April Reflections 2017 Vol. 39 No. 8

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The February 12, 2017, issue of *Time Magazine* featured a cover picture of Stephen K. Bannon with the notation “The Great Manipulator.” The cover story plays up the great influence Bannon, a complex character, has on President Trump as his chief strategist and senior counselor who has a seat on the National Security Council. Enjoying the trust of the president, he helped draft the Inaugural Address and advocated the hasty release of the first executive order commonly seen as a Muslim ban. Bannon has with Trump, what *Time* calls “a mind-meld,” which includes general agreement on issues ranging from political strategy to trade and immigration policies. Bannon frequently interviewed the future president on his Breitbart call-in radio program and made sure the news agency ran favorable stories about him. When he attended his first Trump rally, he saw the candidate as a new Andrew Jackson, the outsider populist who became president. In Trump, Bannon found what he called “a blunt instrument” for achieving his own vision of the country.

In August of 2016, candidate Trump appointed Bannon as head of his campaign, a move which, many believe, contributed to his election victory. Bannon’s fundamental strategy was to tap the anger and discontent of people who felt politically left out, culturally unappreciated and financially deprived. He understood better than most the anti-establishment sentiments that led to the totally surprising 2014 primary defeat of House Majority Leader, Eric Cantor, who spent eight million dollars on the campaign, by a libertarian professor, Dave Brat, who spent only $175,000, but effectively accused Cantor of paying too much attention to Wall Street and too little to Main Street. Bannon, who called the defeat of Cantor by a margin of 57 to 43 a “monumental loss,” applied the lessons to the Trump campaign, utilizing relatively inexpensive large rallies that tapped wide spread anti-establishment feelings. Bannon’s successful electoral strategy earned him a place as the president’s chief political counselor.

Steve Bannon was born November 27, 1953, and grew up in an Irish Catholic family in Richmond Virginia; attended an integrated Benedictine high school; graduated from Virginia Tech and received a master’s degree from Georgetown in urban planning; served seven years in the Navy; earned an MBA from Harvard in 1985; worked for Goldman Sachs for about five years, retiring as a vice-president in 1990; ran his own investment company during the 90’s; went into the entertainment business producing 18 documentary films, including “In the Face of Evil” in praise of Ronald Reagan; joined Breitbart News in 2011 and served as executive director until he came on board the Trump campaign on August 17, 2016.

Bannon has described himself in various ways: “a practical pragmatic capitalist,” a man “from a blue-collar, Irish Catholic, pro-Kennedy, pro-union family of Democrats;” and as Donald Trump’s Thomas Cromwell, an extremely strange comparison since Cromwell is despised by Irish Catholics and lost his head when he fell out of favor with King Henry VIII. Much of the negative public opinion about Bannon flows from the anti-Semitic, racist and misogynistic stories he ran on Breitbart news, which he called “the platform for the alt-right.” He has admitted the prejudices found in the white nationalism of the alternative right but believes it “will wash out” over time. Whatever his reasoning, there is no justification for promoting the prejudices of the alt-right, which are immoral, un-Christian, un-American and dangerous. Since the presidential election, prejudice has not been “washed out.” On the contrary, independent non-partisan studies have discovered a significant increase in hate crimes since the election: for example, in New York, a 42 percent increase in hate crime complaints during the period from Nov 8 to Feb 19th over the same period a year ago. Bannon, who is himself not anti-Semitic according to most commentators, still bears responsibility for providing a forum for white nationalists, who are now increasing their attacks on Jews, as well as blacks, Hispanics and members of the LGBT community.

The personal story of Marty Bannon, the 95 year-old father of Steve, has been a major influence on the economic views of the president’s chief strategist. Marty worked at AT&T for 50 years, rising from a splicer to middle management. During that time he sacrificed and borrowed to buy stock in the company, which was to serve as a safety net for his family. Although it was said that Marty would rather give up his treasured Catholic faith then sell his company stock, he did sell the stock when the recession hit in 2008, losing about $100,000 in the transaction. Steve, who calls his father regularly and visits him monthly, had great empathy for his father’s plight and came to see it as representative of a broken economic system that cares for the elite rich and neglects ordinary working persons.

In the summer of 2014, Bannon gave a talk by way of Skype to the Human Dignity Institute meeting in the Vatican, which spells out some of his economic views. He distinguishes three types of capitalism. One is state sponsored, a brutal form of “crony capitalism” that benefits only a few and fails to spread the wealth among the many. We find this type in Russia, China and, as Bannon pointedly adds, Argentina, the homeland of Pope Francis, who has known only this corrupt form of capitalism.

Bannon also distinguishes what he calls “Ayn Rand or the Objectivist School of libertarian capitalism. This type, which is operative in the United States today, has lost its Judeo-Christian soul to the process of secularization. It coddles the wealthy while objectifying working class people, treating them like commodities. This is the capitalism that robbed his father of the fruits of his hard labor. Bannon is especially incensed that the greedy Wall Street capitalists who caused the 2008 recession were not seriously hurt financially, due to the government bailout, and not one of them was ever convicted of a crime or even charged. Bannon blames the corruption of our capitalistic system, in part, on baby boomers: “the most spoiled, most self-centered, most narcissistic generation the country’s ever produced,” who enjoyed the good life thanks to the hard work and sacrifices of their parents only to cast off their fundamental values of self-sacrifice for the good of others. Reflecting on Bannon’s analysis, we can find echoes of Pope Francis, who insists that economic systems must serve all the people and not the few, and has stated that “inequality is the root of social evil.”

According to Bannon, there is also a benign form of “entrepreneurial capitalism” that helped lift us out of “the barbarism” of the twentieth century and that distributed wealth, reducing poverty and making a decent life possible for people like his father. This positive version of capitalism is driven by the values of the Judeo-Christian tradition, which celebrates justice for all. In this regard, Bannon explicitly praised the Acton Institute, established in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1990 by Fr. Robert Sirico who has been outspoken in his criticism of what he considers the naive and provincial economic views of Pope Francis. For Bannon, a capitalistic system is benign if it avoids a cozy relationship with government and spreads wealth among working class people. He is convinced that we can reform our system by promoting ”economic nationalism,” which recognizes that the United States is not just part of some open global market place “but is a nation with a culture and a reason for being.” His response to globalization is to promote a new American tribalism which rejects both multi-national trade agreements, especially NAFTA and TPP, and open immigration policies while promoting good jobs for U.S. citizens. He is critical of “Silicon Valley progressive plutocrats” who hire so many Asian workers to the detriment of Americans. These plutocrats are, according to Bannon, members of the “party of Devos” (named after the Swiss ski resort which hosts an annual meeting of wealthy influential individuals) who have ruined our capitalistic system by turning it into a socialist globalized economy.

Pope Francis agrees with Trump’s worry that globalization can harm local cultures and economies, but he disagrees that the answer is a new tribalism which excludes refugees and considers immigrants as part of the problem. We could say the pope favors an inclusive nationalism with a human face that welcomes the stranger. Bannon wants to build walls that exclude: Francis wants to build bridges that facilitate personal and cultural encounters.

Of great practical concern is Steve Bannon’s negative attitudes toward Islam, which, for him, is more of a political ideology than a religion, certainly not a religion of peace but a religion of submission, violence, and war. In 2008, he wrote a proposal for a never produced film “Great Satan,” which told the story of secret Muslim sleeper cells taking over the country, establishing oppressive Sharia law and creating “the Islamic States of America.” The proposed film was designed to warn the public about the dangers of subversive Muslim groups already in the country and to expose the folly of appeasing Islamic jihadists who want to destroy the Christian West.

The president’s chief strategist believes that we are already in “an outright war against jihadist Islamic fascism,” a “very brutal and bloody conflict” that threatens to eradicate Western civilization. Bannon points out not only the horrendous brutality of ISIS but also its sophisticated use of social media to recruit terrorists and expand their caliphate, thus “metastasizing” their war against the West into a global conflict.

Bannon is not sure if the Christian West has the spiritual energy or religious conviction to defeat a passionate and sophisticated version of Islamic fascism. We need, he argues, the kind of aggressive militant stand against Islam that Christians demonstrated at Tours in 732, when Charles Martel defeated the Umayya Caliphate, preventing further Muslim advances in Europe.

It is possible to detect an apocalyptic ideology in Bannon’s view of the war against Islam, which sees us moving toward a final decisive battle between good and evil. Bannon, an avid reader, was intrigued by a book published in 1997 by William Strauss and Neal Howe entitled *The Fourth Turning*, which proposed an 80-year cyclical view of modern history with recurring patterns. Each cycle includes a fourth turning which involves a war; for example, the Civil War and WWII. Bannon interpreted this cyclical theory, which is contested by many scholars, to indicate that the coming decisive war between the Christian West and the Muslim East is coming soon and that it will usher in a new age.

Oddly, Bannon’s apocalyptic viewpoint is shared by ISIS leaders, who believe we are moving toward a final battle between the Islamic caliphate and the Christian West called the “armies of Rome.” In one of several versions, Islam will achieve a great victory over the Christian world in a major battle in Dabiq near Allepo, leading to the expansion of the Islamic caliphate. But then an anti-Messiah figure will appear, wiping out large numbers of Muslim warriors, leaving 5,000 trapped in Jerusalem. At that point, Jesus, revered by Muslims as a great prophet who was taken to heaven by Allah, reappears to deliver the final victory to Islam. Unfortunately, ISIS can use Bannon’s worldview to support their contention that Christians hate Muslims and to recruit warriors for the great battle against the West.

Pope Francis represents a very different outlook on the Islamic religion and Muslim believers. In accord with Vatican II, the pope sees Islam as a vehicle of truth and goodness. As members of the Abrahamic family, “Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters.” In his apostolic exhortation “The Joy of the Gospel” Francis makes this crucial statement: “Faced with disconcerting episodes of violent fundamentalism, our respect for the true followers of Islam should lead us to avoid hateful generalizations, for authentic Islam and the proper reading of the Quran are opposed to every form of violence” (n253). More positively, the pope said in another place that Muslims “believe that no one can place a limit on divine mercy” – a faith conviction dear to his own heart.

The pope does not accept an apocalyptic ideology that we are headed toward a final confrontation with the Muslim world. Although he has consistently denounced violence and terrorism wherever it exists, Francis insists that we are not at war with Islam now nor is a future war between the Muslim East and Christian West inevitable. Our real challenge is to engage the world religions in dialogue and collaboration in the great cause of justice and peace.

Through symbolic actions, Francis has modelled this approach: washing the feet of a Muslim girl as part of a Holy Thursday service; bringing three Muslim refugee families from the Greek Island of Lesbos to the Vatican; and developing a relationship with Ahmad el-Tayeb, the grand imam of al-Azhar, the most prestigious Sunni Center of learning in Cairo, by hosting him at the Vatican and visiting him in Cairo.

In Steve Bannon’s worldview, Islam is a political ideology or a religion of violence; Muslims are the enemy; and war is inevitable. For Pope Francis, Islam is a source of grace; Muslims are our brothers and sisters; and global peace is dependent on Christian-Muslim cooperation. As a close advisor to President Trump, Bannon has immense direct influence on policies that affect Muslims. On the other hand, as the head of a transnational church, Pope Francis exercises an indirect spiritual influence, encouraging Christians to examine their attitudes toward Islam in the light of the Gospel and church teaching, especially Vatican II.