

God is not a Republican or a Democrat  
Written by J. Brent Walker

When I was cutting my political teeth in the late 1960s, it was an article of faith among many that one could not be a Republican and a Christian at the same time. And, if you planned to vote for George Wallace for president, God help you! Democrats were thought to be pursuing Godly values like civil rights and economic justice.

Even as a political neophyte, I knew that could not be right. God must be far greater than any one political stance and had to transcend party affiliation. As I matured, I began to understand that all political candidates, parties and ideologies are flawed and that God could not accurately be assigned the label Democrat or Republican or even American for that matter. It was nothing short of idolatry to equate any political movement with the Kingdom of God; it was pure fantasy to deny that people of faith populate nearly any political philosophy.

Thirty-five years later the claims remain, but the labels have switched. Many in the conservative evangelical community have associated Christianity with the GOP and concluded that God is going to pull the cosmic lever (or touch screen) for George W. Bush. For example, Jerry Falwell has been reported as saying: "It is the responsibility of every political conservative, every evangelical Christian, every pro-life Catholic, every traditional Jew ... to get serious about re-electing President Bush" (New York Times, July 16, 2004). In the same way, Pat Robertson has declared: "I think George Bush is going to win in a walk. I really believe I'm hearing from the Lord. It's going to be like a blowout election in 2004. The Lord has just blessed him ... It doesn't make any difference what he does, good or bad" (AP/Fox News, January 2, 2004).

In response to these foolish (indeed heretical) assertions, and others like them, 40 Christian leaders and 40,000 citizens signed a petition titled, "God Is Not a Republican Or a Democrat." Originally published in the New York Times on August 30, the petition is worth reproducing here.

"These leaders of the Religious Right mistakenly claim that God has taken a side in this election, and that Christians should only vote for George W. Bush.

We believe that claims of divine appointment for the President, uncritical affirmation of his policies, and assertions that all Christians must vote for his re-election constitute bad theology and dangerous religion.

We believe that sincere Christians and other people of faith can choose to vote for President Bush or Senator Kerry for reasons deeply rooted in their faith.

We believe that all candidates should be examined by measuring their policies against the complete range of Christian ethics and values.

We will measure the candidates by whether they enhance human life, human dignity, and human rights; whether they strengthen family life and protect children; whether they promote racial reconciliation and support gender equality; whether they serve peace and social justice; and whether they advance the common good rather than only individual, national, and special interests.

We also admonish both parties and candidates to avoid the exploitation of religion or our congregations for partisan political purposes.

By signing this statement, we call Christians and other people of faith to a more thoughtful involvement in this election, rather than claiming God's endorsement of any candidate.

This is the meaning of responsible Christian citizenship."

People of faith ô proceeding in good faith and for essentially religious reasons ô can come to different conclusions about for whom to vote and what policies to support. As the great evangelical theologian Carl F. H. Henry once said, "There is no one direct line from the Bible to the ballot box."

Faithful discipleship and responsible citizenship require us to say "No" to those who would assert a divine imperative for any party or candidate and who claim to know with cock-sure certainty the mind of God.

Let our religious convictions influence how we vote. But in the final analysis, our vote should be based on which candidate would best serve the commonweal and most effectively improve the lives of all Americans.

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