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THE UNGODLY AMERICAN

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ABSTRACT

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ARTICLE

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American prosperity churches hit us front and center in the wake of Hurricane Harvey and Pastor Joel Osteen became the poster child for the Christian 1 percent. Desperate for high ground, the doors of the 16,000 capacity Lakewood Church in Texas were locked from disaster relief. The angry retorts resonated..... *“the church is not open to hurricane victims because it only provides shelter from taxes.”*

Joel Osteen is the Donald Trump of prosperity Christianity. Both live in mansions and both are unapologetically wealthy. Both screech that God has blessed them and that God can bless anyone else too. The prosperity gospel has found the formula that guarantees that God always blesses the righteous with health, wealth and happiness and for that reason churchgoers love to see their preachers thrive as living embodiments of their own message.

Trump and Osteen are inspirational to their followers which make them uncomfortable representations of the deep rifts in the land of opportunity between the haves and the have-nots.

There is a lingering controversy around prosperity megachurches and their charitable giving. If a church places enormous theological weight on tithes and offerings and is not a leader in charitable giving, then the question becomes, who is the primary beneficiary of the prosperity gospel? The everyman who fills the auditoriums, or the man at the front?

In plain sight we have a President who embodies the man at the front who is not guided by head or heart, but tithes and offerings which flow directly into Trump Corporation. His Washington hotel, Mar-a-Lago, golf courses, rented offices, condominium buildings and income streams from various branded products.

Mr. Trump was elected because he convinced demoralized Americans he would help their circumstances, and he lied to all of them. The monumental tax reform which few

Republicans talk about these days because the wealthiest and big corporates were the biggest beneficiaries, was always a two parter.....cut taxes for the wealthy while stripping health care from 26 million Americans. This may be the Trump and Osteen version of capitalism, but is it really America?

We are losing a sense of oneness with nature and the rest of creation, and the choice between good and evil, creativity and destruction in our me-me culture is becoming blurred. There was a time when people owned decisions, but we live in a world today where offloading is much easier.

Some think in depth, others give very little thought, while many don't think at all. Mr. Trump refuses to read his security briefing notes, and while he is quick to remind his adoring audiences he went to the best schools, he had his fixer and sometime lawyer, Michael Cohen who is about to serve three years jail, call up his schools and threaten them from ever releasing his grades.

How one responds to adversity and good or bad luck maybe one of the truest measures of our ability to grow in gratefulness. Our tendency to avoid problems and emotional suffering is the primary basis of all psychological illness as President Trump reminds us daily. Narcissists cannot think about other people, while excessive compulsives cannot think about big picture.

Mr. Trump is fundamentally flawed in all these areas. He gets under our skin because he can, he dominates headlines, but he has no concept of how powerful the US Presidential microphone is and the damage he does with his words. Leaders like MBS in Saudi Arabia, Kim-Jong-un in North Korea, President Putin in Russia and other authoritarians around the world understand they have a free pass on human rights abuse because the Trump administration has shown it will turn the other way.

Collective Europe does not trust Trump, and you need collective Europe against Russia and every tragedy unfolding across the Middle East and beyond. But such a thought process requires big picture understanding of history and its interdependence in a conflicting murky world which Mr. Trump has no curiosity or interest in.

The President regularly insults the intelligence of his 17 security agencies while at the same time coddling up to dictators. He challenges the rule of law and integrity of the free press, and two years into his presidency Mr. Trump is edging towards 10,000 provable false claims and lies. He still commands a loyal following with one third unmoved by his recklessness, while the other two thirds keep democracy limping along.

A person with a character disorder operates under the illusion that he shouldn't have to be responsible for himself or anyone else. Mr. Trump's condition is diagnosable, but at 72 he is probably beyond the reach of any psychological profession. He is one of the worst offenders of simple thinking, a failure typically found among the most immensely influential institutions of society including, more often than not, family, church and the mass media.

English poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote: *"a lie which is half the truth is ever the blackest of lies."*

The truth is that our finest moments, more often than not occur precisely when we are uncomfortable, when we're not feeling happy or fulfilled, when we're struggling and searching. If more Americans pursued such a journey, we may be able to move beyond our current morass.

We are discouraged from questioning or sorting through, much less confronting the lies inherent in President Trump's tax policy because the beneficiaries were the big corporates, Mr. Trump, and his fellow class of squillionaires, but that is not how he sold it to the general public. The common folk were told they would be the winners. Repeat something often enough and believers will believe just about anything.

We have to be free to think and feel, but that doesn't mean we should utter every thought aloud or always wear our hearts on our sleeves. The President keeps his base largely intact because he has been successful in sowing discord. By severing ties with reality, he has successfully crafted a message that dark forces are lined up against America, and achieving greatness requires their destruction and removal, which means all investigative committees should be shut down, Robert Mueller's investigation should be shut down and everyone in justice, the media, academia and all people of independent mind should be required to take a loyalty oath, not to the office of the Presidency, but to the snake salesman Donald J Trump.

Mr. Trump and his sycophant allies describe a southern border which is overrun by marauding black and brown rapists, and the only way to keep the invaders at bay is with a 2,000-mile wall. There was a time in America when facts mattered because illegal crossings have been declining over the last 40 years and 90% of contraband is intercepted at legal points of entry..... a wall therefore would have little impact on what the President claims to be his trump card, which most animates his base, permanently changing the color mix of immigration.

Poor thinking often leads to poor behavior. Mr. Trump was still paying off his fixer Michael Cohen for his playboy bunny escapades well into his Presidency. Where is the outrage from the Christian right? He has cheated on all three wives and been credibly accused by more than 19 women of inappropriate sexual conduct. The hypocritical silence is deafening.

Republicanism used to be about the rule of law and constitutional integrity, yet their own President daily trashes his own justice department and constantly undermines the intelligence community. His unprecedented assault on all that is normal and his declaration of emergency power over a crisis at the border which is in imagination only serves to further erode trust.

It should go without saying you can't truly communicate well if you don't listen well, and you are unable to listen well unless you are thinking well. Many believe listening is a passive interaction, but it is the opposite. Listening well is an active exercise of our attention, and by necessity, is hard work. There is a rule in psychiatry that there is no such thing as a bad thought or feeling; and it is virtually impossible to make judgments about a person's thoughts when they are not translated into behavior. President Trump is unpredictable by design, he refuses to take sound counsel, but if we pay close attention, he frequently tells us exactly what he is thinking.

The best psychotherapists have learned to set their sights on building the best possible relationship or community with their patients, and within that relationship, healing will often naturally occur without having to “do” anything.

Gradually I believe people are coming to realize that community making is more fundamental than peace, and that community making must precede peace. The corrosive cultural shift under President Trump has fostered unprecedented animosity between families and their communities. He assaults our intelligence with his constant lies. The great deal maker has not solved the Korean nuclear crisis, the pressing issue in Iran, nor China and the world’s economy, which has become more perilous because of Mr. Trump’s trade wars.

Whether people are rich or poor, there is a belief among many that they are entitled to something for nothing, or to behave as if the world owes them rather than the other way around. Successive US Presidents from across the aisles, Reagan, the Bushes, Clinton, Obama and Carter understood humility and the power of work ethic. Not President Trump. He will go down as one of the laziest presidents ever. Release of his work diary indicates his handlers frequently schedule at least six hours of executive time a day which he uses to play golf, watch cable TV and tweet.

Everything we know about community and peace indicates that we have no reason whatsoever to expect it effortlessly, or to expect that once we have won peace through sacrifice, that it will stay around for long without having to lift a finger every day.

If there was ever a reminder that Christianity 1% is not the answer, Pope Francis provides reason for hope. He reminds Vatican' ambassadors they risk ridicule if they live overly comfortable lives. A more austere Catholic Church is more fitting he would say. The church hierarchy was told to shun a bourgeois life and ensure bishops remain poor while rejecting the pursuit of worldly goods.

The Pope urged clergy to avoid appointing bishops who were overly ambitious or showed princely psychology. They should be modest, have knowledge of poverty, be close to people, mild mannered, patient and merciful; the complete opposite of the current US President and other despot leaders around the world today.