Opinion
Guest Voices



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump speaks at a Get Out The Vote rally at Coastal Carolina University in Conway, S.C., on Feb. 10. (RNS/AP/Manuel Balce Ceneta)



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Does anyone really want to watch the news these days? Gaza. Israel. Russia. Ukraine. Migrants. Mass shootings. Executions. Tragedy after disaster after meltdown after debacle.

And then there's Mr. Trump.

The ex-president's bombastic rhetoric does little to calm any news consumer's nerves. Nor does it enhance the world's view of the politics of the United States or its moral character.

Yet Trump's braggadocio is only part of what he has brought to our politics. There is a manner of speaking infesting politics, media and even private conversations that is insulting to both the subject and the listener.

Trump's is the language of evil.

We have seen and heard him (between court appearances) deriding NATO, military service and the entire U.S. system of justice with derisive terms and facial expressions.

And it is not only Trump who is fouling the airwaves. Too many Republican politicians are infected with the fiendish attitude seeping from Trump's campaign rallies. His disrespect for people now constitutes acceptable public discourse.

House and Senate Republicans routinely denigrate fellow lawmakers and political opponents. According to The New York Times, Republican members of Congress echo their presumptive nominee's bigoted stances, as they "use rhetoric that denigrates people based on ethnicity, religion or nationality."

The virus of disrespect has spread. Social media sites are replete with crude language and mean comments. Strangers act dismissively toward one another. People in positions of power more obviously demean others. Individual cogs in the wheels of systems and organizations routinely crush individuals.

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The dividing line is not only ethnicity, religion or nationality. Any real or perceived "other" is a fair target. And though everyone suffers, women suffer the most. While women face daily insults and dangers, from catcalls to rape, they also encounter passive-aggressive pushback any time they try to participate in work or society.

Church is no different. Ask any woman who has written to her bishop or pastor about an issue facing her parish and, likely as not, she will say she's been ignored. It does not matter if she asks what happened to the money from the latest fundraising event or why there is no parish council or where (or even when) the synod meeting will take place. She suffers active and passive ecclesial disrespect within the growing atmosphere of general disrespect for the person.

The Catholic bishops of the U.S. say their "preeminent priority" is abortion, and in their statements they expand their interest to human life. Of course, the bishops genuinely do respect all human life, but as a body they seem to be increasingly joined to Trumpian policies, and, by implication, to Trumpian rhetoric.

Examples pop up everywhere. When a parish neon sign blares "Fed up with woke? So are we," the need for separation of church and state takes on new meaning.

Who is preaching inside that church? Would it be Georgia U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, who said on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives that she wanted to censure "Representative Ilhan Omar of Somalia — I mean Minnesota." Or would the preacher that week be Arkansas Senator Tom Cotton, who, during a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing, asked the Singaporean CEO of TikTok if he was Chinese, held a Chinese passport or was a member of the Chinese Communist Party?

Private bigoted language in the Congress is reportedly worse.

When presumably educated, responsible politicians sound as if they are preaching from a bar stool at midnight, what can the rest of us do to remove angry denigration of a person or persons from whatever other pulpit we might be near?

Votes can exorcise the Congress, but will that happen? The problem is that too many voters seem to like the language.

Elsewhere, some people just quietly walk away.