

CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

A NEWSLETTER OF THE ALABAMA BAPTIST CHRISTIAN LIFE COMMISSION

October/November/December 2012

VOL. 22 No. 4

Thoughts on the Upcoming Election

by Timothy George

Earlier this year, in the midst of the presidential primary season, I was asked to address a group of Southern Baptist pastors on the question of Christian faith and political engagement. Though no one knew for sure who the candidates would be at that time, the first question I was asked was, "How should an evangelical Christian decide who to support in this election?" That was a legitimate question, and has prompted me to think of some wider implications.

1) We should be grateful to live in a representative democracy where the right to vote and the rule of law are respected. Such has not always been the case, even in our own country, as the history of slavery, women's suffrage, and the struggle for civil rights indicates. Freedom is ever under assault from without and within. Religious liberty and political responsibility are closely related: If we default on the latter, we may well forfeit the former. **Vote!**

2) The American republic was founded on a clear distinction between church and state, as the First Amendment shows, but this has never meant the separation of faith from public life. What we believe about ultimate matters has a direct bearing on how we deal with issues of everyday life. What is a human being? How do we foster a society where justice prevails? How do we construct "a more perfect union" for the common good? These are profoundly moral and spiritual questions, as well as political ones. While IRS regulations forbid pastors and religious leaders from endorsing particular candidates (a rule that should be reversed in the interest of free speech), there is no prohibition against addressing the great moral issues of our time, all of which have political implications. Michelle Obama was completely correct in her remark at the African Methodist Episcopal Church's General Conference in June. She claimed that "there is no better place than church" to talk about political issues because they are ultimately moral issues. **Distinguish!**

3) In the Manhattan Declaration, Chuck Colson, Robert George, and I made a public argument, based on biblical wisdom and the right use of reason, that the three most pressing moral issues of our time are the sanctity of every human life from conception to natural death, marriage as a lifelong covenantal union of one man and one woman,

and religious freedom for all persons. Of course, there are other issues that also call for Christian engagement: racial reconciliation, care of creation, immigration, education, care for the poor, and sex trafficking, among many others. And at other moments in history, other issues have claimed the attention of believers. For William Wilberforce, it was the abolition of the slave trade. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it was the persecution of the Jews. For Martin Luther King, Jr., it was the cause of civil rights. But today, life, marriage, and freedom are threshold issues that provide a basis for our concern about many other things. They are also the issues most under assault at this moment in our culture.

Discern!

4) There is a difference between Christian discernment and partisan politics. The Kingdom of Christ cannot be equated with any political party. Our current president, a Democrat, is the most pro-abortion president in American history, and yet Supreme Court justices appointed by Republicans gave us *Roe v. Wade*. What Baltimore Archbishop William E. Lori said to Catholic voters applies to all Christians regardless of party affiliation: "The question to ask is this: Are any of the candidates of either party, or independents, standing for something that is intrinsically evil, evil no matter what the circumstances? If that's the case, a Catholic, regardless of his party affiliation, shouldn't be voting for such a person." **Examine!**

5) Regardless of who wins the election in November, the spiritual and moral issues that ought to inform our political acts will remain on the agenda. In seeking to make a wise decision based on a rightly informed conscience, we need to listen to God's voice in the Scriptures, learn as much as we can about the candidates and what they stand for, and turn to God in prayer. These words spoken by God to the people of Israel long ago are still pertinent today: "If... my people, my God-defined people, respond by humbling themselves, praying, seeking my presence, and turning their backs on their wicked lives, I'll be there ready for you: I'll listen from heaven, forgive their sins, and restore their land to health" (2 Chronicles 7:14, The Message).

Pray!

(George is founding dean of Beeson Divinity School of Samford University.)

The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources.
The opinions in the Christian Life Report are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission.

You Can Trust God's Word

by Kenny Hatcher

I remember when I was a little boy watching the news on TV, the men doing the reporting were larger than life. Walter Cronkite, Chet Huntley, David Brinkley and a few others actually reported the news. At the end of some of the newscasts there would be an editorial section where someone gave their opinion. It was understood that this was **not** news, but rather someone's opinion. Those two sections of the newscast never got confused.

There was a time when we felt we could trust our news organizations, but trust is something that has to be earned and, once lost, has to be regained. I don't think I am the only one in this country who feels that not only are we not getting "all" the news, some of what we are getting is not news at all, just someone's opinion. My children grew up knowing that the one thing I just can't stand is to be lied to. Right now I feel betrayed by almost every politician, and almost every media outlet. I'm a big boy now; just please give me the truth. I can handle it!

Thankfully, there is still one source of truth that has remained steadfast for centuries. It is the one source of information we **can** trust: God's Word. Solomon wrote in the Book of Proverbs: "Trust in the Lord with all thine

heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5,6). We are also told that "the truth of the Lord endureth forever" (Psalm 117:2)

Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). He went on to say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

I don't know how the elections are going to turn out, other than we will probably still be arguing about who won when we get ready for the 2016 elections. I do know that, for good or bad (depending on one's opinion), the lack of truth in news reporting and campaign advertisements is going to impact our electoral process. What makes us think a politician, any politician, is going to tell us the truth **after** he or she is elected when he or she wouldn't tell us the truth before?

Whom can you trust? Where can you get the truth? You can trust God, and you can depend on the truth of God's Word. Be informed on the issues, vote your convictions, and pray for whoever is elected.

(Hatcher is pastor of First Baptist Church, Guin, and Chairman of the Christian Life Commission.)

What Does the Bible Say?

by Michael Brooks

Linguist and pollster Frank Luntz, often seen on the Fox News Channel, wrote in his book, "Words That Work," about polling he did demonstrating that teenagers know more about Hollywood than American history.

Less than two percent knew that James Madison is considered the father of the U.S. Constitution, yet 90 percent knew the male star of "Titanic" was Leonardo DiCaprio.

Less than two percent could name then-Chief Justice William Rehnquist, but 95 percent knew the "Fresh Prince of Bel Air" was Will Smith.

Less than nine percent knew Lincoln's hometown--the location of the only home he owned and his tomb--but 75 percent knew where Bart Simpson lives. Both are Springfield!

It's probably true as well that our young people aren't learning biblical history. I remember Bible reading and prayer in junior high and high school, but those days are long gone.

Southern Baptists have assigned our major Bible teaching to the Sunday School. Yet church growth authorities tell us that today our finest members are probably present half the time. Family gatherings, football games and weekend trips are viewed as more important than weekly church attendance.

One pastor learned for himself the extent of biblical ignorance when he quizzed his youth group, "Who knocked down the walls of Jericho?"

The young people didn't have a clue. Later several parents came to the pastor privately and denied that their kids were involved.

At the next deacons meeting the chairman said, "Pastor, about this vandalism at Jericho, let's just pay for the damage and protect our young people. They're good kids and we don't want them to have police records."

The first line of defense against biblical ignorance is the home. Parents must pray with their children and read the Bible to them. This is how God intended it all along.

Just before his death, Moses said to the Hebrews, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

And what were "these words" parents were to teach their children? Moses spoke them earlier in the passage: "The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might" (6:4-5).

There's nothing as important as teaching children to love and serve God, and no one can do this more effectively than moms and dads.

(Brooks is Professor of Communications, Assistant to the President for Public Relations, Judson College, and a member of the Christian Life Commission.)

Religious Beliefs and Actions

by Jeff Fuller

A recent letter from a Coosa County native captivated my attention. In light of recent actions or attempts to stall the religious freedoms we hold so dear, A. Eric Johnston, General Counsel of the Southeast Law Institute in Birmingham, asked the following questions:

“If we cannot carry our beliefs outside the four walls of our churches, then what good is our constitutional protection for those beliefs? If we cannot live out our beliefs in our daily lives, including engaging in ministry opportunities of various sorts in the public square, then of what real value is it to us?”

There is no difference between the beliefs and the action of the one who believes. The Constitution protects both. Not just on a federal level, but within the Alabama Constitution and in the constitutions of our sister states. Some are attempting to silence these actions, as legal trends and positions have been voiced by legal commentators. But let me say as loudly and clearly as possible: “These are guarantees!”

Mr. Johnston continues his thoughts in this same paragraph with these words: “For Christians, we believe it is our obligation to promote the Gospel so that all men will have an opportunity to respond. At the same time, both Christianity and our constitutional provisions respect the right of others to believe whatever way they feel led. Some actions have been declared unprotected, such as polygamy, use of controlled substances or physical harm. Religions that promote violation of other constitutional rights or which promote theocracy are not valid under our form of government.”

God’s Word is our mandate for all that we believe and all that we are in the world in which we live. It is our guidebook, manual and ever-constant companion and we must follow what it says, from the book of Genesis to the book of Revelation. Or, as the old preacher said, “I believe this book from the Table of Contents to Maps.” Amen!

Through God’s Word we receive our mandate for sharing the Gospel. Matthew 28:19-20 tells us, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have

commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (HCSB). Then, the day Jesus ascended into heaven, He spoke these words: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come on you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, HCSB).

These are words all Christians should take seriously and we should be about the Father’s business. That is the business of planting, watering and working and reaping! To do otherwise is to be in disobedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Our freedom given to us in the Constitution guarantees this right.

Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world...” (Matthew 5:13-14, HCSB).

In the original manuscript “You are” is written as “ye are” and “indicates that only the genuinely born-again person is salt and can help meet the needs of the world.” The basic understanding is “salt adds flavoring, acts as a preservative, melts coldness, and heals wounds.” Now that gives us a very appropriate description of the believer in his relationship to the world in which he lives.

Not only is the believer to be salt, but also light. The believer “is the condition (salt) to meet the world’s needs and he has a mission (light) to the world. His light is to clearly shine forth into the darkness of human depravity. He is to set his light upon a candlestick, not hide it ‘under a bushel,’ that is, a basket. Darkness is the absence of light; and darkness alone cannot dispel the light, but the smallest light can dispel the greatest darkness.”

Let us, who call ourselves by the name of Christ, live in the world but not be of this world. Let us take the church outside the four walls of our beautiful buildings and engage society with the life we have found in Christ.

It is our mandate from the Word of God and it is our guaranteed constitutional freedom!

Let me say, in closing, I am truly thankful for the work of the Southeast Law Institute and its leader, Eric Johnston. I am glad to call him a friend and also glad he is from our little corner of the state.

(Fuller is pastor of Rockford Baptist Church and a member of the Christian Life Commission.)

General Election November 6, 2012

EVERY VOTE COUNTS. God expects us to be involved in selecting who represents us in our state capital and our nation’s capital.

America’s future doesn’t depend on what happens in the White House, the Congress, or the Supreme Court. Our future depends on people like us. As American citizens we have the **right** to be involved in the public and legislative arena. As obedient Christians, we have the **responsibility** to be involved. This involvement includes electoral participation—registering to vote, being informed about the choices, and then prayerfully casting our votes for candidates who endorse our convictions and values.

Related Websites:

The Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission SBC - www.iVoteValues.com / www.4040prayer.com

Alabama Secretary of State - www.sos.alabama.gov / www.AlabamaVotes.gov (election dates, ballots, voter registration, etc.)



**Alabama Baptist Convention
STATE BOARD OF MISSIONS**

P.O. Box 11870
Montgomery, AL 36111-0870

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Montgomery, AL
Permit No. 441

Sanctity of Human Life Sunday

January 20, 2013

God is the Author of life, and as His servants, we are to protect human life. According to His Word, there is no alternative. His Word is clear: **human life at all ages and stages is precious.**



Celebrate
the
Human Life

FACTS & ISSUES

Compiled by Keith Hinson - Associate for Public Relations & Christian Ethics
Alabama Baptist State Board of Missions
(334) 613-2289, khinson@alsbom.org

POLITICAL CANDIDATES

"The question is not John 3:16 in terms of reading the regeneration of the person's heart. The question is Romans 13: Does this person have the kind of wisdom to bear the sword on behalf of God's authority that He has granted to the state? And can I trust that person to protect society? That's the fundamental question." -- Russell D. Moore, "Panel Asks: Can Christians Vote for a Mormon?"

[Baptist Press, Sept. 11, 2012](#)

MARIJUANA LEGALIZATION?

"But by keeping marijuana illegal, we can better develop ways to discourage its use. A system of increasing fines, penalties and requirements, like substance-abuse counseling, can be developed. Penalties even could include the loss of one's driver's license. Jail could be a last resort for habitual offenders." -- Barrett Duke, "Why We Shouldn't Legalize Marijuana"

www.eric.com, Sept. 5, 2012

WORK ETHIC IN DECLINE

"After more than 300 years of the Protestant work ethic holding sway, things have begun to change. ... In short, there seems to be a separation between work and the teachings of Scripture resulting in the death of the Protestant work ethic. It should be no surprise that the corrupting nature of sin moves culture back to pagan

standards whenever the teachings of God's work are rejected. That includes the teachings about the dignity, significance and purpose of work as an expression of humankind made in the image of God." -- Bob Terry, "Sliding Back to Pagan Standards"

[The Alabama Baptist, Aug. 30, 2012](#)

THE CHOICE OF LIFE

"As we approach the upcoming election let me remind you of two crucial truths. The person who will kill their own child will not mind killing you. If the culture of death that exists in the USA continues there will be no end to whose life will be taken. If they will kill their own children as a matter of convenience they will also kill you if you are no longer convenient." -- John Thweatt, "Choosing Life for a Child"

www.JohnThweatt.com, Sept. 6, 2012

UNPRECEDENTED CONTRASTS

"Americans will elect a president in November, but our vote will reveal far more than our political preference. The 2012 election is a worldview exercise of unprecedented contrasts - an unavoidable test of our most basic convictions. The electoral map will reveal more than an election winner. It will reveal who Americans really are and what we really believe." -- R. Albert Mohler, "The Great American Worldview Test: The 2012 Election"

www.AlbertMohler.com, Sept. 6, 2012