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Ted Cruz, the American Apostle

“We are witnessing a great awakening,” Ted Cruz told Houston audiences, a quaint group of voter hopefuls, back in August of 2012. He was not discussing the Great Awakening of the Americas in the 18th and 19th century. He was not discussing the famous Protestant Reformation of Christian thought. Nor could he possibly hope to be alluding to the Roman embedding, the Nicean councils, or the vital Pauline epistles. “Millions of Texans, millions of Americans are rising up to reclaim our country, to defend liberty and to restore the Constitution.” Ted Cruz’s vision, in his attempts at leadership of America’s evangelical population (evangelical has been defined by the National Association of Evangelicals as conversionism, activism, Biblicism, and crucicentrism), is shockingly in-line with another leader, from millennia ago, who had similar rhetorical zeal... “For we walk by faith and not by sight,” he ascribed in his second letter to the Corinthians. The rhetorical strategies and blind faith in their apostoletic abilities drive an immutable parallel between ‘The Apostle’, Saul of Tarsus (further referred to as Paul), and current presidential candidate, Ted Cruz.

While very controversial, not officially defined, or even collectively agreed upon, the National Association of Evangelicals’ (NAE) definition of evangelicalism is a strong benchmark for further discussion. The thoughts that one must be born again, demonstration of the gospel in missionary and social efforts, obedience to “the Bible as the ultimate authority” (NAE), and an

understanding of Christ's sacrifice as redeeming are the four staples the Evangelical organization stresses. With these ideas in mind, anybody with familiarity to the New Testament could agree that Paul fits the bill for an evangelical- he theorized most of the four key points in his epistles (2 Timothy 4:2, Ephesians 1:7, Romans 1:17, Romans 6:4).

Simply speaking, both Paul and Cruz discuss similar ideas in their movements. Without even discussing theological trends or agendas, their rhetoric of consistently moving towards 'new' ideals and 'new' ways. "If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God!" (2 Corinthians 3:9) is shockingly akin to Cruz's continual claims for a new generation, such as his announcement video posted in March of 2015: "It's going to take a new generation of conservatives to help make America great again." Our thoughts on Paul's movements may be more theological (Such as Karen Armstrong's examination in her *A History of God*, "Jesus had insisted that the "powers" of God were not for him alone. Paul developed this insight by arguing that Jesus had been the first example of a new type of humanity." (Armstrong 88)), but the simple movement towards a 'new' idea of communal unity is there. Paul and Cruz felt that the current situation was not enough, the current mindsets were too simple- they had ideas to change it, but only through a rebirth.

Beyond the above stated NAE definition for evangelical, it is crucial to remember that the Greek root, euangelion, means "the good news" or "gospel". Paul's thoughts on the Good News about Jesus Christ, as found in 1 Corinthians, says, "I want you to remember the Good News I told you. You received that Good News, the message you heard from me, is God's way to save you. But you must continue believing it. If you don't, you believed for nothing." (1 Corinthians

15:1-2). Paul's affinity for the strength of the Good News of his connection to Christ is precedent for Cruz's claims of a relationship to God- the instances are numerous.

His father, an evangelical pastor named Rafael Cruz, posted a video online narrating that "we were on our knees for two hours seeking God's will. At the end of that time, a word came through his wife, Heidi. And the word came, just saying, 'Seek God's face, not God's hand.'... Ted just looked up and said, 'Lord, here I am, use me. I surrender to you, whatever you want.'" (Corn). Cruz is seeking something Paul sought, but in the political sphere rather than the religious. "Even if gospel comes "from an angel in heaven," Paul writes, his congregations should ignore it (Galatians 1:8). Instead, they should obey Paul and only Paul: "Be imitators of *me*, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1)" (Aslan 192). Paul and Cruz wished to appear not only as appointed of a higher order, but responsible for the actions necessary to lead their movements. "The claim of apostleship is an urgent one for Paul, as it was the only way to justify his entirely self-ascribed mission," (Aslan 186) is an applicable statement to Cruz, inverted as the claim of anointing is an urgent one for Cruz, as it is the only way to justify his entirely self-ascribed candidacy.

As Paul sought the Gentiles, Cruz retroactively seeks the Jews with his Evangelical voters. He told his audience in Washington DC back around 2014, ""if you will not stand with Israel or the Jews, then I will not stand with you" in an attempt to sway both Christians and Jews to his side. "Christians have no greater ally than Israel... if you hate the Jewish people you are not reflecting the teachings of Christ." His attempt to achieve what Jon Perr jokingly referred to as the GOP "dream that one day Jews and Gentiles will be able to join hands and vote Republican in every village and every hamlet, in every state and every city." (Perr) It is, in small part, an inversion of Paul's goal in Ephesians 3, whose "plan is that the Gentiles would be coheirs and

parts of the same body, and that they would share with the Jews in the promises of God in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” Ted Cruz can speak volumes on how the gospel brings him God in Christ Jesus- “I am blessed to receive a word from God every day in receiving the scriptures and reading the scriptures. And God speaks through the Bible,” Cruz said in a debate August of 2015.

So where the line is eventually drawn is in the group’s aim of each leader- Paul wished for Gentiles to become part of his budding faith, while Cruz wishes for the members of his faith and Jews to push his budding political goals to the stage. In both aims we can see the use of zealous rhetoric (“God’s blessing has been on America from the very beginning of this nation, and I believe God isn’t done with America yet” Cruz claimed in a speech to Liberty University in March of 2015, a glaring reach for both the Christian nationals and those who may believe he is subtly appointed by God to fulfill this plan) and the goal of unquestioned faith behind the leader (Paul’s can fill entire epistles, i.e. 1 Corinthians 14:38 “If anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored” and Galatians 4:16 “Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?” as ways to both undercut his detractors and victimize himself for gain). The modern equivalent is almost Old-Testament in its attempts to illicit horrifying sight. On January 31st, Ted Cruz told his supporters in Iowa that they must “awaken the body of Christ that we may pull back from the abyss,” and “strap on the full armor of God, get ready for the attacks that are coming.” Cruz’s appeals to religious symbolism is traditional, but the use against his opponents, non-believers, and detractors is markedly Pauline. Paul and Cruz need to engage Christianity through self-defense of their ability and relationship to the holy.

It is clear to historians that Paul spent a majority of his seventeen epistles defending his own claim, as “these letters devote so much space to defending Paul’s status as an apostle, touting his

direct connection to Jesus, and railing against the leaders in Jerusalem who, “disguising themselves as apostles of Christ,” are, in Paul’s view, actually servants of Satan who have bewitched Paul’s followers” (Aslan 192). To ignore Cruz’s simultaneous actions of anointing himself the Christian choice, and John Fea sees it as his goal to “restore the United States to what he believes is its original identity: a Christian nation.” Fea fears that “it is only a matter of time before Cruz assumes the role of the Old Testament prophet Elijah and tries to cast down fire from heaven to destroy... who oppose his campaign,” not a large distance from Paul’s Galatians 1:8 (ignore them even if they are angels).

The radicalism of both speakers, rhetorical strategy pending, is not one of quality- Cruz and Paul both have their fans and opponents. What lies beyond this neutrality is simple understanding that Cruz is, knowingly or not, following in the path of a man who took on the role as leader of an entire rebounding faith (from Christ to apostles to Paul), a legacy that was upheld by Luther in the Protestant Reformation, and is now entering a further political stage. Where Cruz’s community will be leading is unsure- the answer from the political sphere is worrying. Cruz definitely discussed in his Iowa primary victory that “the revolutionary understanding that all men and women are created equal. That our rights do not come from the Democratic Party or the Republican Party or even from the Tea Party. Our rights come from our creator,” leading to a popular view that his religious views would come before his political duties. “I want to remind you of the promise of Scripture – weeping may endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning.” For, as we read in 1 Corinthians 13:8-9, “Where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.”

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