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“From this day forward it is going to be only America First, America First.” Thus did Donald Trump enunciate a major theme of his presidency in his Inaugural Address. He went on to declare: “We will follow two simple rules: Buy American and Hire American,” adding “Every decision on trade, on taxes, on immigration, on foreign affairs will be made to benefit American workers and American families.” Presenting himself as President of the United States and not President of the whole world, Trump insisted that “a nation exists to serve its citizens,” and called for a “new patriotism” to deal with the “American carnage” of widespread crime, decaying infrastructure, failing schools and shuttered factories.

During the campaign, candidate Trump introduced his America First theme in the context of our disastrous intervention of Iraq and his promise to undo the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). The theme resonated with voters who felt abandoned by the government and victimized by unfair trade policies.

Since his election, Trump has attempted to implement his American First strategy by a series of executive decisions and orders: placing a travel ban on Syrian refugees and citizens of some Muslim majority countries; lifting Obama EPA regulations to provide jobs in the coal mining industry; withdrawing from TPP; requiring the use of American companies and resources on federal projects; placing a tariff on Canadian lumber; refusing the Italian request to support Tripoli government in Libya; and repeating the promise to build a wall on our southern border with Mexico.

The isolationist thrust of the America First policy ran into the realities of our globalized world when the Syrian government used chemical weapons to kill more than 80 of its own innocent citizens and President Trump was confronted with videos of dying children. In retaliation, the President ordered an April 6 attack on a Syrian airbase, which unleashed 50 Tomahawk cruise missiles on specific targets on the base. In his comments, the President expressed the hope “that as long as America stands for justice, that peace and harmony will in the end prevail.”

Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer insisted that the missile attack had important ramifications: resetting Trump’s entire foreign policy; reasserting America’s stake in the Syrian civil war; overriding the constraints of the America First policy; restoring our traditional post WWII engagement with the world; and suggesting the isolationism of Steve Bannon, at least for now, is losing ground to the more traditional approach of Defense Secretary James Mattis and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster. Whether Krauthammer is right about the radical significance of our missile strike on the Syrian airfield remains to be seen. It is clear, however, that the military threats posed by ISIS and North Korea demand the attention of the administration and prevent the America First policy from becoming a total isolationism.

The Trump policy has received serious criticism from generally conservative publications. *U.S. News and World Report* insists that it is a mistake to turn inward in our “ever more connected world.” Given the threats posed by Russian and Chinese aggression, we should maintain our traditional role of “defending freedom and promoting democracy.” Promoting free market economies around the globe creates more American jobs, and supporting democratic regimes makes America safer. *The* *Economist* claims the policy plays into the hands of Putin by weakening institutions that support a humane world order. By rejecting the enlightened patriotism of previous presidents, Trump makes it harder to control regional conflicts and makes us more vulnerable to other nationalistic movements around the world. *Fortune* magazine warns that the Trump policy will hand world economic leadership to China, which embraces globalization and is serious about controlling global warming. *National* *Review* ran an article by Jonah Goldberg who argues the Trump policy effectively replaces an aspirational notion of American exceptionalism that seeks liberty and justice for all with “an identity” notion of exceptionalism based on actual economic growth and restricted immigration.

*National* *Review* also published an article by Michael Barone which defends Trump’s America First policy against the “cosmopolitan elites” who, like President Obama, think of themselves as citizens of the world and feel an obligation to help better mankind. Barone’s fundamental argument is that the political and journalistic elites are out of touch with most Americans and that Trump does reflect the view of the majority who want greater emphasis on distinctively American interests. A *Politico* poll does indicate that most Americans support the America First idea, with favorable ratings of 65% for Trump’s Inaugural Address and 61% for buy and hire American. Furthermore, Barone points out that nationalism is not opposed to human rights and that it can overcome polarization and bring people together, although he offers no concrete evidence that this is actually happening.

It is important for Christians, those who voted for Trump and those who did not, to evaluate policies of the President from a faith perspective. The virtue of patriotism inclines us to participate in the political process, to make judgments about public policy proposals and to vote wisely. Political theology initiates a mutually critical conversation between elements of the Christian tradition and contemporary issues. Let us examine the America First theme from the perspective of a theology of the Holy Spirit, which theologians call pneumatology.

Cardinal Walter Kasper has called the Holy Spirit the “Cinderella” of Western Christian spirituality, suggesting the Spirit is hard at work behind the scenes, unnoticed and unappreciated. Many Christians pray to God the Father through the Son with little conscious attention to the Holy Spirit. The Charismatic Movement, which began at Duquesne University in 1967, has given greater prominence to the gifts of the Spirit in popular piety. Nevertheless, pneumatology remains underdeveloped in the Catholic world as well as in the mainline Protestant Churches.

The second chapter of Luke’s Acts of the Apostles provides a solid starting point for reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit. Before his ascension to the Father, Jesus told his disciples that they would be baptized by the Holy Spirt, empowering them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. On the feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Passover, when devout Jews returned to Jerusalem to celebrate their covenant with God, the Holy Spirit, symbolized by a strong driving wind and tongues of fire, descended upon the disciples and they began to speak in foreign tongues and to make bold proclamation as the Spirit prompted them. The large crowd from all over the known world was amazed because each one heard the disciples in their own language recounting the marvels God had accomplished. The previously fearful disciples spoke with such bold enthusiasm that a few sneered that they had too much new wine. Peter arose and assured the crowd they were not drunk because it was only 9:00 a.m. He went on to proclaim that the prophecy of Joel was being fulfilled that God would pour out a portion of the divine spirit on all mankind. Jesus, who received the Holy Spirit from the Father at his baptism, performed wondrous signs and was crucified by pagans. But God raised him to life, and exalted him at his right hand, enabling him to pour out his Spirit on us. Some three thousand persons accepted Peter’s message and were baptized. Presenting an ideal picture of the early Christian community, Luke tells us they lived in harmony, praying and breaking bread together, and sharing their goods so that no one was in need.

This key passage from Acts suggests that the Holy Spirit propels and draws the human family toward inclusive unity and a communion of love. The Spirit is given not just to a privileged group but is poured out on all flesh, on all human beings. As the point of contact between God and humanity, the Spirit challenges all forms of exclusion and promotes mutual understanding and collaboration. Spirit language facilitates dialogue among the world religions and diverse cultures. Reflection on the personal presence of the Holy Spirit sharpens our perception of bias, prejudice, and ignorance that foster divisions, factions and polarization. As temples of the Holy Spirit, we are called to develop the virtue of solidarity, which inclines us to recognize the same Spirit in others, to form communities of care, and to promote the common good of the entire human population. Contemporary pneumatology emphasizes the practice of hospitality, which welcomes the stranger, values table fellowship, encourages dialogue with others, and embraces refugees. The eyes of Christian faith detect the work of the Holy Spirit when the walls of exclusion are transformed into bridges of inclusion, bringing people together in communities of mutual respect and care.

This pneumatological lens enables us to make nuanced judgments about President Trump’s America First slogan. Positively, it could prompt deeper reflection on our national aspiration to promote freedom, equality and justice. It could act as a restraint on the temptation to think of ourselves as the world’s policeman, to use our military might indiscriminately, and to act on the illusion that we can force the development of democracy in Muslim countries. It could encourage an honest examination of the meaning and value of American exceptionalism. It could alert us to the destructive power of globalization to overwhelm the distinctive truth, goodness and beauty found in nation states and local cultures.

At the same time, pneumatology helps us detect the dangers actually operating in the administration’s America First policy. The travel bans are perceived by many, including Federal judges, as efforts to prevent Muslims from entering the country. The ban on Syrian refugees prevents us from meeting our moral responsibility to join other countries in dealing with a humanitarian crisis of immense proportions. The proposed wall on our southern border symbolizes, for many, an exclusionary outlook at odds with Christian values. The administration’s attempt to roll back EPA regulations designed to reduce our carbon output fails to take into account the dangers of climate change that threaten the human family, especially the poor and vulnerable.

An examination of the America First theme with the theology of the Holy Spirit in mind highlights the responsibility of Christians to fight all forms of bias and prejudice. Statistics gathered by police departments and other agencies show a significant increase in hate crimes since the election of President Trump. New York, for example, reports an 86% increase in reported anti-Semitic incidents in the first three months of 2017 compared to the previous year. A Quinnipiac poll indicates that nearly two-thirds of U.S voters say hatred and prejudice in the U.S. have risen since the election of President Trump. To what degree, if any, the specific rhetoric of America First contributes to bigotry is difficult to determine. Trump supporters point out that the President has spoken out against hatred and prejudice and that he is definitely not anti-Semitic since his daughter Ivanka is a convert to Judaism. On the other hand, critics of the President claim that his exclusionary rhetoric has attracted white supremacist groups and has emboldened individuals to express their prejudices more openly and publicly. Without determining the causal dynamics, it is clear that Christian communities have a moral responsibility to resist the growing cancer of white nationalism that threatens the health of our society. The Holy Spirit, who propels and draws the human family toward inclusive community, empowers each one of us to do our important, if limited, part to combat specific forms of prejudice when they invade our familiar world and to support individual victims who cross our path.