

## ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr. James P. Eckman, President Emeritus  
Grace University, Omaha, Nebraska  
3 November 2012

### *The Presidential Election of 2012*

As I am writing this, the 2012 national election is only days away. With the ridiculously long primary season, we have been in this presidential cycle for nearly two years! That this is one of the more important elections in recent memory is a given. Whoever becomes the next president and whoever is elected to the House and the Senate will face challenges of historic proportion. In this *Perspective*, I am not recommending anyone for national office. But it is imperative that we remember we will also be voting for other national offices (e.g., the entire House of Representatives and 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the Senate). In addition, we will vote for state officials and local officials, all of whom will represent us at various levels. Therefore, as we vote, we must exercise wisdom and discernment. Virtue and character are determinative qualities that must be at the forefront of our voting decisions. We should also look critically at a candidate's courage and temperance in his/her personal life. A candidate whose personal life is in a shambles says much about personal convictions and personal ideology. One simply cannot divorce the personal from the political. Personal choices and lifestyle will tell us much about how candidates will make public policy decisions. Therefore, in this *Perspective* I offer several broad guidelines and principles. Much of my analysis will focus on the presidency, all the while remembering that there are other significant offices for which we will vote.

- First of all, the choice for president is rather astonishing this year. The choice is between a Mormon and a candidate who professes to be a Christian, but who, for over twenty years, has been a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago—one of the most liberal Protestant denominations in the nation. President Obama quoted Matthew 7 as he endorsed same-sex marriage and has also admitted that he is in transition in terms of some of his views about Christianity. Stephen Mansfield has written *The Faith of Barack Obama* and in that book argues that President Obama “is the product of a new, postmodern generation that picks and chooses its own truth from traditional faith, much as a man customizes his meal at a buffet.” Mitt Romney's Mormon faith is deep-seated and has affected so much of how he has lived his life. His commitment to compassion, remarkable generosity and care for other people is exemplary. How Romney has lived his life and his views on important social and cultural issues align more naturally with biblical Christianity than does President Obama. Yet, both men profess a faith in God and both men say that their faith shapes how they live. The American people will need to evaluate the role faith should play in their voting decisions. But there is little doubt that the choice is unambiguous and stark; there is a difference between these two candidates. For that reason, as we exercise our right to vote, we do so with the strong confidence in God's providence and His sovereignty so clearly taught in Scripture (e.g., Romans 13:1-7 and Daniel 4:17, 25).

- Second, regardless of who wins the presidency, the next president will face a truly unbelievable set of challenges. The American economy is hardly healthy and a massive deficit, coupled with a rapidly changing international economy that is more interdependent than ever, will challenge the most capable of leaders. There is also a new international order emerging—a radically different Europe and an evolving and increasingly unstable Middle East. Add to that the growing power—both economically and militarily—of China and you have a volatile and unstable world. It is the responsibility of the American voter to discern which man can deal best with these enormous challenges.
  
- Third, for that reason, I offer the following prayer, originally written by Charles Stanley, but which I have modified. Pray that the next president will:
  1. Recognize his personal sinfulness and daily need for cleansing.
  2. Recognize his personal inadequacy and need for utter dependence on God.
  3. Reject all counsel from his advisors that violates God’s clear ethical and moral law.
  4. Resist all pressure to violate his personal conscience.
  5. Forsake all personal ambition and pride and foster a servant spirit in his life and in those who serve with him.
  6. Rely on prayer and God’s Word as his source for strength and wisdom as he makes decisions.
  7. Restore dignity, honor and trustworthiness to the office of President and to the nation.
  8. Seek to be a good role model in his conduct and in his personal life.
  9. Be reminded daily that he is accountable to Almighty God for all that he does.
  
- Finally, however we decide to vote this election year, there are several key thoughts that should govern our decision-making. Increasing involvement in politics and government has grave dangers for the Christian. For the maximum impact for righteousness in government, a proper, balanced perspective is needed. This necessitates ridding ourselves of what Chuck Colson has called a “starry-eyed view of political power.” Some Christians think that by marshaling a Christian voting bloc we can establish Christ’s kingdom on earth. We dare not confuse the external and limited good that political power can achieve with the internal and infinite good that God’s grace produces. Furthermore, we simply cannot buy into what Colson has called the “political illusion,” the notion that all human problems can be solved by political institutions. It is idolatrous to believe that, for the Bible declares that the root problem of society is spiritual. What the Christian seeks through government is justice, not power. Our goal is, therefore, to move the culture towards the righteousness of God’s revelation. The job of spiritual transformation is the role of the church, not the state.

How then does the Christian decide what to support and what to reject in politics? How does one decide whom to support in elections? For what kinds of laws should the believer work and fight? Robert Dugan, former director of the National Association of Evangelicals, suggests five major principles to guide the Christian in assessing potential candidates and laws:

1. The pre-eminence of religious liberty—a central concern of mine as we begin the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Any candidate or legislation that restricts the exercise of religious faith should be resisted.
2. The protection of life as sacred. Candidates or legislation that treat life frivolously or that seek to destroy it (e.g., abortion, euthanasia, infanticide) should be resisted and defeated.
3. Provision of justice for all. Candidates and legislation must reflect God’s concern for justice and equity. Reading the biblical book of Amos is convincing evidence that God desires that government promote laws that protect the poor and disadvantaged from exploitation and oppression.
4. Preservation of the traditional family. One of the clear teachings of the Bible is that the family is a critical institution to God. Legislation that negatively impacts the family should be rejected. For example, tax legislation that promotes single parent families or penalizes a father for living with his family is counterproductive. The promotion of same-sex marriages runs counter to God’s revelation and should be rejected.
5. Christians, then, as salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16), should seek to effect righteous change in the culture through the political process, not because the kingdom comes from Washington, but because He expects us to be “serving and waiting” (see 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10) until He returns.

Should the church as a local body of believers function as a political caucus? Should a local church become a part of a political coalition? The laws of the United States are clear that local churches cannot engage in direct political activities. To do so would violate the non-profit status of these organizations and possibly result in loss of that status with the Internal Revenue Service. The Bible gives no mandate or even logical inference for local church political activity. There is no evidence of the early church involvement, as a body, in politics. Furthermore, the local church often lacks the necessary expertise for reasoned political involvement and can even find its witness severely harmed in the cesspool of politics. The local church is a principled body, rooted in God’s revelation, not a political programming body. Christians, individually and through other organizations, should be involved in the political arena but the local church will do so to its peril. The two spheres of the Christian’s life—the church and the state—must be kept in balance. Each has a divine job to do; neither should encroach upon the responsibility of the other.

See the *World* magazine (20 October 2012), p. 36, and James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 54-59.