



## Trump, sex and bad character

A couple of decades ago, John Major, then Prime Minister, launched a “Back to Basics” campaign. This argued that what the country needed to do was to go back to basics, with a strong moral backbone.

The fall-out was two fold. First, it gave licence to the media to point out the hypocrisy of this, by demonstrating that a string of cabinet members were having affairs, thus undermining the very family values that Major seemed to be espousing.

Second, it led to a new orthodoxy, that, actually, being good at governing had nothing to do with one’s sexual behaviour. Thus, Robin Cook’s extra marital affair with his secretary had no relevance to whether or not he was a good foreign secretary. In fact, history has tended to look on Cook as a moral person: the one man with a strong enough backbone to resign rather than be in a government that went to war with Iraq. His affair was a secondary thing: it could happen to anyone, after all.

This orthodoxy has been pretty secure until the last week. What we now know that Donald Trump has said about women and done to them turns out to be so ghastly (and probably criminal) that it seems that the orthodoxy doesn’t apply any more. Rather, even if you are a hard core Republican, you can’t face the prospect of voting for Trump as President, essentially because of his sexual immorality.

Sticking to the policies, even if you don’t agree with

them, you can see the appeal: small government, let us be free to do what we want, let us not mess around in countries far from us, let us get things done, even if it means upsetting a few people along the way... You could agree with all these things but still not end up voting for Trump, not because you don’t believe he’ll act on those policies given power, but because he gropes women and brags about it.

What has maybe changed in the last twenty years is our *definition* of sexual immorality. It was possible twenty years ago (just) to think that gay relationships were immoral; that view is very rare today. Going back further, forty years ago, being divorced was a reason for not being promoted in government. Absolutely no one would hold that to be true today.

But then twenty years ago, women might be expected to laugh off a man groping their breast, or patting them on the backside: that was just part of life, there was nothing much wrong about it. We don’t think that now.

What the public’s response to Trump’s behaviour has revealed is that we *are* still bothered by how people behave, outside of politics; it is still relevant to us if they are the type of person who is disgustingly lecherous. In the 90s, we thought that judgement about sexual morality was fading away. It hasn’t; it is just that the boundaries of right and wrong have changed.

*October 2016. Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read “Thought for the Train” at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*