Vice President Pence’s Insidious Rhetoric

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Vice President Pence is one of the most frustrating, slippery, obsequious and evasive political communicators I ever have studied as a scholar of rhetoric. He always has a moderating tone and never attacks the interviewer or his opponents. What I find interesting is how this obscures the rhetorical significance and impact of his discourse.

For example, after watching Pence last Sunday morning on several network news shows, as well as during the daily coronavirus briefings, it is clear that he will never answer important questions about testing, the lack of federal coordination and the President’s inflammatory messages—all matters of concern to the public.
Hence, while he “sounds” smooth, which is a pleasing and stark contrast to Trump, every answer—or should I say non-answer—he gives consistently turns into little more than praise for the President, misleading and false statements about how all is good and how the country is making far more progress than what the health experts and governors (both Republican and Democratic) say. Moreover, his delivery style makes it hard for interviewers to interrupt and stop him; the Vice President can talk non-stop without taking a breath, rendering it nearly impossible to question what he says.

In many ways, therefore, Pence’s discourse is more insidious and, yes, perhaps more worrisome and dangerous than the President’s. I know that sounds odd but it is something we carefully should consider. As a friend of mine noted: Pence’s delivery is un-Trump but his message is the same—the melody is different yet the lyrics are the same.

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