

The Government We Deserve by Rollin Russell

December 6, 2016

Numerous sages have said it: "In a democracy you get the government you deserve." People on both sides of the "dividing wall of hostility" (see Ephesians 2) that now separates us can agree, one side with satisfaction, on the other with disdain.

On the reddish side of the wall, many feel they have been ignored, manipulated, discounted, taken for granted and left to scramble for existence as the economic rug was pulled out from under them. The election was, to them, an upsetting of the apple cart of the elites and power brokers, political, financial and cultural, that made their lives miserable for decades. Trump will change the system, so let the chips fall where he decides. They feel they deserve this dramatic reversal.

On the bluish side of the wall, the election outcome was unthinkable. Their pollsters and commentators told them so. Their sense of justice, mutual respect and equality, their assumptions about a bright, multi-cultural American future told them so. And now all those values seem endangered. The xenophobic, misogynist, racist, arrogant narcissist won the election and his victory unmasks those characteristics in millions who supported him. The nation deserves this painful reality check.

It is a rude awakening. So, now, instead of dozens of email requests for political contributions, each day we receive the angst filled or, on the other hand, gloating speculations about the political, economic and social future. I have found two articles that provide some insight and perspective (and that clearly reveal the side of the wall on which I stand).

Two professors from the University of Texas point out how closely Donald Trump and his campaign rhetoric resemble the political Superman of Friedrich Nietzsche's writings. They write:

The title of Nietzsche's book about a superman, who could be a super-president, is usually translated as *The Anti-Christ* (1895). A more accurate translation from the German is *The Anti-Christian*. The values of Nietzsche's anti-Christian are the opposite of Christian values: strength, not weakness; pride, not humility; impulsive passion, not controlled reason, war, not peace; and egoism, not altruism. In short, the creed of anti-Christians is this: "What is good? All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself." (The Daily Texan, November 18, 2016)

The second insight is not really new. It is from an Altnet article that describes why 81 per cent of Evangelical Christians voted for the President Elect. (Pugh Research, 2016) It sights the ideological rigidity of the white, fundamentalist, Christian population that is dominant in the American heartland.

Religious fundamentalism is what has shaped most of their belief systems. Systems built on a fundamentalist framework are not conducive to introspection, questioning, learning, change. When you have a belief system that is built on fundamentalism, it isn't open to outside criticism, especially by anyone not a member of your tribe and in a position of power.

Rational arguments about qualifications for the office are futile. Citations of gross behavior, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, xenophobia are to no avail. The crucial issues are abortion, homosexuality, male dominance and the make-up of the Supreme Court, which has authorized 'unthinkable' change in all these areas.

So, we acknowledge the supreme irony of fundamentalist Christians overwhelmingly supporting a candidate who plausibly can be described as the anti-Christian, would-be superman. The "dividing wall of hostility," thus, seems impregnable. In Ephesians the dividing wall is broken down by a peculiar and powerful sort of love that embraces the poor and outcast, defies the pretensions of power and empire and envisions the reign of justice and peace.

There are still Christians, Jews, Muslims and persons of other faiths and of no faith who are committed to this authentic biblical/ethical vision. Their voices are currently drowned out by the noise of self-appointed and self-anointed fundamentalist preachers. But, in them is our best hope for a future of unity and mutuality. Let those who "do justice, love mercy and walk humbly" (Micah 6) raise their voices and act on their convictions, and let the walls come tumbling down. One day we may get the government we need rather than the one we deserve.

Rollin O. Russell