Voting and Christian Citizenship

Applying a biblical worldview to your voting choices is an important part of your role as a citizen. Byron Barlowe looks at how Christians should exercise their right to vote and make biblically informed decisions in the voting booth.

Summary

It is both a sacred duty and privilege for Christians to serve as citizens who salt (preserve) and light (illumine) our culture. Americans have inherited a government system based solidly on a biblical worldview, but one that also tolerates and protects other viewpoints. Truly humble, tolerant political engagement does not equal spiritual compromise. Christians found out how seductive political power can be in the 1980s and need to resist the pull of compromise. God doesn't take sides; we need to make sure we're on His side.



Although a strongly biblical candidate may be ideal, that's not often a realistic option. Instead, we must use our sanctified minds to prayerfully choose between imperfect candidates—who are *not*, after all, seeking *pastoral* positions. Believers have a duty to vote our values. How else would we vote? Our calling: not to force those values on others in a free society, but to honor the privileges of citizenship, including legitimate political influence, and to vote our convictions.

Christian Citizenship: A Duty and Privilege

One pundit wrote fifteen months before the 2008 election, "If you're not already weary of the 2008 presidential campaign . . . you must be living in a cave…. The campaign began the day after the 2004 election, making this the first non-stop presidential campaign in history. The media, desperate to sustain interest in the horse race, pursue such earth-shattering stories as: 'Which candidate owns the most pets?'"{1}

Then, a new kind of Internet-age debate featured Democratic presidential candidates responding to home-grown videos posted to *YouTube.com* by members of the public. Among them: two Tennesseans dressed like hillbillies and a snowman, ostensibly concerned about global warming!

Hard to take politics seriously given all of the theater, isn't it? But political engagement—including voting—is a God-given, blood-bought right that Christians must take seriously. We are called by the Lord Jesus to be preserving salt and illuminating light in our culture. And it's not just presidential races that matter.

Kerby Anderson, in an article entitled "Politics and Religion," wrote, "Christian obedience goes beyond calling for spiritual renewal. We have often failed to ask the question, 'What do we do if hearts are not changed?' Because government is ordained of God, we need to consider ways to legitimately use governmental power. Christians have a high stake in making sure government acts justly and makes decisions that provide maximum freedom for the furtherance of the gospel."{2} Some believe we have a *cultural mandate* to redeem not only men's souls, but the works of culture including politics.

Yet, Christians remain on the sidelines in alarming numbers.

According to one poll before the 2004 elections, “only a third of evangelical Christians—those who ought to be most concerned with moral values—[said they would] actually vote.” But the Bible says a lot about believers’ duties as citizens. “When Moses commanded the Israelites to appoint God-fearing leaders, he wasn’t just talking to a handful of citizens who felt like getting involved…. And modern Christians are under the same obligation to choose leaders who love justice…. Today, in our modern democracy, free citizens act as God’s agents for choosing leaders, and we do it by voting.”{3}

As believers, we’re citizens of two kingdoms: one temporal and earthly, the other eternal and heavenly. We are called to participate in both the culture and politics of The City of Man, as this world was called by Augustine, while primarily focusing on the Kingdom of God.

The longevity and value of these dual kingdoms ought to serve as crucial guides to how invested we become in them. Eternal issues matter more than temporal ones. To allow politics and social issues to overtake our commitments to the everlasting is to risk idolatry, while losing ground in both realms.

Flipping the usual focus of candidates’ qualifications onto the electorate, one Christian columnist wrote, “Those who make critical decisions for America (its voters, I mean) should come up to some minimal standards before leaving the house on Election Day. Voters should be able to tell the difference between worldviews…. Voters should be free of regionalism and other types of ‘group-think’…. Vocations, unions, ethnic groups and age groups that vote in lockstep are not behaving as free people. Citizens whose consciences are ruled by others should not govern a free nation… Voters should value their vote, but not sell it.” {4}

It didn’t take Albert Einstein to say it, but he did say “It is the duty of every citizen according to his best capacities to give validity to his convictions in political affairs.”{5}

Chuck Colson, convicted Watergate felon, said, “All you have to do is lose the right to vote once, and you would never again find any excuse for not going into the voting booth…. Be a good citizen: Exercise the greatest right a free people have [*sic*].”{6}

God’s will and Kingdom will not be thwarted, and *we* cannot ultimately control outcomes, even as a voting bloc. As Christian citizens in America, we need to offer due diligence in voting and other political activities, trust God with the results, and keep spiritual concerns first.

Puritan Roots, Pluralism & Practical Politics

In 2007, for the first time a Hindu priest opened Senate deliberations with prayer. I asked a group of Christian homeschool parents gathered to discuss America’s political system if they could justify forbidding this, and no one could answer satisfactorily. Pluralism—when a culture supports various ethnic backgrounds, religions and political views—is a practical and, understood correctly, appropriate reality.

Americans—believers and non-believers alike—have inherited a system of governance based solidly on the Bible, but allowing for a plurality of beliefs or even unbelief. The Puritans who first colonized this land “saw themselves as the new Israel, an elect people.”{7}

The architects of our political arrangement, many of them professing Christians, were deeply influenced by the Puritan’s positive cultural impact and the Scriptures to which they appealed. Daniel Webster said, “Our ancestors established their system of government on morality and religious sentiment.”{8} John Quincy Adams said, “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this: it connected in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government with the

principles of Christianity." George Washington, a devoted Christian, left room for others: "While just government protects all in their religious rights, true religion affords to government its surest support."{9}

Probe's *Mind Games* curriculum points out the realism of the founders in mitigating the imperfections of people even as they self-rule. "Again, we can see the genius of the American system. Madison and others realized the futility of trying to remove passions (human sinfulness) from the population. Therefore, he proposed that human nature be set against human nature. This was done by separating various institutional power structures."{10} This was based on a biblical understanding of man, a proper anthropology.

So, how can such a firmly entrenched Judeo-Christian political heritage be reconciled with a culture increasingly full of Mormons, Hindus, Muslims, humanists, and other unbelievers living alongside Christians?

The Constitution and Bill of Rights justly allows for religious and political diversity. Nineteenth-century theologian Charles Hodge of Princeton regarding immigrants said:

> All are welcomed; all are admitted to equal rights and privileges. All are allowed to acquire property, whatever their religious feelings, and to vote in every election, made eligible to all offices and invested with equal influence in all public affairs. All are allowed to worship as they please, or not to worship at all, if they see fit…. No man is required to profess any form of faith…. More than this cannot reasonably be demanded.{11}

Theologian Richard J. Mouw explored the possibility of evangelical politics that doesn't compromise and at the same is time highly tolerant of other views. Not "anything-goes relativism," but rather confidence that comes from God's

guidebook for life, tempered by fair-minded ways of dealing with people. He wrote, “This humility does not exclude Christians advocating social and political policies that conflict with the views and practices of others. It does mean we should do so in a way that encourages reasonable dialogue and mutual respect.”{12}

Believers need to consider the words of Bernard Crick: “Politics is a way of ruling in divided societies without undue violence…. Politics is not just a necessary evil; it is a realistic good.” Kenyans victimized by recent mob killings that erupted after disputed elections could testify that when the political process fails it can be devastating.

The founders, even as they envisioned pluralism, did not themselves have to deal deeply with it. It requires a keen worldview for voting and activism in today’s truly pluralistic America. Our nation is based on an unmistakable Christian foundation, but that of course doesn’t mean you *have to* be a Christian or even believe in God to participate.

Political Might and the Religious Right: Does God Take Sides?

Ever since Jimmy Carter ran for President based partly on his evangelical faith in the 1970s, and then the Moral Majority took the nation by storm in the ‘80s, there has been a non-stop discussion in America surrounding faith and politics.

Political power’s seduction blinded believers, claim former movers and shakers like Ed Dobson. “One of the dangers,” he said, “of mixing politics and religion is that you begin to think the only way to transform culture is by passing another law. Most of what we did in the Moral Majority was aimed at getting the right people elected so that we would have enough votes to pass the right laws.”{13}

In those days, Christians seemed to believe they could legislate and administrate God's kingdom into full flower. However, core issues like gay unions and abortion remain largely unchanged or even worse today.

"History has shown us we can't rely totally on laws," continued Dobson.{14} A good example is Prohibition. The harder the government cracked down on alcohol, the more ways people found to get around the law. One result was increased crime. Laws don't change hearts; they are meant to restrain evil.

Sidling up to political power brokers even for commendable causes can prove disillusioning. Recently, conservative Christians hoped for fair and full consideration from the administration of the boldly evangelical George Bush. According to former White House deputy director for faith-based initiatives David Kuo, administration operators used and mocked evangelicals who were trying to do compassionate work partly funded through the government. But as Kuo asks, "What did they expect from politicos?" Good question for all of us. Jeremiah the prophet warned, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man."{15} That would seem to include man's politics.

Committed evangelical Bill Armstrong shared prophetically as a Senator back in 1983, "There is a danger when believers get deeply involved in political activity that they will try to put the mantle of Christ on their cause . . . to deify that cause and say, 'Because I'm motivated to run for office for reasons [of] faith, a vote for me is a vote for Jesus'."{16}

Ed Dobson often joked about God not being a Democrat or Republican—but *certainly not* a Democrat. But, he asked, "Is God the God of the religious and political left with its emphasis on the environment and the poor, or is he the God of the religious and political right with its emphasis on the unborn and the family? Both groups claim to speak for God."{17}

The Lord appeared to Joshua before a battle. He discovered that the issue wasn't whether God was on his side or his enemy's, but whether the people were on *God's* side. The religious and political Left casts itself as champion of the poor and the environment while the Right emphasizes the unborn and the family. Both say they speak for God. Seeking God's priorities and using His wisdom for our particular times is critical. However, "God's side" is not always easy to find.

So what's a Christian citizen's role? Armstrong and others believe Christians have been commanded by Christ to be involved. "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" means more than paying taxes. Some basic biblical principles:

- *All political power comes from God;*
- *Government has a God-ordained role to play in society;*
- *Christians have a God-ordained responsibility to that government: to pray, submit to and honor government leaders and, of course, to pay our taxes.{18}*

The late Christian political activist, pastor, and author D. James Kennedy warned in the heady early days of "the Reagan Revolution" not to trust in the man Ronald Reagan but in God. "After victory," he writes, "many people give up the struggle and later discover they had won only a battle, not the war. Are you working less, praying less, giving less, trusting less? Maybe there is a bit of the humanist in all of us."{19} He continues, "The government . . . should be a means to godly ends. Ronald Reagan is but a stone in the sling, and you do not trust in stones; you trust in the living rock, Jesus Christ."{20}

Thus, voters, campaigners *and* officeholders need to heed the humility of experience in a fallen world and the understanding of the Founders that power corrupts and should be divided up, placing final trust in the Almighty.

Should We Elect a Christian When Given the Chance?

Talk show host Larry King asked pastor and author Max Lucado if religion should matter in an election campaign. I love his answer: "Well, genuine religion has to matter. We elect character. We elect a person's worldview. Faith can define that worldview…. [Within the] American population 85 percent of us say that religion matters to us. 72 percent of us say that the religion of a president matters."{21} Polls show that Americans would sooner elect a Muslim or homosexual than an acknowledged atheist.{22}

Philosopher and early church father Augustine dealt with a culture war among the Romans. In his classic book *The City of God* he taught that "The City of Man is populated by those who love themselves and hold God in contempt, while the City of God is populated by those who love God and hold themselves in contempt. Augustine hoped to show that the citizens of the City of God were more beneficial to the interests of Rome than those who inhabit the City of Man."{23} Of course, a Christian will want to vote for a citizen of God's city if there is a clear choice between him and a rank sinner. That choice is seldom so clear in elections. But understanding this dual citizenship of the Christian voter herself in the City of Man and The City of God is essential to dissecting complicated, sometimes competing priorities.

In the tangled vines surrounding campaign messages, it's not so simple to discern a candidate's worldview and decide who best matches our own, but that's what wisdom and good stewardship require (and as recent scandals like Senator Larry Craig's alleged homosexual improprieties shows, a politician's stated views and behavior don't always match). Seems like the Christian citizen's top priority, then, is to have a biblical worldview to start with (something that Probe can help with greatly).

Given that, how does the average Christian voter decide on parties, platforms, and candidates? They do it based on principles of biblical ethics, godly values, simple logic and a discerning ear.

Remember, America is a republic, not a democracy. And in a republic we are to elect representatives who will rise above the passions of the moment. They are to be men and women of character and virtue, who will act responsibly and even nobly as they carry out the best interests of the people. No, we don't want leaders we can love because they remind us of our own darker side. We want leaders we can look up to and respect.{24}

Should we elect a person who claims to be a Christian, like former pastor Mike Huckabee? It depends. Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney received a standing ovation when said, "We need a person of faith to lead the country." A contributor to the blog run by Left-wing evangelical Jim Wallis responded, "But that statement is nearly meaningless, for even Sam Harris is a person of faith. Strident, angry, atheistic faith."{25} Good point: all have faith, but *faith in what or who*?

On the other hand, former Senator Bill Armstrong states, "God was able to make sons of Abraham out of stone. Certainly that means he can make a good legislator out of somebody who isn't necessarily a member of our church or maybe not even a Christian or maybe an atheist. So I don't think we ought to limit God by saying 'only Christians' deserve our support politically."{26}

The politically influential Dr. James Dobson caused a stir when he critiqued one candidate for not regularly attending church. Dr. Richard Land responded that this is not a deciding factor for him. He said that as a Baptist minister he would never have voted for the church-attending Jimmy Carter but did vote twice for the non-attending Ronald Reagan. This, like so

many others, seems to be an issue of individual conscience for voters.

Evangelical Mark DeMoss writes in support of Romney, a devout Mormon. “For years, evangelicals have been keenly interested to know whether a candidate shared their faith. I am now more interested in knowing that a president represents my values than I am that he or she shares my theology.”{27} After all, we’ve worked together on issues like abortion, pornography, and gambling. Can’t we be governed well by someone who shares most of our values, he reasons? As columnist Cal Thomas says, I care less about where the ambulance driver worships than if he knows where the hospital is.

Taking the high road of choosing good candidates, not necessarily ones whose theology one agrees with all down the line, makes voting and party affiliation complex for believers. We’d prefer a clean, easy set of choices. But, it appears that even voting and civic engagement is under the “sweat of the brow” curse of Genesis—nothing comes easy.

Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias reminds us that we’re NOT electing a minister or church elder. He said:

> I think as we elect, we go before God and [choose] out of the candidates who will be the best ones to represent [sanctity of life] values and at the same time be a good leader . . . whose first responsibility [is] to protect citizens.
>
> What we want is a politician who will understand the basic Judeo-Christian worldview, and on the basis of that the moral laws of this nation are framed, and then run this country with the excellence of that which is recognized in a pluralistic society: the freedom to believe or to disbelieve, and the moral framework with which this was conducted: the sanctity of every individual life.{28}

Vote your conscience. Many issues are disputable matters, as

the Apostle Paul put it. Avoid the temptation to *unreflectively* limit your view to a few pet issues. If over time you prayerfully believe that stewardship of the environment is critical, balanced against all considerations, vote accordingly. If sanctity of life issues like abortion and stem cell research are paramount to you, by all means vote that way. However, realize that trade-offs are inevitable; there won't be a perfect candidate who falls in line on all our values and priorities.

Politics, Religion, and Values

As the old saw goes, "never talk about politics and religion." That may be wise advice when Uncle Harry is over for Thanksgiving dinner. But as a rule of life, it breeds ignorance and passivity in self-government. "Only if we allow a biblical worldview and a biblically balanced agenda guide our concrete political work can we significantly improve the political order," according to a statement by the National Association of Evangelicals.{29} That means dialogue, and that's not easy.

Some prefer a public square where anything goes *but* religion. That would be wrong. Likewise, a so-called "sacred public square," with religious values imposed on everyone, would be unfair. Christians should support a "*civil* public square" with open, respectful debate.{30}

But, you often hear people make statements like, "Christians shouldn't try to legislate morality." They might simply mean you can't make people good by passing laws. Fair enough. But *all law*, divine and civil, involves imposing right and wrong. Prohibitions against murder and rape are judgments on good and bad. The question is not whether we *should* legislate morality but rather, "*What kind* of morality we should legislate?"{31}

Yet tragically, as *iVoteValues.com* discovered, "many believers

don’t even consider their values when voting,” often choosing candidates whose positions are at odds with their own beliefs, convictions, and values. A Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life study found that *nearly two-thirds* of Americans say their faith has little to do with their voting decisions!{32} Many believers are missing a chance to be salt and light to the watching world.

What about when the field of candidates offers only “the lesser of two evils”? Like when only one candidate is anti-abortion yet she holds to other troubling positions? That requires thoughtful distinctions. If the reason you vote for candidate X is only to avoid the graver consequences of voting for candidate Y, you’re not formally cooperating with evil. In this case, whatever evil comes from the anti-abortion candidate you helped elect due to your convictions would be unintended. Same as if you were a bank teller and the robber demanded, “Give me all the money or I’ll blow this guy’s brains out.” You cooperate to avoid the greater evil, but your intent was not to enable the robbery.{33} It’s hard to argue against this reasoning in a fallen world where even God allows evil for greater purposes.

What about cases when the field of candidates offers only “the lesser of two evils”? For instance, you can’t decide between the more pro-abortion candidate who’s otherwise highly qualified *and* the anti-abortion person who has some real flaws.

Some believe that if you vote for the pro-abortion person for other important reasons, then you are not responsible for abortions that might result, as briefly illustrated above. Others see a necessary connection—vote for a “pro-abort” and you are guilty. Study and pray hard on such issues as God gives freedom of conscience.

Sometimes it comes down to choices we’d rather not make. Only rarely, perhaps, can we say that to abstain from voting is the

only way. Notable Christian author Mark Noll believes this is such a time for him.{34}

Others warn that this only helps elect the candidates with unbiblical values. One commentator wrote, “Voters should not spend their franchise on empty gestures…. No successful politician is as strong on every issue as we would like. Our own pastors and parents can’t pass this test in their much smaller contexts. Rather than striking a blow for purity, we risk giving up our influence altogether when we follow a man with only one or two ‘perfect’ ideas.”{35}

Hold this kind of issue with an open hand. Many change their minds as they age and lose unrealistic youthful idealism. But if God gives a clear conviction, again, stick with that value or candidate. Only seek the difference between legalism and God’s leading.

Some more left-leaning evangelicals like Ron Sider and Jim Wallis value helping the poor and dispossessed through government, while critics claim that as the Church’s exclusive role. The retort: the Church is failing in its duty and it’s a fulfillment of the Church’s duty to advocate for government intervention. Others focus on sanctity of life issues not only as a higher priority, but as part of the government’s biblically mandated task of protecting its citizenry. What is your conviction? Best be deciding if you don’t know yet.

The purple ink-stained fingers of Iraqi citizens who voted at their own risk for the first time in decades testify to the precious privilege of voting in a free society. Americans gave blood and treasure to free them. Don’t let the same sacrifice made by our ancestors on our behalf go to waste. Inform yourself. “Study to show yourself approved” not only regarding Scripture, but as a citizen of The Cities of Man and of God.

Notes

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27. Mark DeMoss, "Why evangelicals could support this Mormon," *The Politico*, April 24, 2007.

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32. "How You Can Have Maximum Patriotic Impact-Brief," *iVoteValues.com*, http://tinyurl.com/2uot68, see point #3.

33. See an insightful application of this line of reasoning in Nathan Schlueter, "Drawing Pro-Life Lines," *First Things*, October 2001, tinyurl.com/6godf.

34. For a defense of his personal decision to abstain from voting in the 2004 major election, see Mark Noll, "None of the above: why I won't be voting for president," Christian Century, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1058/is_19_121/ai_n6355192.

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A Biblical View on Inflation

For some time, we have been told that inflation is either insignificant or that it is transitory. But even now, most economists and government leaders will acknowledge that inflation is here to stay for the foreseeable future. How should we think about inflation from a biblical perspective? What lessons can we learn from the past? How can we prepare for the future?

History of Inflation

Most countries and empires have had to address the problem of inflation. This includes the nation of Israel. God (speaking through the prophet Isaiah) pronounced judgment on the land

because the country that once was full of justice had debased the currency and its products. “Your silver has become dross, your best wine mixed with water” (Isaiah 1:22). People were cheating each other by adding cheaper metals to their silver and by adding water to their wine.

When people do this, it is called counterfeiting and is severely punished. It was punishable by the death penalty in the Roman Empire. Even today, counterfeiting in China warrants life imprisonment. Unfortunately, when governments debase the currency, it is merely called monetary policy and justified to keep the government functioning.

Governments insist on honest weights and measures, but usually exempt themselves from that requirement. Micah 6:11 asks, “Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of deceitful weights?” A government will prosecute someone who has dishonest weights and measures but allow its own government leaders and central bank to debase their currency.

In previous centuries, kings and citizens engaged in coin-clipping. This form of inflation was more visible. Today, paying back investors and citizens with devalued dollars is less visible and more insidious.

In a statement by someone regarded as one of the most important economists of the twentieth century, British economist John Maynard Keynes noted how inflation affects a nation and its citizens. He said: “By a continuing process of inflation, governments can confiscate, secretly and unobserved, an important part of the wealth of their citizens.”

He also added, “There is no subtler, no surer means of overturning the existing basis of society than to debauch the currency. The process engages all the hidden forces of economic law that come down on the side of destruction and

does so in a manner that not one man in a million is able to diagnose."

What is the impact of inflation? The impact is felt in higher prices. In fact, the classical definition of inflation is "a rise in the general level of prices of goods and services in an economy over a period of time." If you want to calculate the impact of inflation on your family, you can use the mathematical "rule of 72." Take the current inflation rate and divide it into seventy-two. That will give you the number of years at that rate of inflation it will take for prices to double.

Consumer Price Index

Most Americans are starting to realize that the current inflation rate

is different than the consumer price index (CPI). The government uses a different methodology from the past. Here are a few reasons why the CPI is not an accurate measure of inflation.

First, the government's figures understate the inflation rate because they exclude food and fuel costs from its rate of "core inflation." The argument is that food and fuel are too unstable to be included in the inflation rate. But those costs are the ones we consumers feel the most. In fact, most of us spend one-third of our budgets on food and energy costs.

Second, the government also substitutes less expensive products when prices rise. In the past, economists used a "fixed basket of goods" to calculate the consumer price index. In other words, if I buy the very same goods every year, how much does the price rise? Now the government assumes that people will switch brands or foods if the price goes up. For example, if the cost of steak goes up, the consumer price index replaces the cost of steak with hamburger.

Third, in averaging the price of different commodities, the government uses the geometric mean rather than an arithmetic mean. We don't need to get into the math. All you need to know is that technique also decreases the inflation rate.

Fortunately, various websites do provide a more accurate view of inflation. Some of them, for example, use the same basket of goods used in 1980 to estimate the current inflation rate. They conclude that the real inflation rate is more than twice the CPI estimate.

Why did the government change the way it calculates inflation? One reason is that government officials wanted to reduce the cost-of-living adjustments for government pay outs such as Social Security. A lower consumer price index reduces the amount the government must pay beneficiaries for a cost-of-living adjustment.

Chuck E. Cheese

One of my guests, in trying to explain the impact of inflation, compared it to the experience kids and parents had at Chuck E. Cheese. In the past, they would arrive at the arcade restaurant and purchase twenty dollars' worth of tokens. The kids spent their tokens and won certain games. At the end of the adventure, the kids counted their tickets and took them to the toy counter to purchase a prize.

They were thrilled that they had 1,700 points in children's currency. They were excited to trade those tokens for some real treasures. The toy counter was stocked with iPods, stuffed animals, and all sorts of prizes they are ready to take home. But their excitement faded quickly when they realized that it took 500 points just to purchase a Blow Pop. It took even more to earn a Chinese handcuff. The prizes they really wanted required hundreds of thousands of points.

This is the reality of inflation. If you type in "how much purchasing power has the dollar lost" into a search engine,

you will read that “the US dollar has lost more than 96 percent of its purchasing power since the creation of the Federal Reserve in 1913.” That would mean that a one-dollar bill from 1913 would have less than four cents of purchasing power today. The federal government has a CPI Inflation Calculator that will give you an estimate of the amount your money has been devalued based on the government’s CPI calculations.

Causes of Inflation

Government leaders have been arguing that the current inflation is merely due to the disruption of supply chains. While that is partially true, it ignores the bigger picture. After all, inflation has been taking place long before the pandemic, lockdowns, and supply chain problems.

Business leaders acknowledge that providing a supply of goods due to the supply chain bottleneck has resulted in increased prices. Demand exceeds supply. Also, there are higher costs for employees and higher freight costs. Limited supplies of lumber and copper, for example, raised those costs.

But the bigger issue is the fact that the federal government and the Federal Reserve have been printing more dollars. In the past, other governments (e.g., China, Japan, etc.) would buy our treasuries. They have ceased buying those financial instruments, perhaps because they believe that this country is on an unsustainable trajectory with its high consumption, low-savings economy. This is easy to see on the graphs provided by the Federal Reserve. The M2 money stock has been increasing for many years. You will also notice that the amount of money printed shoots straight up in 2020. On some charts, you may notice something else. The weekly chart is discontinued and only updated monthly. That might give you some idea of what may be coming.

Is inflation good for you and the economy? That is what some

pundits and politicians are telling us. Type in words like "inflation is good for you" or "inflation is good for the economy" and you will see the latest attempt to make us feel good about inflation.

On the one hand, inflation is good for the federal government awash in national debt. It is probably good for people in debt. You can pay back debts with devalued dollars. But inflation also allows the federal government to continue to expand without having to live within its means. State governments must live within their means and balance their state budgets. Families are supposed to live within their means, though many take on significant debt. Our previous books, *A Biblical Point of View on Debt* and *A Biblical Point of View on Money* are relevant to these concerns.

On the other hand, inflation is devastating for most people in society. Rich people can invest in appreciating assets (growth stocks, real estate, etc.) while people in the middle class or lower class are hurt by rising prices in food and energy (a significant portion of their monthly expenses). Most Americans are hurt because wages never rise as fast as inflation. Ultimately, inflation makes income inequality even worse.

Biblical View on Money and Inflation

Debt is one of the reasons for the increasing money supply that is causing inflation. The Bible has quite a bit to say about money, and a significant part of these financial warnings concern debt. Proverbs 22:7 says: "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is a servant to the lender." When you borrow money and put yourself in debt, you put yourself in a situation where the lender has significant influence over you. The government is spending more than it is bringing in through revenue. The national debt is increasing every day.

The Bible also teaches that it is wrong to borrow and not repay. Psalm 37:21 says: "The wicked borrows and does not pay

back, but the righteous is gracious and gives." The printing of more money has no end in sight. The federal government has been borrowing money from US citizens, foreign governments, and the Federal Reserve. Will we ever repay our debt? Even if we do so, it will be with devalued dollars.

The Bible teaches that individuals (and governments) should have honest weights and measures. Deuteronomy 25:13 says, "You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small" Proverbs 20:10 warns that "Unequal weights and unequal measures are both alike an abomination to the Lord." Ezekiel 45:10 says, "You shall have just balances, a just ephah, and a just bath."

How should Christians respond to rising inflation? We should begin by paying our debts. We cannot honestly call for the government to live within its means if we won't set the example and live within our means. We should, "Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your harvest; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine" (Proverbs 3:9-10).

We should also make wise investments. We should begin by diversifying. Solomon gives this investment advice: "Divide your portion to seven, or even to eight, for you do not know what misfortune may occur on the earth" (Ecclesiastes 11:2). It makes sense to diversify your portfolio since no human being can accurately and consistently predict the future (James 4:13-15). By diversifying your investments, you minimize the risk to your entire portfolio.

We are heading for economic uncertainty. That is why we need to trust the Lord with our wealth (Proverbs 3:9) and be good stewards of the resources God has provided to us (1 Corinthians 4:2).

Additional Resources

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The Just War Tradition in the Present Crisis

Is it ever right to go to war? Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese provides understanding of just war tradition from a biblical perspective.

Searching for Answers

Recent events have prompted Christians to ask moral questions concerning the legitimacy of war. How far should we go in punishing evil? Can torture ever be justified? On what basis are these actions premised? These problems remain especially acute for those who claim the Christian faith. Fortunately, we are not the first generation to face these questions. The use of force and violence has always troubled the Christian conscience. Jesus Christ gave his life freely without resisting. But does Christ's nonviolent approach deny government the prerogative to maintain order and establish peace through some measure of force? All government action operates on the premise of force. To deny all force, to be a dedicated pacifist, leads no less to a condition of anarchy than if one were a religious fascist. Extremes have the

tendency to meet. In the past, Christians attempted to negotiate through the extremes and seek a limited and prescribed use of force in what has been called the Just War Tradition.



The Just War Tradition finds its source in several streams of Western thought: biblical teaching, law, theology, philosophy, military strategy, and common sense. Just War thinking integrates this wide variety of thought through providing Christians with a general orientation on the issues of war and peace. This tradition transcends denominational barriers and attempts to supply workable answers and solutions to very difficult moral problems. Just War has its origins in Greco-Roman thinking as well as Christian theology: Augustine, Aquinas, and Calvin have all contributed to its development.{1}

Just War thinking does not provide sure-fire ways of fighting guilt-free wars, or offer blanket acceptance of government action. It often condemns acts of war as well as condones. Just War presents critical criteria malleable enough to address a wide assortment of circumstances. It does not give easy answers to difficult questions; instead, it provides a broad moral consensus concerning problems of justifying and controlling war. It presents a living tradition that furnishes a stock of wisdom consisting of doctrines, theories, and philosophies. Mechanical application in following Just War teachings cannot replace critical thinking, genius, and moral circumspection in ever changing circumstances. Just War attempts to approximate justice in the temporal realm in order to achieve a temporal but lasting peace. It does not make pretensions in claiming infinite or absolute justice, which remain ephemeral and unattainable goals. Only God provides infinite justice and judgment in eternity through his own

means. "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Deut. 32:35; Heb. 10:30).

The Clash of Civilizations

To apply Just War criteria we must first have a reasonable assessment of current circumstances. The Cold War era witnessed a bipolar world consisting of two colossal opponents. The end of the Cold War has brought the demise of strict ideological battles and has propelled the advent of cultural divisions in a multi-polar world. Present and future conflicts exist across cultural lines. The "Clash of Civilizations" paradigm replaces the old model of East vs. West.{2} People are more inclined to identify with their religious and ethnic heritage than the old ideology. The West has emerged as the global leader, leaving the rest of the world to struggle either to free itself from the West or to catch it economically and technologically. The triumph of the West—or modernized, secular, and materialist society—has created a backlash in Islamic Fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism does not represent ancient living traditions but a modern recreation of ancient beliefs with a particular emphasis on political conquest. Fundamentalists do not hesitate to enter into battle or holy war (jihad) with the enemies of God at a political and military level. The tragic events of 9/11 and the continual struggle against terrorism traces back to the hostility Islamic fundamentalists feel towards the triumph of the West. They perceive Western global hegemony [ed. note: leadership or predominant influence] as a threat and challenge to their religious beliefs and traditions, as most Christian fundamentalists and evangelicals feel threatened by the invincible advance of modern secular society. The error of fundamentalism lies in thinking it can recreate the past and enforce those beliefs and conditions on the modern world. Coercion remains at the heart of fundamentalist practice, constituting a threat potentially

worse than modern secular society.

This cultural divide causes Christians to reconsider the basis of warfare premised on the responsibilities of the state to defend civil society against the encroachments of religious extremism that fights in the name of God and for a holy cause or crusade.

This may sound strange at first to theological ears, but an absolute principle of Just War states that Christians never fight for "God and Country," but only for "Country." There is only a secular and civil but necessary task to be accomplished in war, never a higher mandate to inaugurate God's kingdom. In this sense Just War thinking attempts to secularize war by which it hopes to limit its horrendous effects.

Holy War or Just War

An essential distinction divides Just War from holy war. Just War does not claim to fight in the name of God or even for eternal causes. It strictly concerns temporal and political reasons. Roland Bainton sums up this position: "War is more humane when God is left out of it."{3} This does not embrace atheism but a Christian recognition concerning the value, place, and responsibilities of government. The state is not God or absolute, but plays a vital role in maintaining order and peace (Matt. 22:21). The Epistles repeat this sentiment (Rom.13; 1 Peter 2: 13-17; 1 Tim.2; Titus 3:1). Government does not act as the organ or defender through which God establishes his kingdom (John 18: 36).

Government does not have the authority to enforce God's will on unwilling subjects except within a prescribed and restricted civil realm that maintains the minimum civil order for the purpose of peace. Government protects the good and punishes the evil. Government serves strictly temporal purposes "in order that we may lead a tranquil and quite life

in all godliness and dignity" (2 Tim. 2:2). God establishes civil authorities for humanity's sake, not his own. Therefore, holy war that claims to fight in the name of God and for eternal truths constitutes demonic corruption of divinely sanctioned civil authority.

The following distinctions separate holy war and Just War beliefs. Holy war fights for divine causes in Crusades and Jihads to punish infidels and heretics and promote a particular faith; Just War fights for political causes to defend liberty and religious freedom. Holy war fights by divine command issuing from clerics and religious leaders; Just War fights through moral sanction. Holy war employs a heavenly mandate, Just War a state mandate. Holy war is unlimited or total; anything goes, and the enemy must be eradicated in genocide or brought to submission. The Holy War slogan is "kill 'em all and let God sort them out!" Holy war accepts one group's claim to absolute justice and goodness, which causes them to regard the other as absolutely evil. Just War practices limited war; it seeks to achieve limited temporal objectives and uses only necessary force to accomplish its task. Just War rejects genocide as a legitimate goal. Holy war fights out of unconditional obedience to faith. Just War fights out of obedience to the state, which is never incontestable. Holy war fights offensive wars of conquest; Just War fights defensive wars, generally responding to provocation. Holy war battles for God to enforce belief and compel submission. Just War defends humanity in protecting civil society, which despite its transitory and mundane role in the eternal scheme of things plays an essential part in preserving humanity from barbarism and allows for everything else in history to exist.

Why Go to War?

Just War thinking uses two major categories to measure the legitimacy of war. The first is called *jus ad bellum* [Latin

for “justice to war”]: the proper recourse to war or judging the reasons for war. This category asks questions to be answered before going to war. It has three major criteria: just authority, just cause, and just intent.

Just authority serves as the presupposition for the rest of the criteria. It requires that only recognized state authorities use force to punish evil (Rom. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2). Just War thinking does not validate individual actions against opponents, which would be terrorism, nor does it allow for paramilitary groups to take matters in their own hands. Just authority requires a formal declaration. War must be declared by a legitimate governmental authority. In the USA, Congress holds the right of formal declaration, but the President executes the war. Congressional authorization in the last sixty years has substituted for formal declaration.

Just cause is the most difficult standard to determine in a pluralistic society. Whose justice do we serve? Just War asserts the notion of comparative or limited justice. No one party has claim to absolute justice; there exists either more or less just cause on each side. Therefore, Just War thinking maintains the right to dissent. Those who believe a war immoral must not be compelled against their wills to participate. Just War thinking recognizes individual conscientious objection.

Just cause breaks down to four other considerations. First, it requires that the state *perform all its duties*. Its first duty requires self-defense and defense of the innocent. A second duty entails recovery of lost land or property, and the third is to punish criminals and evil doers.

Second, just cause requires *proportionality*. This means that the positive results of war must outweigh its probable destructive effects. The force applied should not create greater evil than that resisted.

Third, one judges the *probability of success*. It asks, is the war winnable? Some expectation of reasonable success should exist before engaging in war. Open-ended campaigns are suspect. Clear objectives and goals must be outlined from the beginning. Warfare in the latter twentieth century abandoned objectives in favor of police action and attrition, which leads to interminable warfare.

Fourth, *last resort* means all alternative measures for resolving conflict must be exhausted before using force. However, preemptive strikes are justified if the current climate suggests an imminent attack or invasion. Last resort does not have to wait for the opponent to draw "first blood."

Just intent judges the motives and ends of war. It asks, why go to war? and, what is the end result? Motives must originate from love or at least some minimum concern for others with the end result of peace. This rules out all revenge. The goals of war aim at establishing peace and reconciliation.

The Means of War

The proper conduct in war or judging the means of war is *jus in bello* [Latin for "justice in war"], the second category used to measure conflict. It has two primary standards: proportionality and discrimination.

Proportionality maintains that the employed necessary force not outweigh its objectives. It measures the means according to the ends and condemns all overkill. One should not use a bomb where a bullet will do.

Discrimination basically means non-combatant immunity. A "combatant" is anyone who by reasonable standard is actively engaged in an attempt to destroy you. POW's, civilians, chaplains, medics, and children are all non-combatants and therefore exempt from targeting. Buildings such as hospitals, museums, places of worship and landmarks share the same

status. However, those previously thought to be non-combatants may forfeit immunity if they participate in fighting. If a place of worship becomes a stash for weapons and a safe-house for opponents, it loses its non-combatant status.

A proper understanding of discrimination does not mean that non-combatants may never be killed, but only that they are never intentionally targeted. The tragic reality of every war is that non-combatants will be killed. Discrimination attempts to minimize these incidents so they become the exception rather than the rule.

Killing innocent lives in war may be justified under the principle of *double effect*. This rule allows for the death of non-combatants if they were unintended and accidental. Their deaths equal the collateral effects of just intent. Double effect states that each action has more than one effect, even though only one effect was intentional, the other accidental. Self-defense therefore intends to save one's life or that of another but has the accidental effect of the death of the third party.

The double effect principle is the most controversial aspect of the Just War criteria and will be subject to abuse. Therefore, it must adhere to its own criteria. Certain conditions apply before invoking double effect. First, the act should be good. It should qualify as a legitimate act of war. Second, a good effect must be intended. Third, the evil effect cannot act as an end in itself, and must be minimized with risk to the acting party. Lastly, the good effect always outweighs the evil effect.

Given the ferocity of war, it is understandable that many will scoff at the notion of Just War. However, Just War thinking accepts war and force as part of the human condition (Matt. 24:6) and hopes to arrive at the goal of peace through realistic yet morally appropriate methods. It does not promote war but seeks to mitigate its dreadful effects. Just War

thinking morally informs Western culture to limit its acts of war and not to exploit its full technological capability, which could only result in genocide and total war.

Notes

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Globalization and the Internet – A Christian Considers the Impact

Kerby Anderson looks at the growth and role of the Internet through a Christian worldview perspective. It is important that we continue to understand its capabilities and its dangers.

Introduction

More than one billion people use the Internet and benefit from the vast amount of information that is available to anyone who connects. But any assessment of the Internet will show that it has provided both surprising virtues and unavoidable vices.

Contrary to the oft-repeated joke, Al Gore did not invent the Internet. It was the creation of the Department of Defense that built it in case of a nuclear attack, but its primary use has been during peace. The Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency created a primitive version of the Internet known as ARPAnet. It allowed researchers at various universities to collaborate on projects and conduct research without having to be in the same place.

The first area network was operational in the 1980s, and the Internet gained great popularity in the 1990s because of the availability of web browsers. Today, due to web browsers and search engines, Internet users in every country in the world have access to vast amounts of online information.

The Internet has certainly changed our lives. Thomas Friedman, in his book *The World is Flat*, talks about some of these changes.{1} For example, we used to go to the post office to send mail; now most of us also send digitized mail over the Internet known as e-mail. We used to go to bookstores to browse and buy books; now we also browse digitally. We used to buy a CD to listen to music; now many of us obtain our digitized music off the Internet and download it to an MP3 player.

Friedman also talks about how the Internet has been the great equalizer. A good example of that is Google. Whether you are a university professor with a high speed Internet connection or a poor kid in Asia with access to an Internet café, you have the same basic access to research information. The Internet puts an enormous amount of information at our fingertips.

Essentially, all of the information on the Internet is available to anyone, anywhere, at anytime.

The Internet (and the accompanying digital tools developed to use it) has even changed our language. In the past, if you left a message asking when your friend was going to arrive at the airport, usually you would receive a complete sentence. Today the message would be something like: AA 635 @ 7:42 PM DFW. Tell a joke in a chat room, and you will receive responses like LOL ("laughing out loud") or ROFL ("rolling on the floor laughing"). As people leave the chat room, they may type BBL ("be back later"). Such abbreviations and computer language are a relatively new phenomenon and were spawned by the growth of the Internet.

I want to take a look at some of the challenges of the Internet as well as the attempt by government to control aspects of it. While the Internet has certainly provided information to anyone, anywhere, at any time, there are still limits to what the Internet can do in the global world.

The Challenge of the Internet

The Internet has provided an opportunity to build a global information infrastructure that would link together the world's telecommunications and computer networks. But futurists and governmental leaders also believed that this interconnectedness would also bring friendship and cooperation, and that goal seems elusive.

In a speech given over a decade ago, Vice-President Al Gore said, "Let us build a global community in which the people of neighboring countries view each other not as potential enemies, but as potential partners, as members of the same family in the vast, increasingly interconnected human family."{2}

Maybe peace and harmony are just over the horizon because of

the Internet, but I have my doubts. The information superhighway certainly has connected the world together into one large global network, but highways don't bring peace. Highways connected the various countries in Europe for centuries, yet war was common and peace was not. An information superhighway connects us with countries all over the world, but global cooperation hasn't been the result, at least not yet.

The information superhighway also has some dark back alleys. At the top of the list is pornography. The Internet has made the distribution of pornography much easier. It used to be that someone wanting to view this material had to leave their home and go to the other side of town. The Internet has become the ultimate brown wrapper. Hard core images that used to be difficult to obtain are now only a mouse click away.

Children see pornography at a much younger age than just a decade ago. The average age of first Internet exposure to pornography is eleven years old.{3} Sometimes this exposure is intentional, usually it is accidental. Schools, libraries, and homes using filters often are one step behind those trying to expose more and more people to pornography.

But the influence of the Internet on pornography is only one part of a larger story. In my writing on personal and social ethics, I have found that the Internet has made existing social problems worse. When I wrote my book *Moral Dilemmas* back in 1998, I dealt with such problems as drugs, gambling, and pornography. Seven years later when I was writing my new book, *Christian Ethics in Plain Language*, I noticed that every moral issue I discussed was made worse by the Internet. Now my chapter on pornography had a section on cyberporn. My chapter on gambling had a section dealing with online gambling. My chapter on adultery also dealt with online affairs.

Internet Regulation

All of these concerns lead to the obvious question: Who will regulate the Internet? In the early day of the Internet, proponents saw it as the cyber-frontier that would be self-regulating. The Internet was to liberate us forever from government, borders, and even our physical selves. One writer said we should "look without illusion upon the present possibilities for building, in the on-line spaces of this world, societies more decent and free than those mapped onto dirt and concrete and capital."{4}

And for a time, the self-government of the Internet worked fairly well. Internet pioneers were even successful in fighting off the Communications Decency Act which punished the transmission of "indecent" sexual communications or images on the Internet.{5} But soon national governments began to exercise their authority.

Jack Goldsmith and Tim Wu, in their book, *Who Controls the Internet?*, describe the various ways foreign governments have exercised their authority.{6}

- France requires Yahoo to block Internet surfers from France so they cannot purchase Nazi memorabilia.{7}

- The People's Republic of China requires Yahoo to filter materials that might be harmful or threatening to Party rule. Yahoo is essentially an Internet censor for the Communist party.{8}

- The Chinese version of Google is much slower than the American version because the company cooperates with the Chinese government by blocking search words the Party finds offensive (words like Tibet or democracy).

Even more disturbing is the revelation that Yahoo provided information to the Chinese government that led to the imprisonment of Chinese journalists and pro-democracy leaders.

Reporters Without Borders found that Yahoo has been implicated in the cases of most of the people they were defending.{9}

Columnist Clarence Page points out that "Microsoft cooperates in censoring or deleting blogs that offend the Chinese government's sensibilities. Cisco provides the hardware that gives China the best Internet-blocking and user-tracking technology on the planet."{10}

All of this censorship and cooperation with foreign governments is disturbing, but it also underscores an important point. For years, proponents of the Internet have argued that we can't (or shouldn't) block Internet pornography or that we can't regulate what pedophiles do on the Internet. These recent revelations about Yahoo, Google, and Microsoft show that they can and do block information.

The book *Who Controls the Internet?* argues that the last decade has led to the quiet rediscovery of the functions and justification for territorial government. The Internet has not replaced the legitimate structure of government with a self-regulated cyber-frontier. The Internet may change the way some of these territorial states govern, but it will not diminish their important role in regulating free societies.

Government and Intermediaries

Governments have been able to exercise control over the Internet in various ways. This should not be too surprising. The book *Who Controls the Internet?* points out that while some stores in New York's Chinatown sell counterfeit Gucci bags and Rolex watches, you don't find these same products in local stores. That is because the "most important targets of the laws against counterfeits—trademark laws—are local retailers."{11}

The U.S. government might not be able to go after manufacturers in China or Thailand that produce these

counterfeits, but they certainly can go after retail stores. That's why you won't find these counterfeit goods in a Wal-Mart store. And while it is true that by controlling Wal-Mart or Sears doesn't eliminate counterfeit goods, government still can adequately control the flow of these goods by focusing on these intermediaries.

Governments often control behavior through intermediaries. "Pharmacists and doctors are made into gatekeepers charged with preventing certain forms of drug abuse. Bartenders are responsible for preventing their customers from driving drunk."{12}

As the Internet has grown, there has also been an increase in new intermediaries. These would include Internet Service Providers (ISPs), search engines, browsers, etc. In a sense, the Internet has made the network itself the intermediary. And this has made it possible for governments to exert their control over the Internet. "Sometimes the government-controlled intermediary is Wal-Mart preventing consumer access to counterfeit products, sometimes it is the bartender enforcing drinking age laws, and sometimes it is an ISP blocking access to illegal information."{13}

More than a decade ago, the German government raided the Bavarian offices of Compuserve because they failed to prevent the distribution of child pornography even though it originated outside of Germany.{14} In 2001, the British government threatened certain sites with criminal prosecution for distributing illegal adoption sites. The British ISPs agreed to block the sites so that British citizens could not access them.{15}

Internet Service Providers, therefore, are the obvious target for governmental control. In a sense, they are the most important gatekeepers to the Internet.{16}

Governmental control over the Internet is not perfect nor is

it complete. But the control over intermediaries has allowed territorial governments to exercise much great control and regulation of the Internet than many of the pioneers of cyberspace would have imagined.

Globalization and Government

In previous articles we have addressed the issue of globalization and have recognized that technology (including the Internet) has made it much easier to move information around the world. There is no doubt that the Internet has accelerated the speed of transmission and thus made the world smaller. It is much easier for people around the world to access information and share it with others in this global information infrastructure.

Those who address the issue of globalization also believe that it diminishes the relevance of borders, territorial governments, and geography. Thomas Friedman believes that the Internet and other technologies are flattening the world "without regard to geography, distance, or, in the near future, even language."{17}

In one sense, this is true. The lower costs of moving information and the sheer amount of information exchanged on the Internet have made it more difficult for governments to suppress information they do not like. The explosive growth of blogs and web pages have provided a necessary outlet for opinion and information.

It is also true that there has been some self-governing behavior on the Internet. Friedman, for example, describes eBay as a "self-governing nation-state—the V.R.e., the Virtual Republic of eBay." The CEO of eBay even says, "People will say that eBay restored my faith in humanity—contrary to a world where people are cheating and don't give people the benefit of the doubt."{18}

But it also true that territorial governments work with eBay to arrest and prosecute those who are cheaters or who use the website in illegal ways. And it also relies on a banking system and the potential of governmental prosecution of fraud.

We have also seen in this article that governments have also been able to exert their influence and authority over the Internet. They have been able to use the political process to alter or block information coming into their country and have been able to shape the Internet in ways that the early pioneers of the Internet did not foresee.

Goldsmith and Wu believe that those talking about the force of globalization often naively believe that countries will be powerless in the face of globalization and the Internet. "When globalization enthusiasts miss these points, it is usually because they are in the grips of a strange technological determinism that views the Internet as an unstoppable juggernaut that will overrun the old and outdated determinants of human organization."{19}

There is still a legitimate function for government (Romans 13:1-7) even in this new world of cyberspace. Contrary to the perceived assumption that the Internet will shape governments and move us quickly toward globalization, there is good evidence to suggest that governments will in many ways shape the Internet.

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Romney vs. Obama and Beyond: The Church's Prophetic Role in Politics

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese answers a common question of a Christian view of politics and government: How would a biblical worldview inform us on being in the world of politics but not of it? "Dr. T" models a critical yet engaged distance in assessing the beliefs of Presidential candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama.

Christian Government

During each new election season Christians ask, "What is a biblical view of government?" Does it teach Theocracy, Communism or maybe Democracy? The Old Testament does teach theocracy, which means the Priests ruled the people through the Mosaic Law. Later in its history Israel became a monarchy by its own decision under King Saul—a choice God was not very pleased with, but He accommodated Israel's demand (I Samuel 8).

The New Testament does not adopt theocracy because it applied only to the chosen nation of Israel; it gives no endorsement of any one form of government, but instead offers the Church a special role as a prophetic voice engaging any and all forms of government. There is no such thing as *Christian (civil) Government*, only *Christians in government*. Instead of creating a new system, the Church brings biblical principles to bear on all governments.{1} This position allows the Church everywhere to be actively involved in its particular political situation through maintaining its witness to Christ.

Israel and the Church

The role of Israel and the Church are often conflated in Christian minds, especially during the political season. Many still believe that Christians should create laws or vote for candidates that will bring us closer to a “Christian America” ideal. This is a revised version of an old notion of Christendom that joins church and state going back to the Constantinian Church which espoused a Christian Roman Empire. Some of our Puritan forebears held that America was the New Jerusalem. America as a nation replaces Israel as the people of God and the Church becomes a political entity like Israel.

In approaching politics, it is essential that we keep in mind the differences between Israel and the Church. Israel was a national people with its own civil law and identity. It was closed to the rest of the world and had to live in strict separation from the Gentile nations. Their call was to isolation, to establish Theocracy and to drive the Gentiles out from Canaan, a goal they were never really successful at accomplishing (Judges 1: 19, 28, 32). Israel was one civil nation among many civil nations and it was usually at war with those neighbors.

Israel foreshadowed the Church. They prepared the world for the coming of the messiah and the Church. Their history and law serves as an example or model of instruction for the Church (Romans 15: 4 and I Corinthians 10: 6), but the Church is not obligated to adopt Israel’s civil identity because this would violate her broader mission to reach all people (Acts 1: 8). The Church is called to political and cultural engagement with all systems and all people, not isolation. When the Church becomes a political or cultural system, it loses its message of grace through faith and reverts back to Law (Galatians 3). Faith cannot be legislated.

The Church could not be true to its universal calling if it was a political power like Israel because this turns its

mission into one of war and conquest, such as the Crusades in the middle ages, rather than conversion through faith (John 18: 36). Islam is a good example of a religion that does follow Israel's kind of political identity in the establishment of Sharia Law. The Church is not one nation, but one people among many nations, cultures and systems. It cannot afford to be a nation with its own civil law and government, which sets itself against other governments and other people. When the Church establishes itself as a political power it compromises its prophetic mission and loses its unique contribution to politics. Instead the Church has a more complex role in any system it finds itself in.

In The World but Not of It

Christians are in the world, but not of the world. Jesus prayed that his followers will not be taken out of the world, but that they be sent into the world and kept from its evil (John 17: 15). The Apostle Paul argued similarly that we must maintain our association with people in the world, even immoral people—and not to isolate ourselves (I Corinthians 5: 9, 10). He says, "the form of this world is passing away," an awareness that creates in us an "undistracted devotion to the Lord" in every area of life. We are to participate in the world, but not get too attached to it. We "should be as those who buy, but do not possess…and those who make use of the world as though they did not make full use of it" (I Corinthians 7: 31-35). We bring awareness of the temporal nature of the world.

The Prophetic Role of the Church

The Apostle Peter states that the Church is a unique people of God, "a people for God's own possession" or a "peculiar people" as the King James Version says, called to proclaim the truth. He exhorts Christians to "proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness…" and to keep our "behavior

excellent” in the world. (I Peter 2: 9- 12).

The Church lives differently in society by setting an example. As God’s special people, the Church is called to witness His truth to the world, including to the government structures. This means that the Church works within various systems, something Paul accomplished effectively in his use of Roman Citizenship and with his appeal to Caesar (Matthew 17: 24-27; I Peter 2: 13-20, Romans 13: 1-7, Acts 16: 35-39; 23: 11; 24 and 25).

In preaching the Word the Church acts as prophet to “the world,” the societal structures arrayed against God (Romans 12: 2). This includes all political systems under satanic control (Luke 4: 5-8). A prophet brings a timely and meaningful message of relevance. He has insight to speak to a particular situation. For example when Nathan the prophet spoke the Word of the Lord to King David in confronting David’s sin of murder he held him accountable for his behavior (2 Samuel 12: 1-15). The Bible teaches us through this example that the political powers are not absolute. *The king is not God*, a radical statement in ancient times.

Prophets call people back to obedience to God. They were the conscience of the nation. Likewise, the Church acts as prophet through active participation, but with an attitude of critical distance.

Critical Distance

Critical distance does not mean isolation or withdrawal where we go live in the woods and wait for the world to die. It means involvement in everything the world offers, especially politics, but with an approach from a *different perspective*, an eternal perspective. Criticism means Christians work from within society and offer a perpetual challenge to the status quo that reflects a Christian conscience; it never arrives at a final form of society in which it is completely comfortable.

This is an important, albeit an uncomfortable, role to play. It can never endorse any system uncritically because this acceptance negates the fact of the inherent evil of the world and announces the arrival of the Kingdom of God on earth. The Church then is swallowed in the world's identity. This reflects what happened in the Christian Roman Empire and in the Christian America ideal, which is often the ideology behind so called "Christian Conservative" political activism. The United States is identified with Christendom as "a Christian country." Criticism in this sense does not simply entail a good word of advice, but active participation guided by an ethic of love (Matthew 5: 43-48; Romans 13: 8-10). This may manifest in working to repeal an unjust law or establishing a new law that meets certain needs in society, but especially the needs of the weakest members of society, who cannot speak for themselves and are powerless. This reflects a Christian conscience of concern for others, rather than just ourselves. Laws must protect those who need the most protection, rather than empower those who make it. Law is the enforcement of the personal morality of its makers (hence, when people say you "cannot legislate morality," that's an absurdity).

Perhaps the greatest example in recent times of the Church's prophetic voice in American politics was in bringing attention to the cause of the unborn in its efforts to stem the tide of abortion, both in its political activism and through nonpolitical work of advocating adoption as an alternative to abortion. Another good example was the American Civil Rights Movement when it spoke against racism and the unjust social structures in American society.

Just as the Old Testament prophets held the king accountable to the Law of God—*the king is not God*—so the Church reminds the world of its limitations, that its systems have flaws and must allow for improvement. *The world is not yet in the kingdom of God.* There is no perfect system any more than there

are perfect people. There is always room for growth and change. Only in the kingdom of God does change and growth cease because it is no longer necessary in the final state of perfection (Revelation 21).

Democracy offers a better system for Christians than Communism or Theocracy because it reflects an ideal of freedom, the basis of love and faith. But it has flaws, such as the tyranny of the majority (de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*). Nor is democracy "the end of history," a popular idea after the Cold War, arguing that democracy has emerged from the ideological struggles of history to become the greatest and final system. Nothing will succeed it. The post–Cold War world has reached the end of history, or the end of struggle and the end of change.{2}

There is every reason to consider that democracy will perish from the earth if its people grow complacent and do not defend it or practice it and any idea to suggest that it cannot perish on the basis of a metaphysical law of history will only contribute to that complacency. There is never a final system of society in which the Church refuses to adjure and criticize toward change because that entity would then be equal to the kingdom of God.

Romney vs. Obama

We apply the same standard of *critical distance* in voting for our favorite candidate or party. Voting is often the choice of the lesser of two evils. This popular maxim expresses the same idea of critical distance as long as we understand that the choice of the lesser evil is still a far less than perfect choice. Critical distance includes self-criticism.

Most people choose a candidate who comes closest to their own position and then largely ignore their differences. Critical distance will not dismiss the differences because through it we hold ourselves accountable by seeing our blind spots and

recognizing potential problems. We show humility and responsibility through admitting the limits of our own position and choices.

Many contrasts exist between Governor Romney and President Obama, not least of which is personal religious belief. Ironically, Evangelical Christians largely ignore this issue, though each candidate's views represent a serious difference as compared to biblical Christianity. In the past, Evangelicals have stressed the importance of personal belief. After all, most people hold to a particular political and economic view because of their religious views, not despite them.

President Obama reflects Liberation Theology in his belief that government must act as champion of the people. This should be done, in his view, by elevating the condition of the disenfranchised into the middle class, mainly through economic redistribution, but also through religious pluralism, toleration of minorities, woman's rights and gay rights. Liberation Theology adapts Christianity to a socialist political agenda that uses government as a tool to free people from oppressive social structures such as capitalism, racism and patriarchy. There is a strong emphasis on social justice, radical equality and group sin, meaning the structure of a society is to blame for its problems rather than the individual, who is a victim.

Governor Romney styles himself as a stalwart defender of free enterprise informed by Mormon beliefs that reflect traditional American values of family, faith, and work ethic. Government must protect those values from its own encroachment in order to maintain the middle class. Although Mormonism is radically different from Evangelical Christianity in its doctrinal formulation, it accepts similar social values, which stress personal responsibility and initiative.

Although, no election can be reduced to one issue or to

personal beliefs, these considerations' potential impact cannot be disregarded. Behind Obama stands a Liberation Christianity that has and will continue to benefit from his re-election. A Romney victory will lift the cultural status of Mormons in America from outsiders to the mainstream. In the past, the election to the Presidency of a member from a group struggling for recognition in mainstream America received a stamp of approval at the highest level of political office that gave them increased cultural recognition and cache . The election of one of your own to the Presidency is a sign of arrival. President Kennedy's election to office brought American mainstream acceptance to Roman Catholics, just as President Carter brought it to Evangelicals and President Obama brought the full acceptance of African-Americans, so a "President Romney" will create a greater cultural awareness and acceptance of Mormons.

The contemporary political logic of the American system says put your criticism out there during the primaries, but put it away once a candidate for your party is chosen. You're supposed to fall in line behind him or her. Christians often follow the same logic and refuse to entertain criticism of our chosen candidate because it suggests a preference for the opposing side. The lack of criticism generally continues through our chosen candidate's administration. Problems and faults are usually blamed on the other side and Christians become as politically polarized as the parties. This surrenders any critical distance gained and the Church loses its unique contribution for political advantage. It's like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of soup (Genesis 25: 27-34). We can in good conscience choose a candidate that we do not completely agree with *if* we retain our criticism of him. We should participate, yet with reservations.

Critical distance can tolerate voting for someone of a different faith if he is a better choice than the alternative, but it cannot live with softening its differences in order to

win an election or modifying its convictions for political gain. Evangelicals are faced with a difficult choice, not between Liberation Theology or Mormonism, but whether or not they will retain their doctrinal critique and rejection of Mormonism, when those differences threaten its economic and political interests.

Recently, the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association dropped Mormonism from its cult list. And the language of "values" between Christians and Mormons grows indistinguishable, so that now "Christian values" are somehow equated with "Mormon values" and a vote for a Mormon is a vote for "biblical values." The greatest "value" for Christians is the deity of Jesus Christ, which most Mormons do not accept. Evangelicals and Mormons share a similar political agenda in preserving the free enterprise system and in protecting the traditional American family ideal, which they both consider preferable to the creeping socialism of the Obama administration. There is no need to drop the hard and fast differences between Christianity and Mormonism; Christians can work with anyone if we effectively practice *critical distance* at the same time.

So, it comes down to retaining our prophetic role as members of Christ's Body—not as much who we vote for, but why and how.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, "A Christian View of Politics, Government, and Social Action," *Mind Games Survival Course Manual* (Plano, Texas: Probe Ministries, 1998), www.ministeriosprobe.org/MGManual/Politics/Gov1.htm

2. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). The idea of the end of history here is really a Hegelian version of Christian America, just as the idea of progress, the foundation of Fukuyama's argument, reflects a secularization of the older notion of the idea of providence that founded "Christian America." Both identify

either Christendom or the Western World with the kingdom of God, the final form of society. One is traditionally religious in its conception and the other secular.

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Hayek and 'The Road to Serfdom'

Kerby Anderson gives an overview of the bestseller The Road to Serfdom *and explains how it is consistent with a Christian worldview.*

Why the Interest in Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*?

A few years ago, if you said the name Friedrich Hayek to the average person in society, they wouldn't know his name. They might wrongly guess that he was the father of actress Selma Hayek. His name was unknown to non-economists.



Today he has much more visibility. People are reading his classic book, *The Road to Serfdom*, perhaps in order to make sense of our troubled economic climate and the current administration's policies. When TV host Glenn Beck talked about Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*, the book went to number one on Amazon and stayed in the top ten for some time. A rap video featuring cartoon versions of Hayek and John Maynard Keynes have been viewed over a million times on

YouTube.

Why all the interest in a Vienna-born, Nobel Prize-winning economist who passed off the scene some time ago? People are taking a second look at Hayek because of our current economic troubles. Russ Roberts, in his op-ed, "Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback,"{1} says people are reconsidering four ideas Hayek championed.

First, Hayek and his fellow Austrian School economists such as Ludwig Von Mises argued that the economy is much more complicated than the simple economic principles set forth by Keynes. Boosting aggregate demand by funding certain sectors with a stimulus package of the economy won't necessarily help any other sector of the economy.

Second, Hayek highlighted the role of the Federal Reserve in the business cycle. The artificially low interest rates set by the Fed played a crucial role in inflating the housing bubble. Our current monetary policy seems to merely be postponing the economic adjustments that must take place to heal the housing market.

Third, Hayek argued in his book that political freedom and economic freedom are connected and intertwined. The government in a centrally controlled economy controls more than just wages and prices. It inevitably infringes on what we do and where we live.

Even when the government tries to steer the economy in the name of the "public good," the increased power of the state corrupts those who wield that power. "Hayek pointed out that powerful bureaucracies don't attract angels—they attract people who enjoy running the lives of others. They tend to take care of their friends before taking care of others."{2}

A final point by Hayek is that order can emerge not just from the top down but also from the bottom up. At the moment, citizens in many of the modern democracies are suffering from

a top-down fatigue. A free market not only generates order but the freedom to work and trade with others. The opposite of top-down collectivism is not selfishness but cooperation.

Although *The Road to Serfdom* was written at the end of World War II to warn England that it could fall into the same fate as Germany, its warning to every generation is timeless.

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom* (part one)

Hayek wrote his classic book *The Road to Serfdom*{3} more than sixty years ago, yet people are still reading it today. As they read it and apply its principles, many others misunderstand. Let's look at some of the prevalent misconceptions.

Because Hayek was a Nobel-winning economist, people wrongly believe that *The Road to Serfdom* is merely a book about economics. It is much more. It is about the impact a centrally planned socialist society can have on individuals. Hayek says one of the main points in his book is "that the most important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people. This is necessarily a slow affair, a process which extends not over a few years but perhaps over one or two generations."{4}

The character of citizens is changed because they have yielded their will and decision-making to a totalitarian government. They may have done so willingly in order to have a welfare state. Or they may have done so unwillingly because a dictator has taken control of the reins of power. Either way, Hayek argues, their character has been altered because the control over every detail of economic life is ultimately control of life itself.

In the forward to his book, Hayek makes his case about the

insidious nature of a soft despotism. He quotes from Alexis de Tocqueville's prediction in *Democracy in America* of the "new kind of servitude" when

> *after having thus successively taken each member of the community in it powerful grasp, and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of small, complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered but softened, bent and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.{5}*

Tocqueville warned that the search for greater equality typically is accompanied by greater centralization of government with a corresponding loss of liberty. The chapter was insightfully titled, "What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear."

Tocqueville also described the contrast between democracy and socialism:

> *Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom; socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude.{6}*

Hayek believed that individual citizens should develop their

own abilities and pursue their own dreams. He argued that government should be a *means*, a mere *instrument*, "to help individuals in their fullest development of their individual personality."{7}

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom* (part two)

Another misconception about Hayek is that he was making a case for radical libertarianism. Some of the previous quotes illustrate that he understood that the government could and should intervene in circumstances. He explains that his book was not about whether the government should or should not act in every circumstance.

What he was calling for was a government limited in scope and power. On the one hand, he rejected libertarian anarchy. On the other hand, he devoted the book to the reasons why we should reject a pervasive, centrally controlled society advocated by the socialists of his day. He recognized the place for government's role.

The government, however, should focus its attention on setting the ground rules for competition rather than devote time and energy to picking winners and losers in the marketplace. And Hayek reasoned that government cannot possibly know the individual and collective needs of society. Therefore, Hayek argues that the "state should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general types of situations and should allow the individuals freedom in everything which depends on the circumstances of time and place, because only the individuals concerned in each instance can fully know these circumstances and adapt their actions to them."{10}

Wise and prudent government must recognize that there are fundamental limitations in human knowledge. A government that recognizes its limitations is less likely to intervene at every level and implement a top-down control of the economy.

One last misconception has to do with helping those who suffer misfortune. It is true that he rejected the idea of a top-down, centrally controlled economy and socialist welfare state. But that did not exclude the concept of some sort of social safety net.

In his chapter on "Security and Freedom" he says, "there can be no doubt that some minimum of food, shelter, and clothing, sufficient to preserve health and the capacity to work can be assured to everybody."{11} He notes that this has been achieved in England (and we might add in most other modern democracies).

He went on to argue that the government should provide assistance to victims of such "acts of God" (such as earthquakes and floods). Although he might disagree with the extent governments today provide ongoing assistance for years, Hayek certainly did believe there was a place for providing aid to those struck by misfortune.

Paved With Good Intentions

Friedrich Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom* to warn us that sometimes the road can be paved with good intentions. Most government officials and bureaucrats write laws, rules, and regulations with every good intention. They desire to make the world a better place by preventing catastrophe and by encouraging positive actions from their citizens. But in their desire to control and direct every aspect of life, they take us down the road to serfdom.

Hayek says the problem comes from a "passion for conscious control of everything."{12} People who enter into government and run powerful bureaucracies are often people who enjoy running not only the bureaucracy but also the lives of its citizens. In making uniform rules from a distance, they deprive the local communities of the freedom to apply their own knowledge and wisdom to their unique situations.

Socialist government seeks to be a benevolent god, but usually morphs into a malevolent tyrant. Micromanaging the details of life leads to what Hayek calls “imprudence.” Most of us would call such rules intrusive, inefficient, and often downright idiotic. But the governmental bureaucrat may believe he is right in making such rules, believing that the local people are too stupid to know what is best for them. Hayek argues that citizens are best served when they are given the freedom to make choices that are best for them and their communities.

Hayek actually makes his case for economic freedom using a moral argument. If government assumes our moral responsibility, then we are no longer free moral agents. The intrusion of the state limits my ability to make moral choices. “What our generation is in danger of forgetting is not only that morals are of necessity a phenomenon of individual conduct but also that they can exist only in the sphere in which the individual is free to decide for himself and is called upon voluntarily to sacrifice personal advantage to the observance of a moral rule.”{13} This is true whether it is an individual or a government that takes responsibility. In either case, we are no longer making free moral decisions. Someone or something else is making moral decisions for us. “Responsibility, not to a superior, but to one’s conscience, the awareness of duty is not exacted by compulsion, the necessity to decide which of the things one values are to be sacrificed to others, and to bear the consequences of one’s own decision, are the very essence of any morals which deserve the name.”{14}

A socialist government may promise freedom to its citizens but it adversely affects them when it frees them from making moral choices. “A movement whose main promise is the relief from responsibility cannot but be antimoral in its effect, however lofty the ideals to which it owes its birth.”{15}

Hayek also warned about the danger of centralizing power in the hands of a few bureaucrats. He argued that, “by uniting in

the hands of a single body power formerly exercised independently by many, an amount of power is created infinitely greater than any that existed before, so much more far reaching as almost to be different in kind."{16}

He even argues that once we centralize power in a bureaucracy, we are headed down the road to serfdom. "What is called economic power, while it can be an instrument of coercion, is, in the hands of private individuals, never exclusive or complete power, never power over the whole of life of a person. But centralized as an instrument of political power it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery."{17}

Biblical Perspective

How does *The Road to Serfdom* compare to biblical principles? We must begin by stating that Friedrich Hayek was not a Christian. He did not confess Christian faith nor did he attend religious services. Hayek could best be described as an agnostic.

He was born in 1899 into an affluent, aristocratic family in Austria. He grew up in a nominally Roman Catholic home. Apparently there was a time when he seriously considered Christianity. Shortly before Hayek became a teenager, he began to ask some of the big questions of life. In his teen years, he was influenced by a godly teacher and even came under the conviction of sin. However, his quest ended when he felt that no one could satisfactorily answer his questions. From that point on he seems to have set aside any interest in Christianity and even expressed hostility toward religion.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Hayek and Christianity can be found in their common understanding of human nature. Hayek started with a simple premise: human beings are limited in their understanding. The Bible would say that we are fallen creatures living in a fallen world.

Starting with this assumption that human beings are not God, he constructed a case for liberty and limited government. This was in contrast to the prevailing socialist view that human beings possessed superior knowledge and could wisely order the affairs of its citizens through central planning. Hayek rejected the idea that central planners would have enough knowledge to organize the economy and instead showed that the spontaneous ordering of economic systems would be the mechanism that would push forward progress in society.

Hayek essentially held to a high view and a low view of human nature. Or we could call it a balanced view of human nature. He recognized that human beings did have a noble side influenced by rationality, compassion, and even altruism. But he also understood that human beings also are limited in their perception of the world and subject to character flaws.

Such a view comports with a biblical perspective of human nature. First, there is a noble aspect to human beings. We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28) and are made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5). Second, there is a flaw in human beings. The Bible teaches that all are sinful (Rom. 3:23) and that the heart of man is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9).

Hayek believed that "man learns by the disappointment of expectations." In other words, we learn that we are limited in our capacities. We do not have God's understanding of the world and thus cannot effectively control the world like socialists confidently believe that we can. We are not the center of the universe. We are not gods. As Christians we can agree with the concept of the "disappointment of expectations" because we are fallen and live in a world that groans in travail (Romans 8:22).

Although Hayek was not a Christian, many of the ideas in *The Road to Serfdom* connect with biblical principles. Christians would be wise to read it and learn from him the lessons of

history.

Notes

1. Russ Roberts, “Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback,” *Wall Street Journal*, 28 June 2010.
2. Ibid.
3. F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents, the Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).
4. Ibid., 48.
5. Ibid., 49.
6. Ibid., 77.
7. Ibid., 115.
8. Ibid., 57.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid., 114.
11. Ibid., 148.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 216.
14. Ibid., 217.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 165.
17. Ibid., 166.

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Biblical Principles

October 11, 2007

How should a Christian evaluate social and political issues? Here are a few biblical principles that can be used. First is the sanctity of human life. Verses such as Psalm 139:13-16

show that God's care and concern extend to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22-25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle that applies to many areas of bioethics.

A related biblical principle involves the equality of human beings. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority (Philippians 2). Believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people (James 2). Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). These principles apply to racial relations and our view of government.

A third principle is a biblical perspective on marriage. Marriage is God's plan and provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). Marriage provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

A final principle concerns government and our obedience to civil authority. Government is ordained by God (Rom.13:1-7). We are to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Even though we are to obey government, there may be certain times when we might be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). These principles apply to issues such as war, civil disobedience, politics, and government.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. As Christians it is important to consider these biblical principles and consistently apply them to these issues.

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Christian Worldview and Social Issues

Biblical Principles

How can we apply a Christian worldview to social and political issues? I would like to set forth some key biblical principles that we can apply to these issues.

A key biblical principle that applies to the area of bioethics is the sanctity of human life. Such verses as Psalm 139:13-16 show that God's care and concern extends to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22–25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle. These principles can be applied to issues ranging from abortion to stem cell research to infanticide.

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procreation and nurture of children (Eph. 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Cor. 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

Another biblical principle involves sexual ethics. The Bible teaches that sex is to be within the bounds of marriage, as a man and the woman become one flesh (Eph. 5:31). Paul teaches that we should "avoid sexual immorality" and learn to control our own body in a way that is "holy and honorable" (1 Thess. 4:3-5). He admonishes us to flee sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:18). These principles apply to such issues as premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.

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Communicating in a Secular Culture

How can we communicate biblical morality effectively to a secular culture? Here are a few principles.

First, we must interpret Scripture properly. Too often, Christians have passed off their sociological preferences (on issues like abortion or homosexual behavior) instead of doing proper biblical exegesis. The result has often been *a priori* conclusions buttressed with improper proof-texting.

In areas where the Bible clearly speaks, we should exercise our prophetic voice as we seek to be salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16). In other areas, concessions should be allowed.

The apostle Paul recognized that the first priority of Christians is to preach the gospel. He refused to allow various distinctions to hamper his effectiveness, and he tried to "become all things to all men" that he might save some (1 Cor. 9:22). Christians must stand firm for biblical truth, yet also recognize the greater need for the unsaved person to hear a loving presentation of the gospel.

Second, Christians should carefully develop biblical principles which can be applied to contemporary social and medical issues. Christians often jump immediately from biblical passages into political and social programs. They wrongly neglect the important intermediate step of applying biblical principles within a particular social and cultural situation.

Third, Christians should articulate the moral teachings of Scripture in ways that are meaningful in a pluralistic society. Philosophical principles like the "right to life" or "the dangers of promiscuity" can be appealed to as part of common grace. Scientific, social, legal, and ethical considerations can be useful in arguing for biblical principles in a secular culture.

Christians can argue in a public arena against abortion on the basis of scientific and legal evidence. Medical advances in embryology and fetology show that human life exists in the womb. A legal analysis of the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* decision shows the justices violated a standard principle of jurisprudence. The burden of proof is placed on the life-taker and the benefit of the doubt is given to the life-saver.

This does not mean we should sublimate the biblical message. But our effectiveness in the public arena will be improved if we elaborate the scientific, social, legal, and ethical aspects of a particular issue instead of trying to articulate our case on Scripture alone.

Christians should develop effective ways to communicate biblical morality to our secular culture. Law and public policy should be based upon biblical morality which results from an accurate interpretation of Scripture and a careful application to society.

Christian Principles in Social Action

How should Christians be involved in the social and political arena? Here are a few key principles.

First, Christians must remember that they have a dual citizenship. On the one hand, their citizenship is in heaven and not on earth (Phil. 3:17–21). Christians must remind themselves that God is sovereign over human affairs even when circumstances look dark and discouraging. On the other hand, the Bible also teaches that Christians are citizens of this earth (Matt. 22:15–22). They are to obey government (Rom.13:1–7) and work within the social and political circumstances to affect change. Christians are to pray for those in authority (1 Tim. 2:1–4) and to obey those in authority.

Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to leaven hidden in three pecks of meal (Matt.13:33). The meal represents the world, and the leaven represents the Christian presence in it. We are to exercise our influence within society, seeking to bring about change that way. Though the Christian presence may seem as insignificant as leaven in meal, nevertheless we are to bring about the same profound change.

Second, Christians must remember that God is sovereign. As the Sovereign over the nations, He bestows power on whom He wishes (Dan. 4:17), and He can turn the heart of a king wherever He wishes (Prov.21:1).

Third, Christians must use their specific gifts within the social and political arenas. Christians have different gifts

and ministries (1 Cor. 12:4–6). Some may be called to a higher level of political participation than others (e.g., a candidate for school board or for Congress). All have a responsibility to be involved in society, but some are called to a higher level of social service, such as a social worker or crisis pregnancy center worker. Christians must recognize the diversity of gifts and encourage fellow believers to use their individual gifts for the greatest impact.

Fourth, Christians should channel their social and political activity through the church. Christians need to be accountable to each other, especially as they seek to make an impact on society. Wise leadership can prevent zealous evangelical Christians from repeating mistakes made in previous decades by other Christians.

The local church should also provide a context for compassionate social service. In the New Testament, the local church became a training ground for social action (Acts 2:45; 4:34). Meeting the needs of the poor, the infirm, the elderly, and widows is a responsibility of the church. Ministries to these groups can provide a foundation and a catalyst for further outreach and ministry to the community at large.

Christians are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–16). In our needy society, we have abundant opportunities to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and meet significant social needs. By combining these two areas of preaching and ministry, Christians can make a strategic difference in society.

Fallacies and Tactics

Let’s now focus on some logical fallacies and tactics used against Christians. We need to exercise discernment and be on alert for these attempts to sidetrack moral and biblical reflection on some of the key issues of our day.

The first tactic is *equivocation*. This is the use of vague terms. Someone can start off using language we think we understand and then veer off into a new meaning. If you have been listening to the Probe radio program for any time, you are well aware of the fact that religious cults are often guilty of this. A cult member might say that he believes in salvation by grace. But what he really means is that you have to join his cult and work your way toward salvation. Make people define the vague terms they use.

This tactic is used frequently in bioethics. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research often will not acknowledge the distinction between adult stem cells and embryonic stem cells. Those trying to legalize cloning will refer to it as "somatic cell nuclear transfer." Unless you have a scientific background, you will not know that it is essentially the same thing.

A second tactic is what is often called *"card stacking."* That is when an opponent has a selective use of evidence. Don't jump on the latest bandwagon and intellectual fad without checking the evidence. Many advocates are guilty of listing all the points in their favor while ignoring the serious points against it.

For example, the major biology textbooks used in high school and college never provide students with evidence against evolution. Jonathan Wells, in his book *Icons of Evolution,* shows that the examples that are used in most textbooks are either wrong or misleading. Some of the examples are known frauds (such as the Haeckel embryos) and continue to show up in textbooks decades after they were shown to be fraudulent.

A third tactic is *"appeal to authority."* That means a person is relying on authority to the exclusion of logic and evidence. Just because an expert says it doesn't necessarily make it true. We live in a culture that worships experts, but not all experts are right. Hiram's Law says, "If you consult

enough experts, you can confirm any opinion."

Those who argue that global warming is caused solely by human activity often say that "the debate in the scientific community is over." But an Internet search of critics of the theories behind global warming will show that there are many scientists with credentials in climatology or meteorology who have questions about the theory. It is not accurate to say that the debate is over when the debate still seems to be taking place.

A fourth tactic often used against Christians is known as an *ad hominem* attack. This is Latin for "against the man." People using this tactic attack the person instead of dealing with the validity of their argument. Often the soundness of an argument is inversely proportional to the amount of *ad hominem* rhetoric. If there is evidence for the position, proponents usually argue the merits of the position. When evidence is lacking, they attack the critics.

Christians who want public libraries to filter pornography from minors are accused of censorship. Citizens who want to define marriage as between one man and one woman are called bigots. Scientists who criticize evolution are subjected to withering attacks on their character and scientific credentials. Scientists who question global warming are compared to holocaust deniers.

Another tactic is the *straw man argument*. This is done by making your opponent's argument seem so ridiculous that it is easy to attack and knock down. Liberal commentators say that evangelical Christians want to implement a religious theocracy in America. That's not true. But the hyperbole works to marginalize Christian activists who believe they have a responsibility to speak to social and political issues within society.

A sixth tactic is *sidestepping*. This is done when someone

dodges the issue by changing the subject. Ask a proponent of abortion whether the fetus is human and you are likely to see this technique in action. He or she might start talking about a woman's right to choose or the right of women to control their own bodies. Perhaps you will hear a discourse on the need to tolerate various viewpoints in a pluralistic society. But you probably won't get a straight answer to an important question.

A final tactic is the *"red herring."* That means to go off on a tangent (and is taken from the practice of luring hunting dogs off the trail with the scent of a herring). Proponents of embryonic stem cell research rarely will talk about the morality of destroying human embryos. Instead they will go off on a tangent and talk about the various diseases that could be treated and the thousands of people who could be helped with the research.

Be on the alert when someone in a debate changes the subject. They may want to argue their points on more familiar ground, or they may know they cannot win their argument on the relevant issue at hand.

A person with discernment will recognize these tactics and beware. We are called to develop discernment as we tear down false arguments raised up against the knowledge of God. By doing this we will learn to take every thought captive to the obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

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Veep Logic?

When you're the Vice President of the United States and your office uses farfetched arguments to defend your policies, maybe it's time to review your logic.

Dick Cheney's aides have supported his office's refusal to comply with an executive order because, they've said, the Veep is not part of the government's executive branch. Huh? Seems his duties as president of the Senate, part of the legislative branch, exempt him from executive orders.

The White House now has backed off Cheney's approach and welcomed him back into the executive branch—but he still doesn't have to comply.

Confused? Amused? Disturbed?

Civics Lesson

I've forgotten more of my early education than I care to admit, but I do remember junior high school civics class: Executive, legislative, and judicial. President and VP are executive branch, Congress is legislative, Supreme Court is judicial.

In 2003, President Bush amended an existing executive order about classified information in light of post-9/11 security concerns. Executive branch entities are to report to an oversight agency about how they handle classified material.

Bush's order applies to executive agencies and any other entity within the executive branch that comes into the possession of classified information. {1} You would think that includes the Office of the Vice President, but Cheney's office has refused since 2003 to comply.

Logical problems with the dual-role argument are legion.

Cheney in the past has invoked executive privilege to maintain secrets. Surely having legislative branch duties does not negate one's executive branch status. Can a student disobey school rules because s/he also participates in community service projects?

Cheney's Gift to Jon Stewart

Recently the dual-role logic made headlines. Administration critics howled. Humorists roared. "Cheney's gift to Jon Stewart," remarked one journalist friend. The Comedy Central's *Daily Show* TV anchor joked that Cheney was establishing himself as the fourth branch of government. {2}

Congressman Rahm Emanuel of Illinois proposed cutting funding for Cheney's office and home. "He's not part of the executive branch. We're not going to fund something that doesn't exist," said Emanuel according to the *Chicago Tribune*. "I'm following through on the vice president's logic, no matter how ludicrous it might be." {3} The funding cut narrowly failed in the House.

TheWashington Post noted that Emanuel also opposed Cheney's participation in the congressional baseball game because "he would remake the rules to his liking." {4}

Now a White House spokesman says the dual-role argument is not necessary. He says the executive order explicitly gives Cheney the same standing in the matter as Bush, who issued and enforces the order, so the subordinate oversight agency has no authority to investigate Cheney. {5}

That huge sigh you hear is America relieved that a constitutional crisis has been averted. The internal dispute was passed on to Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, who, of course, has his own critics.

The Question Remains

But the question remains, what are we to make of a high government office that would use such unreasonable reasoning in the first place? Are its leaders naive? Desperate? Covering up something? Blind to the obvious?

The entire episode hints of George Orwell's *Animal Farm*: All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.

Cheney's distorted logic involves focusing on his lesser legislative responsibility and minimizing his major executive responsibilities. Another adept social critic, Jesus of Nazareth, once rebuked some legalistic leaders for majoring on the minors and minimizing what's important. "Blind guides!" he called them. "You strain your water so you won't accidentally swallow a gnat; then you swallow a camel!" {6}

Cheney seems to—or seems to want us to—strain the gnat and swallow the camel. Is it a wonder such tenuous logic makes observers suspicious?

Notes

1. George W. Bush, Executive Order: Further Amendment to Executive Order 12958, As Amended, Classified National Security Information; The White House, March 25, 2003; 6.1 (b);www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030325-11.html, accessed June 29, 2007.
2. "The Daily Show: Non-Executive Decision," nynerd.com/jon-stewart-on-dick-cheney/, accessed June 29, 2007.
3. Leora Falk, "Emanuel seeks to cut funding for Cheney's office, home," Chicago Tribune, June 26, 2007; tinyurl.com/2mmdzt; accessed June 29, 2007.
4. Dana Milbank, "The Cheese Stands Alone," The Washington Post, June 26, 2007, A02; tinyurl.com/ywffjo; accessed June 29, 2007.

5. Jim Rutenberg, “White House Drops Vice President’s Dual-Role Argument as Moot,” The New York Times, June 28, 2007; www.nytimes.com/2007/06/28/washington/28cheney.html?ref=washington; accessed June 29, 2007.
6. Matthew 23:24 NLT.

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Christian Discernment

We are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. We must apply biblical principles to these social and political issues. And we must avoid the pitfalls and logical fallacies that so often accompany these issues.

 *This article is also available in Spanish.*

Turn on a television or open a newspaper. You are immediately presented with a myriad of ethical issues. Daily we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. Society is awash in controversial issues: abortion, euthanasia, cloning, race, drug abuse, homosexuality, gambling, pornography, and capital punishment. Life may have been simpler in a previous age, but now the rise of technology and the fall of ethical consensus have brought us to a society full of moral dilemmas.

Never has society needed biblical perspectives more to evaluate contemporary moral issues. And yet Christians seem less equipped to address these topics from a biblical perspective. The Barna Research Group conducted a national survey of adults and concluded that only four percent of

adults have a biblical worldview as the basis of their decision-making. The survey also discovered that nine percent of born again Christians have such a perspective on life.{1}

It is worth noting that what George Barna defines as a biblical worldview would be considered by most people to be basic Christian doctrine. It doesn't even include aspects of a biblical perspective on social and political issues.

Of even greater concern is the fact that most Christians do not base their beliefs on an absolute moral foundation. Biblical ethics rests on the belief in absolute truth. Yet surveys show that a minority of born again adults (forty-four percent) and an even smaller proportion of born again teenagers (nine percent) are certain of the existence of absolute moral truth.{2} By a three-to-one margin adults say truth is always relative to the person and their situation. This perspective is even more lopsided among teenagers who overwhelmingly believe moral truth depends on the circumstances.{3}

Social scientists as well as pollsters have been warning that American society is becoming more and more dominated by moral anarchy. Writing in the early 1990s, James Patterson and Peter Kim said in *The Day America Told the Truth* that there was no moral authority in America. "We choose which laws of God we believe in. There is absolutely no moral consensus in this country as there was in the 1950s, when all our institutions commanded more respect."{4} Essentially we live in a world of moral anarchy.

So how do we begin to apply a Christian worldview to the complex social and political issues of the day? And how do we avoid falling for the latest fad or cultural trend that blows in the wind? The following are some key principles to apply and some dangerous pitfalls to avoid.

Biblical Principles

A key biblical principle that applies to the area of bioethics is the sanctity of human life. Such verses as Psalm 139:13-16 show that God's care and concern extend to the womb. Other verses such as Jeremiah 1:5, Judges 13:7-8, Psalm 51:5 and Exodus 21:22–25 give additional perspective and framework to this principle. These principles can be applied to issues ranging from abortion to stem cell research to infanticide.

A related biblical principle involves the equality of human beings. The Bible teaches that God has made "of one blood all nations of men" (Acts 17:26). The Bible also teaches that it is wrong for a Christian to have feelings of superiority (Philippians 2). Believers are told not to make class distinctions between various people (James 2). Paul teaches the spiritual equality of all people in Christ (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11). These principles apply to racial relations and our view of government.

A third principle is a biblical perspective on marriage. Marriage is God's plan and provides intimate companionship for life (Genesis 2:18). Marriage provides a context for the procreation and nurture of children (Ephesians 6:1-2). And finally, marriage provides a godly outlet for sexual desire (1 Corinthians 7:2). These principles can be applied to such diverse issues as artificial reproduction (which often introduces a third party into the pregnancy) and cohabitation (living together).

Another biblical principle involves sexual ethics. The Bible teaches that sex is to be within the bounds of marriage, as a man and the woman become one flesh (Ephesians 5:31). Paul teaches that we should "avoid sexual immorality" and learn to control our own body in a way that is "holy and honorable" (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5). He admonishes us to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18). These principles apply to such issues as premarital sex, adultery, and homosexuality.

A final principle concerns government and our obedience to civil authority. Government is ordained by God (Rom.13:1-7). We are to render service and obedience to the government (Matt. 22:21) and submit to civil authority (1 Pet. 2:13-17). Even though we are to obey government, there may be certain times when we might be forced to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29). These principles apply to issues such as war, civil disobedience, politics, and government.

Biblical Discernment

So how do we sort out what is true and what is false? This is a difficult proposition in a world awash in data. It underscores the need for Christians to develop discernment. This is a word that appears fairly often in the Bible (1 Samuel 25:32-33; 1 Kings 3:10-11; 4:29; Psalm 119:66; Proverbs 2:3; Daniel 2:14; Philippians 1:9 [NASB]). And with so many facts, claims, and opinions being tossed about, we all need to be able to sort through what is true and what is false.

Colossians 2:8 says, “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” We need to develop discernment so that we are not taken captive by false ideas. Here are some things to watch for:

1. Equivocation – the use of vague terms. Someone can start off using language we think we understand and then veer off into a new meaning. Most of us are well aware of the fact that religious cults are often guilty of this. A cult member might say that he believes in salvation by grace. But what he really means is that you have to join his cult and work your way toward salvation. Make people define the vague terms they use.

This tactic is used frequently in bioethics. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research often will not acknowledge the

distinction between adult stem cells and embryonic stem cells. Those trying to legalize cloning will refer to it as "somatic cell nuclear transfer." Unless you have a scientific background, you will not know that it is essentially the same thing.

2. Card stacking – the selective use of evidence. Don't jump on the latest bandwagon and intellectual fad without checking the evidence. Many advocates are guilty of listing all the points in their favor while ignoring the serious points against it.

The major biology textbooks used in high school and college never provide students with evidence against evolution. Jonathan Wells, in his book *Icons of Evolution,* shows that the examples that are used in most textbooks are either wrong or misleading.{5} Some of the examples are known frauds (such as the Haeckel embryos) and continue to show up in textbooks decades after they were shown to be fraudulent.

Another example would be the Y2K fears. Anyone who was concerned about the potential catastrophe in 2000 need only read any of the technical computer journals in the 1990s to see that no computer expert was predicting what the Y2K fear mongers were predicting at the time.

3. Appeal to authority – relying on authority to the exclusion of logic and evidence. Just because an expert says it, that doesn't necessarily make it true. We live in a culture that worships experts, but not all experts are right. Hiram's Law says: "If you consult enough experts, you can confirm any opinion."

Those who argue that global warming is caused by human activity often say that "the debate in the scientific community is over." But an Internet search of critics of the theories behind global warming will show that there are many scientists with credentials in climatology or meteorology who

have questions about the theory. It is not accurate to say that the debate is over when the debate still seems to be taking place.

4. Ad hominem – Latin for "against the man." People using this tactic attack the person instead of dealing with the validity of their argument. Often the soundness of an argument is inversely proportional to the amount of ad hominem rhetoric. If there is evidence for the position, proponents usually argue the merits of the position. When evidence is lacking, they attack the critics.

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5. Straw man argument – making your opponent's argument seem so ridiculous that it is easy to attack and knock down. Liberal commentators say that evangelical Christians want to implement a religious theocracy in America. That's not true. But the hyperbole works to marginalize Christian activists who believe they have a responsibility to speak to social and political issues within society.

Those who stand for moral principles in the area of bioethics often see this tactic used against them. They hear from proponents of physician assisted suicide that pro-life advocates don't care about the suffering of the terminally ill. Proponents of embryonic stem cell research level the same charge by saying that pro-life people don't care that these new medical technologies could alleviate the suffering of many with intractable diseases. Nothing could be further from the truth.

6. Sidestepping – dodging the issue by changing the subject. Politicians do this in press conferences by not answering the question asked by the reporter, but instead answering a question they wish someone had asked. Professors sometimes do that when a student points out an inconsistency or a leap in logic.

Ask a proponent of abortion whether the fetus is human and you are likely to see this tactic in action. He or she might start talking about a woman's right to choose or the right of women to control their own bodies. Perhaps you will hear a discourse on the need to tolerate various viewpoints in a pluralistic society. But you probably won't get a straight answer to an important question.

7. Red herring – going off on a tangent (from the practice of luring hunting dogs off the trail with the scent of a herring fish). Proponents of embryonic stem cell research rarely will talk about the morality of destroying human embryos. Instead they will go off on a tangent and talk about the various diseases that could be treated and the thousands of people who could be helped with the research.

Be on the alert when someone in a debate changes the subject. They may want to argue their points on more familiar ground, or they may know they cannot win their argument on the relevant issue at hand.

In conclusion, we have discussed some of the key biblical principles we should apply to our consideration and debate about social and political issues. We have talked about the sanctity of human life and the equality of human beings. We have discussed a biblical perspective on marriage and on sexual ethics. And we have also talked about a biblical perspective on government and civil authority.

We have also spent some time talking about the importance of developing biblical discernment and looked at many of the

logical fallacies that are frequently used in arguing against a biblical perspective on many of the social and political issues of our day.

Every day, it seems, we are confronted with ethical choices and moral complexity. As Christians it is important to consider these biblical principles and consistently apply them to these issues. It is also important that we develop discernment and learn to recognize these tactics. We are called to develop discernment as we tear down false arguments raised up against the knowledge of God. By doing this we will learn to take every thought captive to the obedience to Christ (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

Notes

1. “A Biblical Worldview Has a Radical Effect on a Person’s Life,” The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 1 Dec. 2003.
2. “The Year’s Most Intriguing Findings, From Barna Research Studies,” The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 12 Dec. 2000.
3. “Americans Are Most Likely to Base Truth on Feelings,” The Barna Update (Ventura, CA), 12 Feb. 2002.
4. James Patterson and Peter Kim, *The Day America Told the Truth* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991).
5. Jonathan Wells, *Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth?* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 2000).

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