavered in opposing illegal immigration. It boggles the mind to understand why Cruz simply would not confess that he had a different position earlier but changed it in light of the hordes of illegals that have poured over the border since that time. His insistence that he never wavered on opposing citizenship for illegal immigrants is false, and it conflicts with his dogmatic insistence that he is the only "consistent conservative" in the race. He is not consistent, at least not on one of the most important issues in the campaign, stemming the tide of illegal immigration.

It is also a fact that senior members of the Cruz campaign maintained a false narrative that Ben Carson had left the campaign in the first caucus, Iowa. That false representation to delegates in the caucus caused some to vote for Cruz on the false assumption that their favorite candidate, Carson, was out of the race. While Cruz later agreed that those actions of his agents were improper, he nevertheless did not take any step to rectify the problem (like ask for a second caucus vote or disclaim those votes he received under false pretenses).

And now we have the Melania Trump matter. It is a fact that Melania Trump was a model. It is also a fact that in her twenties she posed nude. It is also a fact that she is beautiful and intelligent. Born in Slovenia in 1970, she studied at the University of Ljubjana. She speaks five languages. She is the owner of a jewelry line. She is a devoted mother. Cruz's failure to condemn the Make America

Awesome PAC ad when it first aired is far more revealing and damaging to Cruz than to Trump. Indeed, were Cruz truly an evangelical, he would regard any prior transgression of another as forgivable, not his place to judge ultimately, and not appropriately reflective of either who Melania Trump was then or who she is today. Moreover, he would regard the use of this low tactic in an effort to besmirch Donald Trump itself sinful, because Donald Trump certainly cannot be deemed unfit for office solely because his wife posed nude in 2000 for British GQ. Yet beyond a tweet disclaiming involvement in the ad, Cruz did not upon the ad's release condemn it, explain that he did not think it appropriate to question Trump based on Melania's photo shoot, and did not think the image itself a reflection of the honesty or integrity of Melania, but again, as with the Carson incident, Cruz remained largely mum. One can surmise that he did so because he hoped both tactics would redound to his political benefit, but that legerdemain is more characteristic of the Pharisees than of Christ.

Indeed, we do not have qualifications for the position of First Lady; it is not an elected office. But, nevertheless, I for one think Melania Trump would be a great First Lady. I find her refreshingly honest and, like Trump, a Washington outsider, not a career politician's wife. She comes with none of the dishonest baggage and corrupt political history that accompanied Hillary Clinton to the White House when she was First Lady. Melania's reputation is one of honesty. She is dignified and elegant. She is fluent in five foreign languages. She is from Eastern Europe, the very part of the world now besought by acts of aggression and political intrigue from Vladimir Putin. She will be a solid link to our Eastern European allies and will give them comfort knowing that a person who has lived among them and is a byproduct of their culture has the ear of the President of the United States.

In the end, I think Cruz's inconsistencies telling, but I also

think his dogmatic insistence on his own perfection politically unappealing. In the primaries thus far, Cruz has held a subset of the conservative vote, but he has not shown any broader appeal.

By contrast, Trump has shown broader appeal, causing conservative Democrats, Republicans who have not voted for years, independents, and disaffected individuals who have never voted along with a segment of the Latino vote to go his way. Because Cruz has shown no facility to reach beyond a subset of the conservative vote, he cannot win in a general election unless, that is, he becomes an inconsistent conservative. In light of Cruz's insistence that he and he alone is "consistent," the inconsistencies present give substance to Trump's charge that Cruz is "lyin' Ted."

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