



Values Voters and Ron Paul

Ron Paul just scored another victory in his campaign for the presidency. Just last year, the Texas congressman barely even registered in the Values Voters Summit straw poll. This year, however, with 37 percent of the vote, he didn't just walk away with it; he left second place contestant Herman Cain in the dust. With 23 percent of voters backing the latter, Paul beat Cain by a full 14 percentage points.



Long time self-avowed "social conservative" Senator Rick Santorum came in at third place with 16 percent.

This is as ironic a twist of events as it must be exasperating for Santorum: It is Santorum, most definitely *not* Paul, who is supposed to be "the values voters'" candidate. In fact, to hear the former Pennsylvania Senator tell it — and he spares no occasion to tell it — "values voters" *are* his main body of support. If the media was as interested in marginalizing Santorum as they are in doing the same to Paul, "values voters" would be known simply as "Santorum people." Yet Paul defeated Santorum not only among the latter's "people"; he defeated him by a vast margin.

Even as I write this, already the masters of GOP spin are laboring inexhaustibly to reduce the significance of Paul's achievement. It isn't, though, that they are diligently in search of ever more ingenious ways by which they can explain *away* Paul's viability. There are *no* ingenuous explanations in the coming to this effect. Moreover, there aren't even many *disingenuous* explanations. Rather, there are essentially *two* strategies of which Paul's detractors continually avail themselves to dismiss him: Either his latest accomplishment, whatever it may be, is ultimately of no importance, they tell us, or else it is attributable solely to his fellow cultists, those peculiar "Paul people." Yet in spite of the staleness of this script, Republican Party apologists are reciting it on cue this weekend as they try once again to diminish Paul.

Their protestations to the contrary aside, though Paul's showing in this most recent poll promises to neither break nor make his campaign, it is anything but insignificant.

To reiterate, Paul has never been known for his success at attracting the vote of the so-called "values voter." There can be no question that neither Paul's competitors, such as Santorum, nor those GOP pundits, such as Bill Bennett, who have long regarded themselves as voices of "social conservatism," expected Paul to have done well in this most recent straw poll, not to mention come in first place. If this straw poll is any indication of a new trend — and you can rest assured that it would most certainly be unanimously regarded as such by the "conservative media" if it was any other candidate but Paul under discussion — then we can only conclude that "values voters" are now "Paul people!"

This brings me to the second consideration.

As *everyone* now knows, Herman Cain won the Florida Straw Poll a few weeks back. Prior to this *one* achievement, though, Cain's single digit poll numbers prevented him from receiving much media



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coverage. Since then, however, a GOP-friendly media all too eager to catapult a black candidate into the stratosphere has exploited Cain's success in Florida to just that end. Now, he comes in *second* in the Values Voters Summit poll *behind* Paul and *this* event the same media figures appropriate to fuel the momentum that *they* created for Cain initially.

Paul, in stark contrast, from the outset of the presidential primaries has been doing appreciably better than Cain and, for that matter, every other candidate except for the two media-selected frontrunners — *in spite of* being ignored and dismissed by those entrusted with the task of providing honest coverage of events. And now, the one group of GOP constituents that was supposed to lie far beyond Paul's grasp, the "values voters," have swung solidly behind him.

Paul must regularly contend with a hostile, indeed, an unjust, "conservative media." And yet he still maintains a roughly third place showing in the polls. Granted, now he is slightly behind Cain, whose poll numbers have "soared" since Florida. But, again, the latter's poll numbers have "soared" precisely because his supporters in "conservative media" continually tell us about his "soaring" poll numbers. For Paul, they reserve unqualified contempt; but still, the good doctor's standing remains the envy of most of his rivals.

Finally, that Paul appealed to the majority of "values voters" participating in their "summit's" straw poll just might be due to the growing recognition that his ideas are not only *constitutional*, but they are as well *Christian*. The importance of this insight can't be overstated.

The Santorums and Bennetts of our generation have long promoted the idea that the federal government must be enlisted in the service of "Judeo-Christian" morality. They may very well believe this. However, in appealing to "values voters" — the vast majority of whom are Christians — Paul invites his supporters to revisit a feature of their tradition, an idea rooted in the teaching of Christ to which the rise of the dominance of our federal government and the utopian politics with which this has been coupled have all but blinded them.

This is the idea that the realms of politics and religion — "Caesar" and God, or as Augustine put it, "the City of Man" and "the City of God" — though they may and often do overlap, are nevertheless mutually distinct. Those who would conflate the two aren't just fools; they are *blasphemers*. With those few simple words — "Give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God" — Jesus opened an unbridgeable chasm between Christianity, on the one hand, and utopian politics on the other. Indeed, from the apostle Paul to Augustine and throughout even the medieval period, for the duration of their pre-modern history, Christians knew this well. However, the emergence of centralized governments and the unprecedented power over which they acquired a monopoly forced this old Christian concept to the periphery.

Perhaps Paul's victory at the Values Voters Summit signals its resurrection.



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