

Keeping Company With Those We Oppose

After the first Biden-Trump presidential debate, one of my nephews posted on Facebook that anyone who supported President Donald Trump would no longer be a part of his life. Did this young man forget that his mother, stepfather, and sister are Trump supporters, as are several of his cousins, aunts, and uncles?

Another young woman I know well unfriended anyone on Facebook, including someone close to me, who refuses to toe the leftist line.

Recently a reader wrote to me about an article I'd written. In an unrelated aside, she told me that three of her four children, all college graduates, now barely speak to her and her husband, who are conservative Trump supporters.

Six months ago, I wrote a profile of a family who had triumphed over several hardships for a homeschooling magazine. A week or so after the story appeared online, the mother called me in tears, asking that the school remove the post from its website. Her married son had seen the post, angrily telephoned his mother, accused her of brainwashing him when she was teaching him at home, attacked her religious faith and politics, and demanded she contact the school and have the piece taken down.

We removed the article, but once again I caught a glimpse of the damage done when we inject politics into every realm of life.

I suspect most of us know people who have severed relations with family members and friends over politics. They cut them loose on social media, refuse to return phone calls, and I've even heard of people excluded from family events such as

weddings and holidays.

Why is that? What is driving some of us to these cruel, ugly, and foolish extremes?

There are several possibilities.

1. Rhetoric

The heated and overblown rhetoric of our time has certainly contributed to these fractured personal relationships. When we demonize others by labeling them as racists, Nazis, and white supremacists, we diminish any possibility of meaningful dialogue. We declare our opponents beyond the pale, cast them into the darkness, and smugly feel virtuous in our actions.

The problem, of course, is that often those who behave this way have become ideologues. Propagandized by extremist rhetoric, they become what Eric Hoffer once called “true believers,” fanatics who value a mass movement – political, religious, or otherwise – above individuals.

2. Religion

Politics has replaced religious faith for many people in 21st century America. They look to build a heaven on earth and are willing to destroy those they perceive as standing in their way. If we look at groups like Antifa or Black Lives Matter, if we listen to certain politicians or college professors, we find a religious strain in their words and actions. They obey an unwritten creed, adhere to a certain orthodoxy, and when members of their sect break some tenet of that creed, as in the case of Harry Potter author [J.K. Rowling](#), they boot them from their midst and do their utmost to destroy that person’s reputation.

When a political belief becomes a god, the “Isms” are not far

behind: communism, fascism, socialism, and Nazism. Just as the Aztecs once engaged in human sacrifice to propitiate their gods, true believers are willing to strap their opponents on the altar, draw out their knives, and cut out their hearts.

3. Identity politics

By creating divisions based on race, religion, gender, and wealth, true believers are able to diminish and even destroy the idea that we are all Americans. In the past century, all totalitarians have used this same strategy: the Nazis vilified the Jews, the Russian communists the kulaks, the Chinese communists the intellectuals and professionals. The list goes on and on in every socialist country. To paraphrase Vladimir Lenin "Simply declare them an enemy of the people, and everyone will understand everything."

Divide and conquer. It works everywhere, including in family bonds and friendships.

Though readers may have differing experiences, all of the splits among family and friends in my own life come from the left. I know of no conservative sons who have telephoned their liberal fathers and ordered them out of their lives, no grandfather who, on finding out Sally was voting for Joe Biden, cut her out of his will and life.

There is, I believe, a reason for these one-sided breakdowns in relationships. Most conservatives don't buy into the idea that "politics is everything." Conservatives see a newborn daughter as a beautiful gift, not as an environmental footprint. They see a traditional wedding as an occasion for celebration, not some antiquated suppression of women. They see hard work and ambition as the road to success, not as some embodiment of white cultural values.

Finally, conservatives also see family and friendship as treasures, more meaningful and valuable than the latest causes

of social justice warriors or the virtue signaling that today passes for virtue itself.

We derive the word companion from two Latin words: “cum,” meaning “with,” and “panis,” meaning “bread.” A companion is one with whom we break bread.

Shouldn't bread broken with kinfolk and the shared wine of companionship beat politics hands down?

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