

The Vote

by Todd Maupin

It was a day in August, a slow news day. Most people were thinking about where they could still go for vacation or about what they might do for Halloween. And then came the news of a lifetime. Verily, the news of an eternity.

God had decided to resign. Not even two weeks notice. He just resigned. Point blank. "My heart's not in it anymore. I want to work on other projects," he said. This was all he said. And yes, he was a he. Not because a woman could not have done his job just as well or better, but just because, back when he started, gender was not a thing and being male was just what came easier.

Most people were shocked when the news broke. They were sitting around the campfire, around the dinner table, on a beach, at a desk, or just in front of the television at home. No matter where they were, they were all staring intently at their phones as they always did. "God has resigned." This was the notification that upended the world. The notification that was impossible to dismiss. There were some who were on flights at the time, and when they landed, the passengers erupted into a collective gasp.

The news was met with shock, disbelief, panic, disappointment, indifference, curiosity, excitement, trepidation, and many other words that mean more or less the same thing as these words. The atheists and agnostics who had never believed in a supreme being were skeptical. How could someone who did not exist resign? If he always existed and has now resigned, was it too late to start believing? Journey's greatest hit from 1981 shot to the top of the charts again.

Once the news settled to the extent that it could, everyone wondered what to do next. The post could just not remain vacant,

now could it? We could not soldier on without a general to lead us. Someone had been in the job since the dawn of time, pulling strings, guiding us, shuffling weather and nature around, creating havoc, moving mountains, and just exercising his will as he saw fit. Our lives could not just proceed unsupervised, could they?

Some of our terrestrial leaders wanted to just let things stand and see how it went. Automation had claimed plenty of jobs so why not one more? Granted, being God was more complicated than working in a factory in Indiana, but most of us had never done that either. What more did we know about injecting dog food into cans that we did about whatever God did up there?

The lure of having power over time and space and all things great and small was just too strong a temptation to be ignored. It was decided that there would have to be a vote to choose our next god. The first argument was whether God should be capitalized or not. No one could agree so it was decided to eliminate this quandary by always using CAPS HENCEFORTH AND FOREVERMORE.

NO ONE LIKED THIS, BUT WE ALL BECAME ACCUSTOMED TO IT EVENTUALLY. THE GERMANS WERE INITIALLY THE MOST UPSET. "HOW WILL WE KNOW WHICH WORDS ARE NOUNS?" THEY ASKED BITTERLY. "JUST LEARN GRAMMAR ASAP," THEY WERE TOLD, "THE REST OF US ARE TRYING TO FIGURE OUT ACRONYMS. TTYL." EVERYONE USING NON-LATIN SCRIPTS JUST REMAINED SILENT AND SMUG.

IT WAS DECIDED THAT THE ELECTION FOR A NEW GOD WOULD BE HELD ON NEW YEAR'S DAY ACCORDING TO THE GREGORIAN CALENDAR. BILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO DO NOT USE THIS CALENDAR OBJECTED, BUT EVENTUALLY RELENDED BECAUSE THEY HAD NOTHING ELSE GOING ON THAT DAY.

THE NCAA PUT UP A STRONGER FIGHT. WHAT KIND OF RATINGS WOULD THERE BE FOR BOWL GAMES IF PEOPLE WERE OUT VOTING FOR GOD? LSU, UCLA, USC, UAB-BIRMINGHAM, OR GOD? WHO WOULD BE FAVORED IN SUCH A MATCHUP? SUPERMARKET OWNERS SALIVATED AT THE THOUGHT OF HOW MANY MORE NACHOS THEY MIGHT SELL FOR THE OCCASION.

WHEN THE CANDIDATES STARTED COMING FORWARD, RULES AND REQUIREMENTS HAD TO BE ESTABLISHED. CANDIDATES HAD TO BE ALIVE ON VOTING DAY. IT SEEMED SILLY BUT CAMPAIGNS HAD ALREADY STARTED FOR GANDHI, MOTHER THERESA, A SLEW OF FORMER POPES, MUHAMMAD - PEACE AND PRAYERS BE UPON HIM, BUDDHA, EX-CHAIRMAN MAO, LINCOLN, JFK, AND, OF COURSE, JESUS CHRIST. THIS ULTIMATE WAS A DIFFICULT SELL IN THE FIRST PLACE. "HE ALREADY SACRIFICED HIMSELF FOR US ONCE. DO YOU THINK HE WOULD WANT TO DO IT AGAIN?" SOME TALKING HEAD ARGUED.

THE CRITERION OF HAVING ONLY LIVING CANDIDATES LEVELED THE PLAYING FIELD CONSIDERABLY. IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER, THE BEFANA, VARIOUS IMAMS, AYATOLLAHS, RABBIS, THE CURRENT POPE, AND MANY WORLD LEADERS BECAME FRONT-RUNNERS. ALSO, SOME SHAMEN ABOUT WHOM MOST OF THE WORLD WAS TOO IGNORANT TO KNOW OF THEIR EXISTENCE OR WHAT THEY REPRESENTED. THANKFULLY, THE CAMPAIGNS OF MUSK, JORDAN, AND ZUCKERBERG NEVER GAINED TRACTION. "JUST LOOK HOW THEY HAVE RUN TWITTER, THE CHARLOTTE HORNETS, AND META INTO THE GROUND. DO YOU WE WANT THEM IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING?" SOMEONE ASKED. THE ANSWER WAS NO. NO, WE DID NOT.

THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT WAS NOT INTERESTED. "HE ALREADY BELIEVES THAT HE IS GOD," SAID SOMEONE IN HIS CIRCLE, IN HIS RED SQUARE. "AND WHO ARE WE TO ARGUE." SOME

POLITICAL SCIENCE EXPERT OFFERED HIS ANALYSIS: "THERE IS NO RASPUTIN TO DISPUTE THAT PUTIN."

MANY EXPECTED AND WANTED THE DEVIL TO TAKE A STAB AT TAKING OVER FOR HIS ETERNAL NEMESIS. OLD SCRATCH WAS A SCRATCH, HOWEVER. "I'VE GOT ENOUGH HEAT ON ME ALREADY, I DON'T NEED TO TAKE ON ANY OF THAT EXTRA NONSENSE," HE EXPLAINED. NEVERTHELESS, HE DID MAKE HIMSELF AVAILABLE FOR POTENTIAL DEALS AND PACTS WITH PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES AND PACS.

GRETA ALSO DECIDED THAT THE JOB WAS NOT FOR HER. "THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IS NOT RIGHT. I AM NOT COMFORTABLE WITH THE ENVIRONMENT. BUT THANKS FOR ASKING." WE THANKED HER, BUT WERE RELIEVED. "GRETA, WE APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN. WE ALWAYS HAVE. PLEASE CONTINUE GOING TO COLLEGE AND COME UP WITH SOME SOLUTIONS," WE ADVISED. NO ONE REMEMBERED ASKING HER.

AND SO, THE CAMPAIGNS STARTED, THE STUMPING BEGAN, AND EVERYWHERE PEOPLE LOOKED, LISTENED, AND SCROLLED, THERE WERE ADVERTISEMENTS ASKING THEM TO VOTE FOR THE CANDIDATES ASPIRING TO BE THE NEXT GOD. ALL WORSHIP SERVICES WERE HIJACKED BY CAMPAIGNS AND BECAME RALLIES FOR RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS' FAVORITES TO ASSUME THE THRONE IN THE CLOUDS OR WHEREVER THEY WOULD SIT AND RULE. OR STAND. GOD COULD HAVE A STANDING DESK IF THAT WAS WHAT HE, SHE, OR THEY WANTED.

AS THE WEEKS PASSED, THE RANKS OF CANDIDATES NARROWED AS MANY BOWED OUT. DEBATES THAT WERE HELD VIRTUALLY TRANSPIRED AS SMOOTHLY AS ANY VIRTUAL EVENT. THESE WERE JUST A SERIES OF GLITCH-RIDDEN SIMULTANEOUS INTERRUPTIONS ON A GLOBAL SCALE THAT

NEVER REALLY SETTLED ANYTHING. CANDIDATES MADE ALL SORTS OF PROMISES WHICH HAD NO GUARANTEE OF EVER BEING FULFILLED, EVEN MORE SO THAN PROMISES MADE DURING THE COURSE OF TERRESTRIAL ELECTION CAMPAIGNS. NO ONE REALLY KNEW TO WHAT LEVEL THE NEW GOD WOULD BE EMPOWERED. LIKE MOST CAMPAIGNS, MOST PEOPLE JUST WANTED IT TO BE OVER.

AFTER THANKSGIVING, DECEMBER ARRIVED. THE TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY SONGS, CAROLS, AND ANTHEMS SOUNDED HOLLOW WITHOUT A GOD IN THE UNIVERSE FOR THE FESTIVE MUSICAL VERSES. FOR A TIME, SANTA CLAUS HAD MULLED A RUN FOR THE HIGHER POST. BUT IN BETWEEN MULLED WINE AND MULLED ALE, HE DECIDED HE WOULD RATHER RETAIN HIS CURRENT JOB. AND WHO COULD BLAME HIM? HE EXPLAINED HIS RATIONALE IN A PREPARED STATEMENT. "I HAD BEEN TOYING WITH THE IDEA OF RUNNING FOR GOD, BUT I HAVE DECIDED AGAINST IT. I LIKE WORKING JUST ONE DAY PER YEAR AND BEING PAID IN COOKIES AND MILK. AND HONESTLY, I DON'T WANT TO DROP WHAT I AM DOING EVERYTIME SOMEONE SNEEZES."

THAT FINAL MONTH AHEAD OF THE VOTE WAS QUICKLY CONSUMED BY CONSUMERS AND THOSE GATHERING FOR A HOLIDAY MEAL. THE CANDIDATES LEFT STANDING WERE A LACKLUSTER BUNCH THAT EXCITED NO ONE. IT WAS THEN THAT THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER EMERGED.

HE WAS MUCH LIKE THAT BENEVOLENT, WISE, AND WIZENED CHARACTER WHO APPEARS IN THE THIRD ACT OF MANY STEPHEN KING NOVELS. HIS EXACT ORIGINS AND INTENTS WERE UNKNOWN BUT THERE WAS JUST SOMETHING ABOUT HIM THAT INVITED TRUST AND ADMIRATION. WHEN HE SPOKE, HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY ELOQUENT. HIS IDEAS WERE NOT GRANDIOSE, OR EVEN VERY PRACTICAL. FOR SOMEONE WHO

COULD ASSUME CONTROL OF OUR ENLIGHTENMENT, HE WAS NOT EVEN ENLIGHTENING WHEN CLARIFYING SIMPLER CONCEPTS. AND YET, HE BECAME WHAT THE WORLD NEEDED: A FRONT-RUNNER.

WHY DO PEOPLE VOTE THE WAY THEY DO? THERE ARE ALL SORTS OF REASONS BUT FEW OF THEM ARE REMOTELY LOGICAL. WE CRAVE ORDER AND STRUCTURE AND WHEN WE FIND A ROUND PEG FOR AN EMPTY CIRCLE, WE WANT TO PUT IT THERE. AND SO, ON NEW YEAR'S DAY, THE WORLD'S MAJORITY CIRCLED THE NAME OF THIS LATE-COMER DARK HORSE CANDIDATE TO BE THE BRIGHT AND SHINING LIGHT OF THE WORLD FOR ALL ETERNITY. FOR ALL MANKIND.

THE RESULTS WERE NOT A SURPRISE. THE FINAL COUNT WAS NOT EVEN CLOSE. THERE WAS NO NEED FOR A RUNOFF. NO ONE CONTESTED THE OUTCOME. WE HAD A NEW GOD. IT HAD ALL HAPPENED IN RECORD TIME, WE SUPPOSED. NO ONE KNEW FOR SURE. MAYBE THE OLD GOD DID, BUT HIS WHEREABOUTS WERE UNKNOWN.

INAUGURATION DAY WAS SET FOR JANUARY 11. THERE WAS SOME INITIAL CONFUSION AS TO HOW THIS WOULD WORK. COULD WE SWEAR IN THE NEW GOD ON A BIBLE? SHOULDN'T HE BE HELD TO AN OATH BASED ON SOMETHING HIGHER THAN HIMSELF? NO ONE COULD THINK OF ANYTHING BETTER, SO IT WAS ULTIMATELY DECIDED TO USE FOUR BIBLES.

WHEN THE FATEFUL DAY ARRIVED, EVERYONE WANTED TO ATTEND, BUT THERE WAS NO VENUE LARGE ENOUGH FOR EVEN A FRACTION OF THE CROWD. ICELAND HAD BEEN CHOSEN AS THE LOCATION FOR THE SWEARING IN CEREMONY. THIS WAS ONLY BECAUSE THE LATEST DISCOUNT AIRLINE HAD OFFERED TO FLY EVERYONE THERE AT A REDUCED FARE. SO, A CROWD OF ABOUT A MILLION PEOPLE ASSEMBLED IN

REYKJAVIK, WHILE THE REST OF THE WORLD WATCHED ON LIVESTREAM.

THE NEW GOD WAS QUICKLY SWORN IN. HE HAD BEEN ASKED TO PREPARE AN INAUGURATION SPEECH. HE HAD BEEN RELUCTANT BUT EVENTUALLY YIELDED, REASONING THAT THIS MIGHT BE THE LAST EARTH-BOUND REQUEST MADE TO HIM. "THANK YOU ALL FOR CHOOSING ME TO BE GOD. I AM HONORED. AS MY FIRST OFFICIAL ACTION, I WOULD LIKE TO STOP WITH THIS ALL-CAPS LUNACY. IT HURTS MY EYES AND GIVES ME A HEADACHE."

That was it for the all caps, thank God. We never decided whether or not to use an uppercase G, but everyone was just so glad to be done with caps that we just forgot about this dilemma.

God went on to say a few more things. Some people clapped and cheered, not so much because he was saying anything impressive, but because they supposed this is what you do when a being of that magnitude takes the time to give a speech.

The end of the speech was when it happened. Some said it was a lightning bolt. Others described it as a more of a dark sphere. Many of us there among the crowd that day saw nothing. One moment, he was standing, shaking hands and giving high fives as he made his way down from the stage, and the next moment, he had collapsed. God was on the ground, motionless. Tailored just for the occasion, the new wrinkle-free suit had become the attire of a creased, crumpled, shriveled, and deceased man.

Our world was suddenly in turmoil, for the second time in six months. We had a new God, only to lose him immediately. We had not even selected a vice God. A lack of forethought was one of our vices. And so, we were left to our devices yet again. There was no

line of succession. There was no grassy knoll, no motorcade, no book repository, but there was mass confusion and turmoil.

The world leaders in attendance in Reykjavik gathered for a huddle. Unfortunately, none of them had any ideas on how to proceed. Fortunately, one of them had been unable to find a sitter and had brought a child along. It was this child, in the end, who helped everyone to understand. This child was one of those annoying know-it-all you are glad is not your kid, but, just the same, you cannot doubt the veracity of the smarmy precociousness on display.

“Before August, no one had ever seen God, nor knew for sure if he was up there, but the world still believed. How do we know that this guy” - the child pointed over at the lifeless god who was still lying where he fell because no one had dared to move him yet - “was not elevated to the heavens and that is where he is now?”

The flock without a shepherd looked sheepish. How had we ever expected that our new God would assume power?

“It's true,” said a world leader, later attributed as being the Prime Minister of The Gambia, “how did we expect to send him to up to wherever his offices are?”

The leader of Liechtenstein agreed. “Yes, maybe this is how the process works. None of us knows for sure, do we? Let's just assume that our new God is up there watching over us.”

Everyone nodded and that is what we decided to do. God bless us everyone.

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