

Supernatural forces not at work in politics

Mike Huckabee has a lot to learn about critical thinking. Based on his latest speech at Liberty University, he is not fit to be president.

Gov. Huckabee analyzed his victory in the Iowa caucuses with remarks that display an appalling lack of understanding of what analyzing something actually requires. He said "There's only one explanation for it, and it's not a human one."

Sorry Huck, but that is incorrect. There are lots of explanations. Some are more likely than others, but they are all quite human. You could try "Most of the voters who went to the polls were evangelical Christians." Or maybe, "More people liked me best." Why exactly are supernatural forces required here?

Does Huckabee want us to believe that God is endorsing his candidacy? Surely even the good pastor wouldn't go that far. Is he saying that since people were praying for him to win Iowa, God answered their prayers? If so, what exactly will he say when other Republican candidates win primaries? Will God have answered their prayers, too?

It's not unusual for less thoughtful people to believe supernatural forces are at work in politics. Evangelical leader Charles Colson called the 2000 presidential election "miraculous deliverance." Leading Baptist preacher Richard Land opined "God has clearly shown America his blessings. If Kerry had won, it would have proved God was cursing the United States."

More recently, one candidate for state office in the South blamed his defeat on Satan. And after a creationist-dominated school board was thrown out in a landslide election, Pat Robertson told his TV audience that the city of Dover had "voted God out." According to Robertson, they forfeited the right to call on God in the future.

It's a free country. People such as Colson, Land and Dobson have a right to their views. So does Huckabee. What Huckabee does not have is a free pass to let his claims of presidential suitability go unchallenged.

Stating that supernatural forces are "the only explanation" for any phenomenon, let alone a poll surge, is an inappropriate statement for a presidential candidate to make. Not because it is a statement of deep faith, but because it is a statement of profound ignorance.



OPINION
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Thoughtful scholars of philosophy and religion have long understood that the supernatural cannot be an "explanation" for anything. That is because an explanation is something that would be wrong if things were otherwise. That's what it means to explain something.

This essential feature of a true explanation gets lost when people debate topics they are passionate about (such as politics and religion). Supernatural causes don't qualify as explanations because no state of affairs could ever rule them out. That doesn't make supernatural forces impossible. It just means they can't be called "explanations."

Think about what could happen with a president who thinks supernatural forces can explain things, or even worse decides they are the "only" explanation. If democracies in the Middle East continue to put anti-American Islamic parties in power, what should the president do? Do you want a president who will ask his Middle East experts in the State Department what's going on? Or do you want a president who is sure the "only" explanation is the hand of Satan?

Most religions recognize a thoughtful difference between the political and the spiritual. Politics is a dirty, pragmatic business that is all too human in origin. So far, the supernatural hasn't been necessary to explain it. I would suggest that it is never likely to be.

One of the most compelling advantages of our Constitution and our separation of church and state is precisely how it encourages pragmatic approaches to politics. Has anyone noticed how fortunate America has been in that, compared to Europe, we have avoided religious wars? How likely is that to continue if supernatural explanations are allowed a foothold in American politics?

Speculating on the role of supernatural forces in the world is fine if you want to be a preacher or theologian.

But Huckabee is not running for pastor in chief. He is seeking to become the most powerful person in the world: The president of the United States. Under those circumstances, assigning supernatural causes to natural effects is not an asset. It is a horrible liability.

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