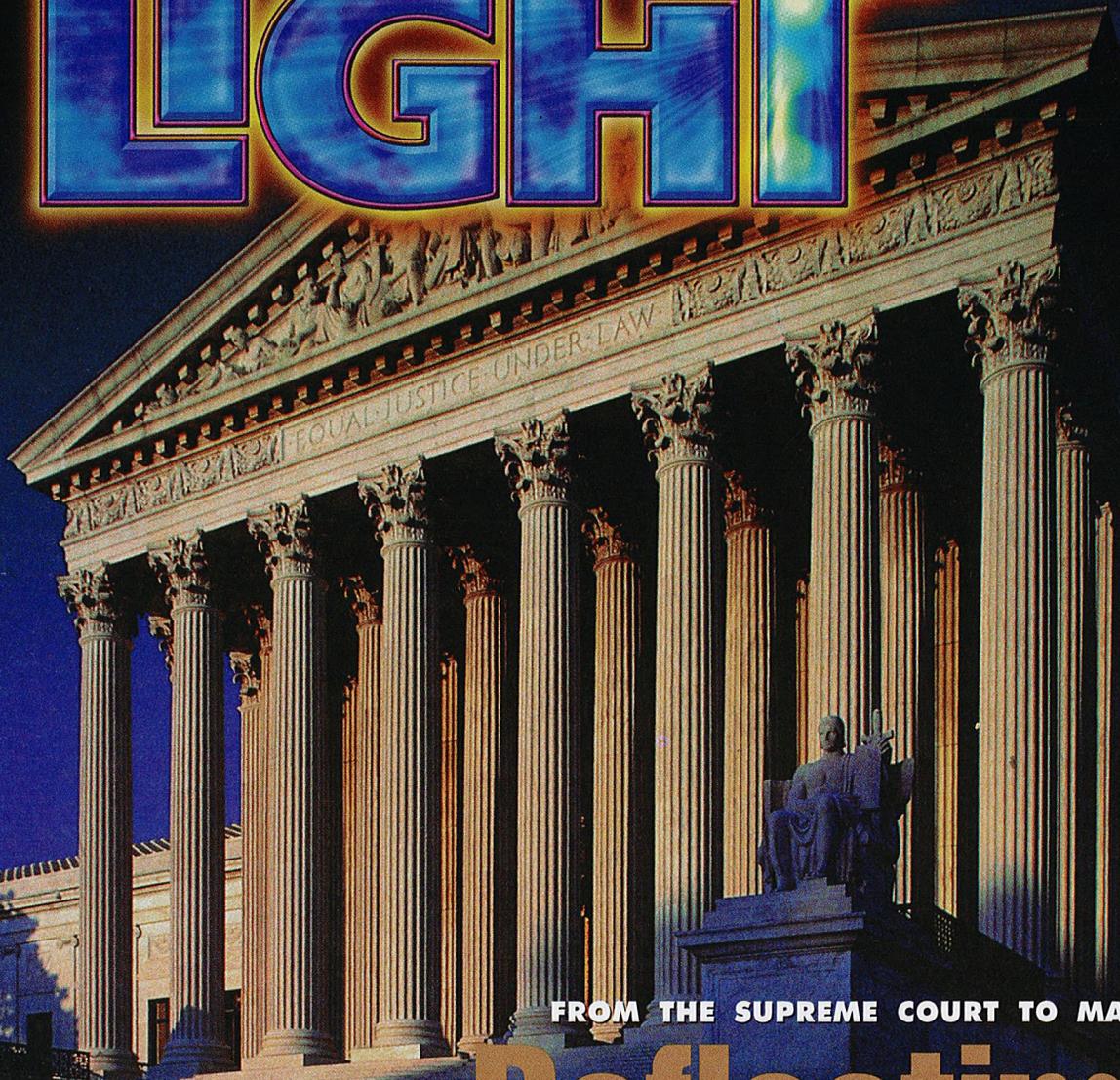


LIGHT



FROM THE SUPREME COURT TO MAIN

Reflecting

STREET, USA, THE EFFECTS OF ELECTION 2000

on America's

WILL BE FELT FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

Future

YOUR VOTE DOES MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

"I still believe that standing up for the truth of God is the greatest thing in the world. This is the end of life. The end of life is not to be happy. The end of life is not to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. The end of life is to do the will of God, come what may."

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery, Alabama, in a sermon delivered in 1956

BY DR. RICHARD D. LAND

The growing secularization of American culture makes it more critical than ever that citizens Christians exert their influence in the public square. And there is no time like the present for Christians to carry their faith-tinted views into the give-and-take of civic affairs.

Christians need to boldly engage the culture with the life-changing and the future-

groups each have their unique perspective on the issues. And the person elected as the next President of the United States will lead our country the way he wants it to go. And perhaps more than at anytime in a generation, the decisions made in this electoral cycle will significantly impact your children and your grandchildren for the rest of their lives.

As Christians, it is our

His Word will not return to Him void (Isa. 55:11).

The glorious truth that our salvation in Christ makes our future heavenly citizenship secure does not relieve us from fulfilling our earthly responsibilities as citizen Christians. Christians are citizens of two realms—the earthly and the spiritual—and we have rights and privileges as well as obligations and responsibilities in both spheres.

As citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), we are commanded to be obedient to the Lord Jesus (Exod. 20:1-5). Our Lord's instruction to "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matt. 22:21) means giving ultimate allegiance only to God. It means paying your taxes. It also means much more.

The Apostle Paul instructs us that as Christians we have the responsibility to be good citizens of the state "for conscience sake" because God has ordained government to punish and restrict evil-doers and to reward and protect moral behavior (Rom. 13:1-7). As Christians we are to support and participate in the civil government.

Christians also are commanded by Jesus to be the "salt" of the earth and the "light" of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). He calls us as citizen Christians to be actively engaged with the world, preserving as "salt" and illuminating as "light." Thus, the responsibilities of citizen Christians include not just obedience to the state, but involvement in society. And such involvement includes electoral participation—registering to vote, being informed

about the choices, and then casting our votes for candidates who endorse our convictions and values.

When we bring our religious and moral convictions into the public marketplace of ideas and involve ourselves in the political arena, we are standing solidly within the best of our traditions as Christians in American history. Clearly, as American citizens we have the right to be involved in the public and legislative arena. As obedient Christians, we have a responsibility to be involved.

Citizen Christians are called upon not just to enjoy, but to exercise; not just to preach, but to practice our liberties. Surely, there could be no better thing in this election season for Americans and for America than for citizen Christians to awaken to the exercise of their rights and to the fulfillment of their responsibilities. When we honor God in this way, we have the potential to make a profound difference in the electoral and public policy process.¹



Richard Land is President of the SBC's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission and host of the nationally syndicated daily radio broadcast, *For Faith & Family*.

URGENT!

Inform your congregation of the issues by calling 1-800-475-9127 to request additional copies of this magazine. Political platforms of the two major parties are included in the center of this publication to inform voters of each presidential candidate's stance on issues that will affect every American's faith and family.

Our salvation in Christ makes our heavenly citizenship secure but does not relieve us from fulfilling earthly responsibilities as citizen Christians. Changing the culture requires more than quietly performing our civic duty—slipping behind the curtain of a voting booth and pulling the lever. It requires us to take a stand based upon God's Word and to speak the truth . . . out loud.

securing truths of Scripture in the 2000 election season, an election that has as its centerpiece a pivotal presidential race. It is not the time for believers to retreat or deny the value of their presence and point of view in the electoral and public policy process.

Yet many Americans are tuning out the 2000 campaigns for local, state, and federal offices. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press found that nearly half of Americans (49%) believe things will basically stay the same in our country regardless of who is elected President (www.people-press.org).

Nothing could be further from the truth. Your involvement in the political process makes a difference. Candidates running on the tickets of the two major parties along with those representing the interests of the various other splinter

biblical duty to engage in "intelligent intercession for politicians" and "informed involvement in politics," as Robert Dugan says in his book, *Stand and Be Counted*. In a democracy, our faith-filled values are just as relevant to the discussion of the issues as are the values of our neighbors. We dare not underestimate the damage that can be inflicted upon our nation by an uneducated and unmotivated electorate.

And it's about more than quietly performing our civic duty—slipping behind the curtain of a voting booth and pulling the lever. Changing the culture requires Bible-believing citizens to take a stand based upon God's Word and to speak the truth . . . out loud. Then you'll be assured of making a difference—potentially a big difference for your faith and family! God has promised that



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Why Should Christians Vote?

BY DWAYNE HASTINGS

1 Christians should vote because Jesus tells us in the Bible to be a part of the process, not apart from it.

Jesus commands His followers to involve themselves in the culture as salt and light—bearing the purifying and enlightening force of Scripture—to impact society for good and for God (Matt. 5:13-16). Stepping into that voting booth, informed Christians indicate their electoral preferences based on their views on the issues shaped by godly wisdom they gain from God in study and prayer. It is a Christian's obligation to offer up a faith-based agenda for the common good.

2 Christians should vote because our liberties were secured by the blood of our forebearers in faith early in our nation's history and have been preserved by the vigilance of brave men and women who time and time again have defended our freedoms.

When we exercise our right to vote, we acknowledge our gratefulness for the sacrifice of those who have gone before us. Contemporary Christians' lack of involvement in the political process weakens our voice and threatens to erode our right to bring biblically based views into the policy arena.

John Adams, our nation's second president, wrote to his wife Abigail in 1775: "It is Religion and Morality alone which can establish the principles upon which freedom can freely stand. A patriot must be a religious man."

3 Christians should vote because Jesus urged His followers to render unto Caesar what was Caesar's (Luke 20:19-26).

Voting is a means by which all citizens, including Christians, exercise their civic responsibilities under the rights guaranteed in a democracy. In doing so, Christians are acting in obedience to the Lord's command. While as Americans we do not have an emperor to whom civic homage is due, we do have a Constitution within which is made clear our right to have a representative government. For a Christian to sit on his hands during an election is an unconscionable breach of Christ's command.

4 Christians should vote because Christ compels us to voice our faith-based convictions at the ballot box, as well as through the mailbox and atop the soapbox.

"For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15). As Christians, we should be informed voters, not voting a

5 Christians should vote because the innocent, the indigent, and the unborn need a defender.

"He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). We are standing four-square on Scripture when we support candidates who advocate public policy that protects innocent human life, cares for the oppressed, and provides equal justice for the accused.

6 Christians should vote because as we exercise our civic right we have the opportunity to advocate policy positions that signal our faith in the providential care of God.

We exhibit our trust in God as we support candidates whose public policy positions may not directly benefit us but offer relief to others in greater need. "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

Our positions on the issues may run counter to the whims

of the population at large as we emphasize policies which address the needs of others, placing our own interests subservient to the public good, e.g. supporting a pro-life candidate instead of a candidate promising tax-relief. Since our neighbors may well take notice of our selflessness, we are witnessing to our abiding faith in God.

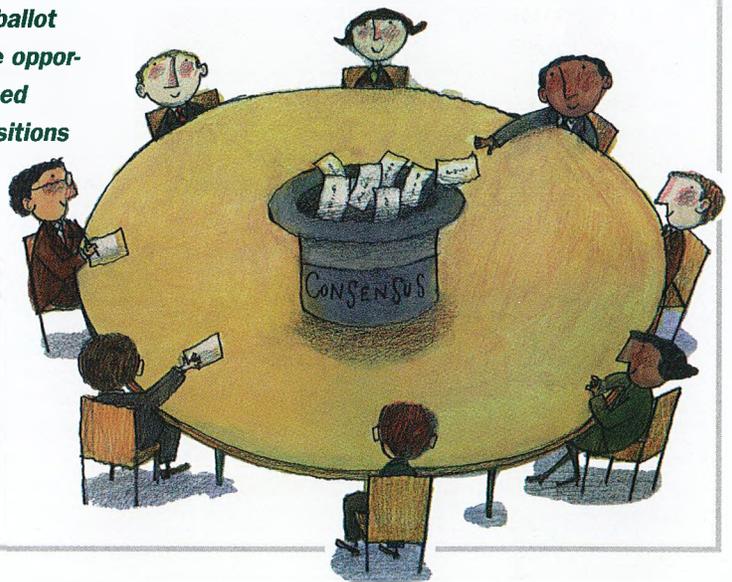
7 Christians should vote because as we involve ourselves in the electoral and public policy process, we add to our prayer list.

As Jesus has charged us to carry our faith into the public square, we bear a necessary obligation in our "political involvement" to know and pray for those who serve us as public servants.

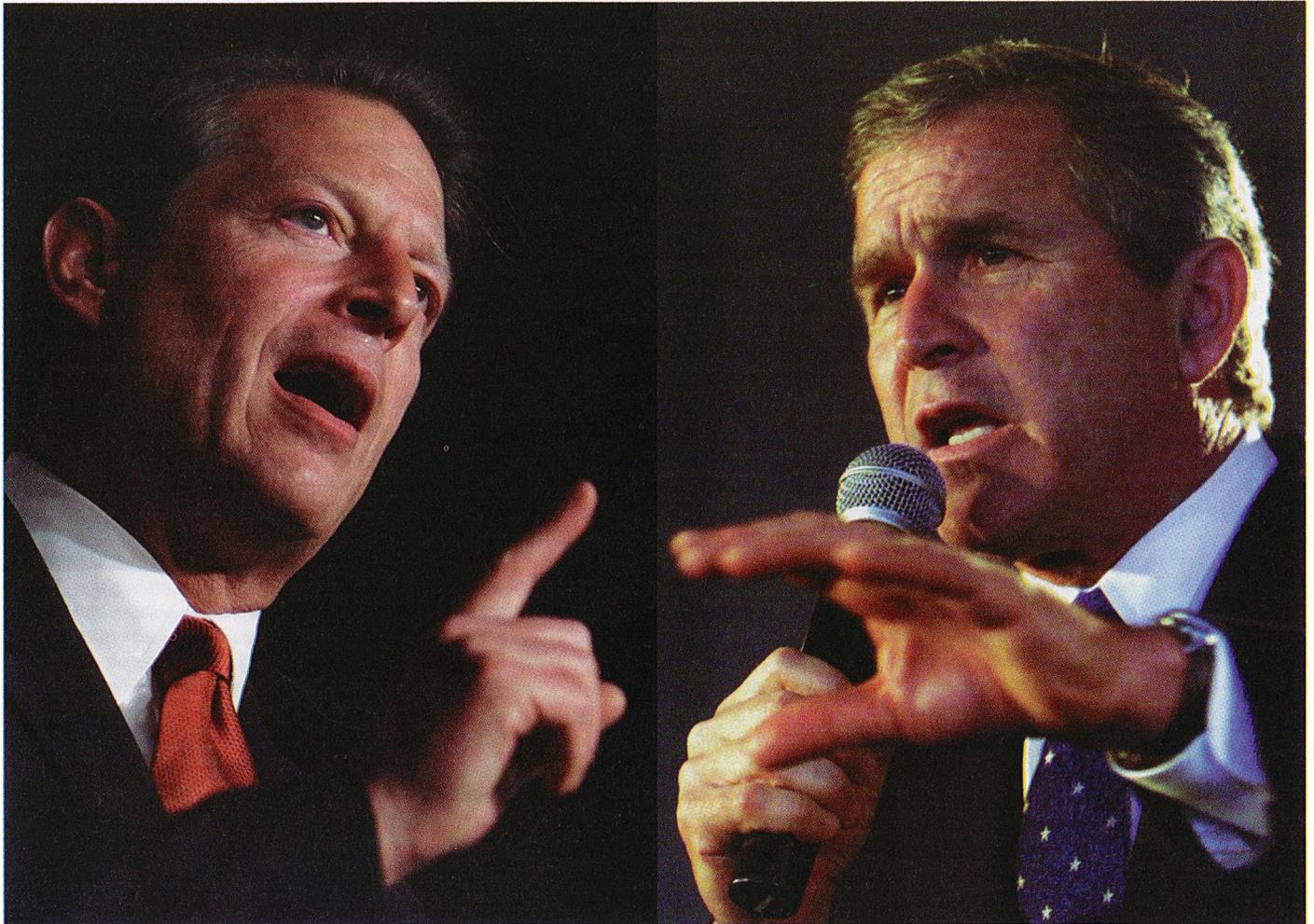
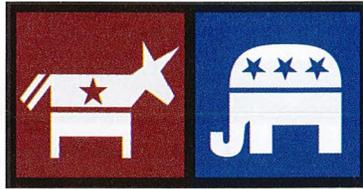
This participation in the political process cannot stop at the ballot box; such personal involvement introduces us to those who represent us. Such awareness should then compel us to both pray for our leaders and plead for policy that is undergirded by scriptural principles (1 Tim. 2:1-2; 2 Tim. 4:2-5).⁺

From the board room to the ballot box, the Christian has unique opportunities to voice his faith-based convictions and advocate positions that signal his faith in the providential care of God.

"party line" or simply in accordance with another's prescribed agenda. Christians are to look beyond the campaign rhetoric and politicians' artful posturing to uncover the genuine policy positions of the candidates.



ELECTION 2000



**TWO VISIONS FOR AMERICA:
DEMOCRATS, REPUBLICANS
ON THE ISSUES**

Included on the following three pages are excerpts, as compiled by Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission staff, from the 2000 Democrat and Republican platforms. This is not an exhaustive list of the issues in this year's election, nor is it an endorsement of either party or candidate. A presidential candidate traditionally is not bound to every position in the party platform, but Al Gore and George W. Bush each oversaw his party's platform process. These are the platforms on which they are running. The full text of each platform is available online at www.democrats.org or www.rnc.org.



DEMOCRATS

REPUBLICANS

ABORTION

"The Democrat Party stands behind the right of every woman to choose, consistent with *Roe v. Wade*, and regardless of ability to pay. We believe it is a fundamental constitutional liberty that individual Americans — not government — can best take responsibility for making the most difficult and intensely personal decisions regarding reproduction. This year's Supreme Court rulings show to us all that eliminating a woman's right to choose is only one justice away. That's why the stakes in this election are as high as ever. Our goal is to make abortion less necessary and more rare, not more difficult and more dangerous.... Al Gore will appoint justices to the Supreme Court who have a demonstrated concern for and commitment to the individual rights protected by our Constitution, including the right to privacy."

"The Supreme Court's recent decision, prohibiting states from banning partial birth abortions—a procedure denounced by a committee of the American Medical Association and rightly branded as four-fifths infanticide—shocks the conscience of the nation.... the unborn child has a fundamental... right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and we endorse legislation to make clear that the 14th Amendment's protections apply to unborn children. Our purpose is to have legislative and judicial protection of that right against those who perform abortions. We oppose using public revenues for abortion and will not fund organizations which advocate it. We support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of human life.... We salute those who provide alternatives to abortion and offer adoption services...."

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

"We must restore Americans' faith in their own democracy by providing real... campaign finance reform, creating fairer and more open elections, and breaking the link between special interests and political influence.... The McCain-Feingold bill is the very first piece of legislation that a President Gore will submit to Congress—and he will fight for it until it becomes the law of the land.... He will insist on tough new lobbying reform, publicly guaranteed TV time for debates and advocacy by candidates, and a crackdown on special interest issue ads. Most boldly of all, Al Gore has proposed a public-private, non-partisan Democracy Endowment which will raise money from Americans and finance congressional elections—with no other contributions allowed to candidates who accept the funding."

"[Our] party affirms that any regulation of the political process must not infringe upon the rights of the people to full participation in the political process.... [Our] guiding principle in the development of laws to regulate campaigns is: Will any particular proposal encourage or restrict the energetic engagement of Americans in elections?... [We] will stop the abuses of corporate and labor 'soft' money contributions to political parties.... Enact 'Paycheck Protection,' ensuring no union member is forced to contribute to [a] campaign... preserve the right of every individual and all groups to express their opinions and advocate their issues... forbidding incumbents to roll over their leftover campaign funds into a campaign for a different office; require full and timely disclosure on the Internet of all campaign contributions...."

CIVIL RIGHTS

"We continue to lead the fight to end discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. [Our] party has always supported the Equal Rights Amendment and will continue to do so, and we are committed to ensuring full equality for women and to vigorously enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act.... We recognize the importance of new battles against forms of discrimination and disadvantage that stand as barriers to communities and families, such as environmental injustices and predatory lending practices. And we will fight for full funding and full staffing of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and other civil rights enforcement agencies so they can do their job of ensuring that America lives up to its creed of equal rights and equal opportunity for all."

"Equality of individuals before the law has always been a cornerstone of our party. We oppose discrimination based on sex, race, age, religion, creed, disability, or national origin and will vigorously enforce anti-discrimination statutes. We call on all Americans to reject the forces of hatred and bigotry. Accordingly, we denounce all who practice or promote racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice, and religious intolerance.... We support the First Amendment right of freedom of association and stand united with private organizations, such as the Boy Scouts... and support their positions.... We do not believe sexual preference should be given special legal protection.... We believe rights inhere in individuals, not groups. We will attain our nation's goal of equal opportunity without quotas or other... preferential treatment."

CRIME

"[We] believe government's most basic duty is to establish law, order, and freedom and keep citizens safe from crime." Supports increase in number of community police on streets, tougher laws against serious and violent crime, DNA testing in death-penalty cases in "all appropriate circumstances," increased crime prevention, stronger penalties against sex offenders, and an end to racial profiling. "Al Gore believes in a Victims' Rights Amendment.... Democrats believe that we should fight gun crime... with stronger laws and stronger enforcement.... We need mandatory child safety locks, to protect our children. We should require a photo license I.D., a full background check, and a gun safety test to buy a new handgun in America. We support more federal gun prosecutors, ATF agents and inspectors, and giving states and communities another 10,000 prosecutors to fight gun crime."

"While we support community policing and other proven initiatives against crime, we strongly oppose any erosion of that responsibility by the federal government.... A Republican president will advance an agenda... [of] no-frills prisons, with productive work requirements, that make the threat of jail a powerful deterrent to crime... [and] a constitutional amendment to protect victims' rights at every stage of the criminal justice system.... We will reopen Pennsylvania Ave. in front of the White House as a symbolic expression of our confidence in the restoration of the rule of law.... We renew our call for a complete overhaul of the juvenile justice system that will punish juvenile offenders.... We defend the constitutional right to keep and bear arms, and we affirm the individual responsibility to safely use and store firearms.... [and] will vigorously enforce current gun laws...."

DRUGS

"We need to dry up drug demand, hold up drugs at the border and break up drug rings that are spreading poison on our streets. We should open more drug courts... double the number of drug hot-spots where we aggressively target our enforcement efforts, expand drug treatment for at-risk youth, and make sure that all of our school zones are drug-free zones.... We know that to dry up drug demand, we must provide drug treatment upon demand.... We have to test prisoners for drugs while they are in jail, treat them for addictions, and break up the drug rings inside our prison system.... We must continue to fight narco-traffickers, increasing our budget to do so. We must continue to have a strong drug czar who can bring together the considerable resources of the U.S. government in this effort."

"The entire nation has suffered from the administration's virtual surrender in the war against drugs.... A Republican president will advance an agenda to restore the public's safety [through] increased penalties and resources to combat the dramatic rise in production and use of methamphetamine and new drugs such as ecstasy; an effective program of rehabilitation, where appropriate.... We will bring accountability to anti-drug programs, promote those that work, and cease funding for those that waste resources. The Department of Justice will require federal prosecutors to aggressively pursue drug dealers, from the kingpins to the lackeys. We renew our support for capital punishment for drug traffickers who take innocent life."

DEMOCRATS

REPUBLICANS

"We need revolutionary improvements in our public schools. This requires a major national investment; a demand of accountability from all; a genuine expansion of public-school choice, and renewed focus on discipline, character and safety in our schools... [W]hat America needs are public schools that compete with one another and are held accountable for results, not private-school vouchers that drain resources from public schools and hand over the public's hard-earned tax dollars to private schools with no accountability." Supports voluntary national tests in fourth-grade reading and eighth-grade math and a teacher corps for needy schools. "Failing schools that do not improve should be quickly shut down and reopened with a new principal and new teachers.... The Democrat Party will triple the number of charter schools in the nation."

"Parents and the entertainment industry must accept more responsibility. Many parents are not aware of the resources available to them, such as the V-chip technology in television sets and Internet filtering devices, that can help shield children from violent entertainment. The entertainment industry must accept more responsibility and exercise more self-restraint, by strictly enforcing movie ratings, by taking a close look at violence in its own advertising, and by determining whether the ratings systems are allowing too many children to be exposed to too much violence and cruelty."

"Democrats know that for all of us there is no more solemn responsibility than that of stewards of God's creation.... With regard to public lands, Democrats believe that communities, environmental interests, and government agencies should work together to protect our public resources, critical habitat areas, and wildlands while ensuring the vitality of local economies.... Democrats believe we must give Americans incentives to invest in driving more fuel-efficient cars, trucks, and sport-utility vehicles, living in more energy-efficient homes, and using more environmentally sound appliances and equipment. We need to clean up aging power plants. We must invest in rebuilding and improving our transportation infrastructure and ensure that we adequately maintain these systems for the future."

"Faith-based and community-based organizations have always been at the forefront in combating the hardships facing families and communities. Democrats believe it is time that government found ways to harness the power of faith-based organizations in tackling social ills such as drug addiction, juvenile violence, and homelessness. However, in contrast to the Republicans, Democrats believe that partnerships with faith-based organizations should augment—not replace—government programs, should respect First Amendment protections, and should never use taxpayer funds to proselytize or to support discrimination."

"Government does not raise children, families do. But government can help make the hardest job in the world—being a parent—a little easier.... We need to expand [the Family and Medical Leave law] so that it covers parent-teacher visits and children's routine medical appointments.... We should not penalize families by forcing couples to pay more in taxes just because they have made the sacred commitment of marriage to one another.... Provide grants to community and faith-based organizations to help couples prepare for and strengthen their marriages... become better parents and reduce domestic violence.... making child care more affordable through targeted tax cuts and other investments, in improving the safety and quality of child care centers, in ensuring that children start school ready to read and in giving a helping hand to parents who decided to stay at home with their children.... Fund Head Start.... we must require all fathers who owe child support to pay or go to work...."

"The Republican Party commits itself to bold reforms in education—to make every school a place of learning and achievement for every child. We will preserve local control of public schools, while demanding high standards and accountability for results.... Empower needy families to escape persistently failing schools by allowing federal dollars to follow their children to the school of their choice.... Ensure that all children learn to read by reforming Head Start and by facilitating state reading initiatives.... [reward] states that enact a system for teacher accountability.... We defend the option for home schooling and call for vigilant enforcement of laws designed to protect family rights and privacy in education.... We will continue to work for the return of voluntary school prayer to our schools...."

"There is much to celebrate in contemporary culture, but also much to deplore: the glorification of violence, the glamorizing of drugs, the abuse of women and children whether in music or videos, advertising, or tabloid journalism. We support and applaud... [those] individuals and organizations using their power as citizens and consumers to advance a cultural renewal in all aspects of American life.... [We] call upon the media to reconsider their role in fostering bias through negative stereotyping of religious citizens."

"Economic prosperity and environmental protection must advance together.... Environmental regulations should be based upon the best science. We believe the government's main role should be to provide market-based incentives to innovate and develop the new technologies for Americans to meet—and exceed—environmental standards.... Use the Superfund resources to actually clean up places where people live and labor, rather than waste it on costly litigation." Promises to work "with businesses and other nations to reduce harmful emissions through new technologies without compromising America's sovereignty or competitiveness—and without forcing Americans to walk to work."

"When government funds privately-operated social, welfare, or educational programs, it must not discriminate against faith-based organizations, whose record in providing services to those in need far exceeds that of the public sector. Their participation should be actively encouraged, and never conditioned upon covering or removing religious objects or symbols.... Congress mandated charitable choice in the welfare reform law of 1996, allowing states to contract with faith-based providers for welfare services on the same basis as any other provider.... We propose... [to] apply charitable choice to all federal social service programs... [and] extending the federal charity tax deduction to the 70% of all tax filers who do not itemize deductions."

"Republicans recognize the importance of having a father and a mother in the home. The two-parent family still provides the best environment of stability, discipline, responsibility, and character.... We encourage states to review their divorce laws and to support projects that strengthen marriage, promote successful parenting, bolster the stability of the home, and protect the economic rights of the innocent spouse and children.... We support initiatives that strengthen marriage rates and promote committed fatherhood.... We second Gov. Bush's call to make permanent the adoption tax credit and expand it to \$7,500.... [and] help families by doubling the child tax credit to \$1,000, making it available to more families, and eliminating the marriage penalty.... With the tax cuts we propose... six million families—one in five tax-paying families with children—will no longer pay any federal income tax...."

EDUCATION

ENTERTAINMENT/ MEDIA

ENVIRONMENT

FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

FAMILY

PARTY PLATFORMS

the issues

DEMOCRATS

REPUBLICANS

GAMBLING (The Democrat party's platform makes no reference to gambling.)

"We support legislation prohibiting gambling over the Internet or in student athletics by athletes who are participating in competitive sports."

HEALTH CARE "We must redouble our efforts to bring the uninsured into coverage step-by-step and as soon as possible. We should guarantee access to affordable health care for every child in America... Americans need a real, enforceable Patients' Bill of Rights with the right to see a specialist, the right to appeal decisions to an outside board, guaranteed coverage of emergency room care, and the right to sue when they are unfairly denied coverage... It is time we modernized Medicare with a new prescription drug benefit... It is time we treated underage tobacco use like the health crisis it is. That's why we need to give the [Food and Drug Administration] full authority to keep cigarettes away from children..."

"Our nation must reform Medicare—and in doing so, ensure that prescription drugs are affordable and available for every senior who needs them. Seniors deserve a wider scope of coverage... more choices among health plans... All Americans should have access to high-quality and affordable health care. They should have a range of options and be able to select what is the best care for their individual and family needs—a health care system that supports, not supplants, the private sector; that promotes personal responsibility in health care decision-making; and that ensures the least intrusive role for the federal government... We also support a patient's right to adjudicate claims in court to receive necessary medical care."

HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS "We support continued efforts, like the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, to end workplace discrimination against gay men and lesbians. We support the full inclusion of gay and lesbian families in the life of the nation. This would include an equitable alignment of benefits." Favors punishing hate crimes based on sexual orientation. Al Gore "is committed to equal treatment of all service members and believes all patriotic Americans [should] be allowed to serve their country without discrimination, persecution, and violence."

"We support the traditional definition of 'marriage' as the legal union of one man and one woman, and we believe that federal judges and bureaucrats should not force states to recognize other living arrangements as marriages"... Congress enacted "the Defense of Marriage Act which a Republican Department of Justice will energetically defend in the courts... We do not believe sexual preference should be given special legal protection or standing in law... We affirm that homosexuality is incompatible with military service."

HUMAN EMBRYO RESEARCH "We should allow stem cell research to make important new discoveries."

"With the enormous increase in resources for biomedical research comes accountability for its use, as well as responsibility to maintain the highest ethical standards. We applaud congressional Republicans for the steps they have taken for protection of human embryos and against human cloning, the trafficking in fetal tissue organs, and related abuses."

PORNOGRAPHY (The Democrat party's platform makes no reference to pornography.)

"Federal obscenity and child pornography laws... must be vigorously enforced—in contrast to the current administration's failure in this area... We endorse Republican legislation pending in Congress to require schools and libraries to secure their computers against on-line porn and predators if they accept federal subsidies to connect to the Internet."

RELIGION IN PUBLIC LIFE (The Democrat party's platform does not specifically address religion in public life.)

"Our country was founded in faith and upon the truth that self-government is rooted in religious conviction. While the Constitution guards against the establishment of state-sponsored religion, it also honors the free exercise of religion. We believe the federal courts must respect this freedom and the original intent of the Framers. We assert the right of religious leaders to speak out on public issues and will not allow the EEOC or any other arm of government to regulate or ban religious symbols from the workplace. We condemn the desecration of places of worship and objects of religious devotion... We believe religious institutions and schools should not be taxed... We affirm the right of public schools, courthouses, and other public buildings to post copies of the Ten Commandments."

TEEN SEXUALITY "We support contraceptive research, family planning, comprehensive family life education, and policies that support healthy childbearing... We must continue to support efforts to reduce unintended pregnancies, and we call on all Americans to take personal responsibility to meet this important goal."

"We renew our call for replacing 'family planning' programs for teens with increased funding for abstinence education which teaches abstinence until marriage as the responsible and expected standard of behavior. Abstinence from sexual activity is the only protection that is 100% effective against out-of-wedlock pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases... We oppose school-based clinics that provide referrals, counseling, and related services for contraception and abortion... We support the establishment of Second Chance Maternity Homes..."

Does Character Count?

BUILDING ONE NATION UNDER GOD

BY ADRIAN ROGERS

Our nation is in crisis. But I want to address not so much the crisis in government, but the bigger and more disturbing crisis at the level of everyday American life.

Whenever charges are brought against someone in high office, as we are continually witnessing in our nation these days, people respond in three ways: "The charges are true," "The charges are untrue," and "So what? Who cares? Guilty, innocent — what difference does it make?"

The third category is what I am most concerned with. These people are the ones who argue that there is no connection between personal life and political abilities. And according to all indications, this response to scandal and serious charges is the most common response among Americans.

In a newspaper article, a sociologist made this observation: "Character has been slowly bred out of many Americans, especially baby boomers and their children." He argued that decades of pampering and organized activities and "feel-good" approaches in which participants do not have to take personal responsibility have made character almost passé.

But make no mistake. It makes every difference what a person in leadership believes and does in his personal life. Character counts with God, and it must count with us if we want to stay the judgment of God on this great nation.



"Nothing is politically right that

The fact is that America desperately needs the blessing of God! We are ruined without it. The Bible says in Proverbs 29:2, "When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice: but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

Here are five biblical characteristics God requires of leaders before His blessing can rest on a nation.

RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Bible says, "It is an abomination to kings to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness" (Prov. 16:12). This is God speaking. We don't have a king

in this country, but God is talking about leadership whether it's a king or a president. You see, leadership is stewardship. The Bible calls the political leader "a minister of God" (Rom. 13:4). The leader is acting for God, and therefore should be godly.

An unrighteous person is unfit for leadership, whether it be in the church, home, business, or government. The worst kind of leadership is hypocritical leadership that carries a big black Bible but does not live a righteous and holy life.

In the '60s, young people strummed their guitars and sang songs promoting God, country, patriotism, and other themes.

They were not part of a "right-wing conspiracy," but one line that they sang seems to be especially relevant. It says: "You can't live crooked and think straight, whether you are a chauffeur or a Chief of State."

WISDOM

A leader must also possess wisdom. The Bible says, "I wisdom dwell with prudence . . . By me [wisdom] kings reign and, princes decree justice. By me princes rule and nobles, even all the judges of the earth" (Prov. 8:12, 15-16).

Here is an example of how little our nation understands true leadership. We say we want

our leaders to be skilled. But God says, "I want My leaders to be wise." It is far better for a leader to be wise than to be intelligent or gifted.

That's the reason a nation cannot be governed by the taking of popularity polls. Beware of polls! A person who takes a poll to find out what people want and then pampers them and promises things, whether he can deliver them or not, is an opportunistic politician, not a godly leader.

Former President Harry Truman once made a wise observation about the difference between leadership and poll-taking. Truman said, "I wonder how far Moses would've gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt." What would Jesus Christ have preached if He had taken a poll in Israel to find out what the people wanted to hear? Where would the Protestant Reformation have gone if Martin Luther had taken a poll?

It isn't the polls of momentary public opinion that count. What counts is wise leadership from men who know right from wrong and follow the right. God requires that His leaders be men of fortitude and honesty. It is leaders like this who shape epochs in the history of the world.

Wisdom is better than a strong economy. In the light of the king's countenance is life; and his favour is as "a cloud of the latter rain. How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver" (Prov. 16:15-16).

This idea that the economy is all that really matters is just plain stupid! There is no other way to say it. God values wisdom and understanding more than gold or silver.

Of Kings and Presidents

Although God requires character of leaders, He respects our choice of a leader who doesn't possess character. Not that God approves of the choice, but He respects human will. He allows us to choose our leaders.

In Hosea 8:4, God says, "They have set up kings, but not by Me: they have made princes, and I knew it not." The people did not seek God in their choice of leaders, so they didn't have God's will to guide them. Wicked rulers are God's reward for wicked people.

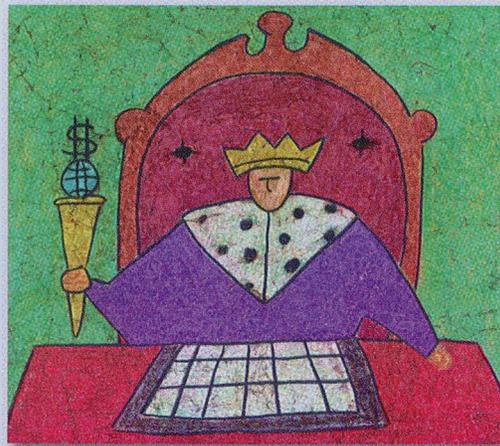
One of the most chilling verses in the Bible is 1 Samuel 8:18: "Ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day." In other words, your evil king was your choice. Don't expect God to come to your aid when that king leads you into disaster!

We have come to a place as a nation where we have said, "The stock market is setting records and things are fine, so don't get shook up over a few moral lapses." However, when war breaks out in the Middle East and fearsome biological weapons are unleashed on the world, or some other scenario of judgment unfolds, no one will care about the economy.

America will then cry out to God, and God will not hear. God have mercy on America! When we say that character makes no difference, it's a way of saying that God makes no difference!

People say, "But God must be blessing America. Look how prosperous we are. The Dow Jones is up and unemployment is down." But take note: If there had been a Dow Jones average in Sodom, it would have been up, too. Sodom had the bloom of prosperity on it just before the fire of God fell (see Ezek. 16:49-50).

We are free to choose, but we are not free to choose the consequences of our choice.



A nation that chooses economy over wisdom as its basis for choosing a leader is headed for trouble. If war breaks out and biological weapons are unleashed on the world, no one will care about the economy...

is morally wrong.”

The president of a South American country was once asked by an economist, “What’s the difference between North America and South America? Why has North America been so blessed, while South America has experienced such poverty?”

Both of these regions have great natural resources, fertile fields, and great land masses. Why have they developed in such different ways? This South American president said in response, “It is because the people who came to your shores came seeking God. The people who came to our shores came seeking gold.”

When will our people learn that wisdom is far more important than a record close on the Dow Jones? Our Pilgrim fathers did not come to these shores so that the stock market might blossom. We have become one nation under greed!

HONESTY

Another aspect of the character God requires of a leader is absolute honesty. According to Proverbs 20:28, “Mercy and truth preserve the king.”

Liars and leaders are not the same. If a man is a liar, he has a character flaw that goes all the way to the core of his being. People are not liars because they tell lies. They tell lies because they are liars.

A man is never more like the devil than when he lies, for Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar and the

father of lies. A man is never more like the Lord Jesus than when he tells the truth, because Jesus Himself is the truth (John 14:6).

SEXUAL MORALITY

A leader must be a person of high sexual morality. We’ve come to a sad day when parents have to turn off the news when children come into the room because the news is X-rated. The stand-up comics

PROTECTION OF THE WEAK

A leader must speak up for those who can’t speak for themselves and those who are about to be destroyed. There are many defenseless Americans today, and they’re depending on the government to defend them. America’s leaders should stand up for the unborn, the most defenseless of all those who cannot speak for themselves. God commands the one in authority, “Open thy mouth for the dumb



POLL-TAKING AND LEADERSHIP

Former President Harry Truman once made a wise observation about the difference between leadership and poll-taking. He said, “I wonder how far Moses would’ve gone if he had taken a poll in Egypt.” What would Jesus Christ have preached if He had taken a poll in Israel to find out what the people wanted to hear? Where would the Protestant Reformation have gone if Martin Luther had taken a poll?



love it. However, if the nation laughs off the sexual sins of our leaders, should we be surprised if our children treat immorality lightly?

A leader’s moral character is so important because if a leader cannot keep his most sacred promise of all, the promise he made to his wife before Almighty God, how can he be trusted to keep any other promise? A leader must be, therefore, a man of sexual morality.

in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.”

If a throne of iniquity is one that uses the law to commit evil, then what we have in America today is a throne of iniquity! Laws are passed to shed innocent blood. *But nothing is politically right that is morally wrong.*

The king, the prince, the leader, must be a man of righteousness, wisdom, absolute honesty, and sexual purity. He must protect the weak. This is the character that God requires. ❶

Does Character Count?

It does if there is a God in glory—a God who helped our founders establish this nation, and who has sustained this nation and brought us thus far.

But if America says, “God, we don’t need You anymore. We don’t want Your rule anymore. We know what we are doing. Our skill and ingenuity will see us through,” then I say, “God help America!” Because God will say, “You don’t need Me? Then don’t call on Me when judgment falls.”

Do you remember what happened when Peter preached his great sermon on the Day of Pentecost? The people of Israel “were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

This is the question God’s people need to ask today. Let me suggest three answers to that cry.

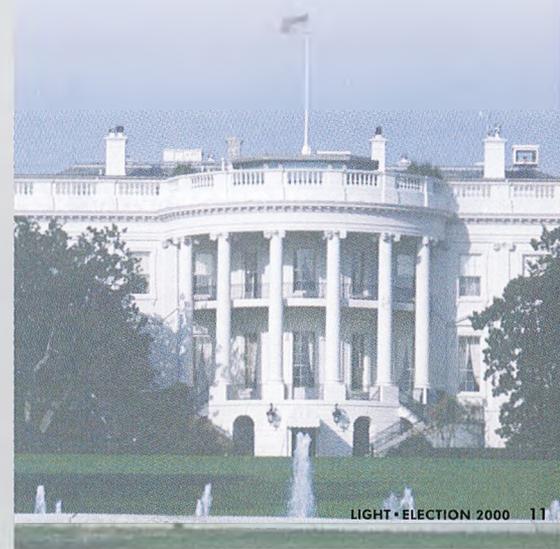
Pray for revival. When God sends revival, He is not going to send it through Washington! Our government cannot bring revival, and neither can it stop revival. We had better stop looking to our elected officials to save us, and start looking to God to save us!

Prepare for survival. I don’t know what’s going to happen to America in the days ahead. But you need to be insulating your children against the hard times that may come.

You and I need to be building into the hearts of our young people some bedrock biblical truths that will sustain them and keep them true to God in any situation, because rebellion and immorality are in the air around us like a fungus!

Get ready for arrival. Jesus is coming! God’s eternal plan goes beyond the shores of America. Jesus is coming back, and on that day He will show the world who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The most patriotic thing we can do is to get right with God, and to help others get right with Him.

Dr. Adrian Rogers is one of America’s most respected Bible teachers. As pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, he presents the Good News of Jesus Christ with conviction, compassion, and integrity. His broadcast ministry, Love Worth Finding, is declaring the Gospel and changing lives around the world. For more information, please contact Love Worth Finding at P.O. Box 38300, Memphis, TN 38183-0300, (901) 382-7900. You can also learn more about Love Worth Finding at their Web site: www.lwf.org.



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GENTURIES COMBINED. PLEASE LEAD YOUR

with

FAMILY TO "REMEMBER THE PRISONERS...

them"

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