

Editorial: Moral values ´ has wider implications

The Herald Staff, From The Plainview Daily Herald

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The subject of “moral values” came up time and again in the presidential election with a national exit poll showing that 80 percent of voters who said “moral values” are a primary concern cast their ballots for George W. Bush. For many, “moral values” came down to the lightning rod issues of abortion, same-sex marriage, fetal stem cell research, etc. Advertisem

Marv Knox, a native of Perryton who is editor of The Baptist Standard newspaper, pointed out in a recent editorial that, indeed, those are vital issues.

However, he also pointed out that there are other moral issues about which people of faith also should be concerned.

Some of those appeared in an ad sponsored by the Sojourners organization which appeared in this paper before the election. That group is somewhat of a counter to the so-called Religious Right and thus its opinions get dismissed as “liberal.”

Marv Knox said in his editorial: “You can understand why sex monopolizes the moral values´ radar: Sexual imagery dominates television and movies, billboards and magazines. Abortion is a life-or-death issue. And homosexuality, which millions of Americans wish would just go away, seems to be forced upon our consciousness, both in the media and in the courts.

“But . . . there´s more to this world than sex. And every American, particularly every person of faith, who is motivated by moral values´ should press our leaders to act on a wider range of issues. They include, but aren´t necessarily limited to:

“•Poverty. People need to take responsibility for their own lives. Deadbeat dads are louses. Some folks abuse “the system.” we can work to reduce the plague of poverty without embracing socialism or a welfare state. Working families shouldn´t be impoverished; shame on our society when they are. No matter how lousy their parents, children shouldn´t be malnourished. Bottom line: Jesus said the way we minister to the least of these´ reflects how we minister to him. No argument, rationalization or equivocation.

“•Healthcare. We don´t have to have socialized medicine to provide more equity, fairness and, yes, grace to our medical system. We all know it´s broke and getting worse. We have a moral´ obligation to fix it.

“•Environment. You don´t have to be a tree-hugger to be alarmed. The planet´s air, water and soil all are jeopardized. Genesis tells us this world doesn´t belong to us. It is God´s. We are to be good stewards.

“•Debt. Economic theories . . . fail the morality test if they enrich us while impoverishing our children and grandchildren. Money is not value-neutral. The Golden Rule applies to the economy, too.

“•Nationalism. Patriotism is wonderful; it is a love for one´s country born out of gratitude to God. It embraces self-sacrifice, optimism, compassion and altruistic vision. While it aspires to the best for one´s country, it does not seek to exalt that country at the expense of others. But nationalism is a perversion of patriotism. It poses as patriotism, but it is selfish and mean . . . assumes blessings are a divine right, owed by God.

"We are tilting toward nationalism. We don't have to become a patsy or allow global bullies to go unchecked. But we should guard against becoming the bully, the oppressor. We should seek the kind of humility that is affordable precisely because we have been blessed and now are the most powerful nation on Earth.

"We who seek to pattern our lives after the Great Commandment -- loving God -- sometimes forget the Second Commandment -- love others, even our enemies. But any biblical definition of moral values surely embraces both." Posted to *MyPlainview*: NOVEMBER 29, 2004 05:04 CST

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Don't put a restraining order on God

Sojourner's Magazine

12.08.2004

by David Batstone

In Cupertino, California, a public school teacher ignited a cultural powder keg this semester when he supplemented the standard-issue history book with materials backing up his contention that religion was central to the founding fathers.

In New York City last week, several major television networks banned a paid advertisement produced by the United Churches of Christ. The commercial features a core value of the UCC church - that it welcomes with grace all people into its community regardless of an individual's background.

These recent, high-profile events give us a clear view into the often muddled moral values debate that rages from shore to shore in America today. They show both cultural conservatives and cultural liberals using the same arguments to restrict public conversation. More pointedly, each side of the polar (as in cold...war) divide is happy to ban a message from the public square if that message does not align with its own cherished beliefs.

I expect a spirited debate from both ends of the spectrum, so better to address the assumed frontline counterattacks. Liberals claim they are upholding the cherished separation of "church and state" when they put a restraining order on God from entering public schools. The Constitution, however, nowhere stipulates that religion should be deemed a taboo subject in public life. The state (and by extension public schools) is prohibited from the establishment of religion, indeed. But that's a far cry from outright exclusion.

Steven Williams wants to teach his fifth-graders how deeply Christian values shaped early America. So he passed out to his class William Penn's "Frame of Government of Pennsylvania" in

which Penn wrote, "Government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institution and end."

Talk about crossing the church-state wall! With that kind of pedigree, we should kick Pennsylvania out of the Union posthaste. Wait a minute, put Delaware on that list as well. A list of religious clauses in the 1776 Delaware state constitution requires officeholders to "profess faith in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ His only Son."

To ban any reference to religious conviction in the early history of America would be rewriting history. So that's ridiculous. But the complaint goes deeper in the Cupertino case, because Williams is a practicing Christian who wants his students to realize that faith in God continues to be an important element in government. A parent of a student at the Cupertino school complains, "This is not about teaching history, this is about indoctrination."

I honestly do not know if Williams is directly proselytizing in the classroom. I bet not, though I would not be surprised if he hopes that a seed of faith might be planted in his students' lives. For most secularists, it does not matter. Any teaching about religion in history or contemporary life is akin to "indoctrination."

Cultural conservatives likely are standing atop their chairs cheering at this point. But why don't they apply that same enthusiasm to defend the right of the United Church of Christ to proclaim its message on national television? It's because they are no less interested in legislating their own narrow stream of moral values. They, too, want all Americans to be converted into their own image.

After reading all of the hype about the "controversial" commercial, I went to view it on an Internet site. I was totally shocked at how innocuous it was. In my opinion, it also captured the gospel stories of Jesus accepting into table fellowship those very people that his society deemed as "unclean." Like it or not, UCC theology and ethics has a firm grounding in the biblical tradition of grace and freedom.

The commercial does not address gay marriage as much of the conservative media would lead you to believe. It does not even address the gay lifestyle, beyond showing two men who fit the stereotype approaching the church steps and being turned away by a bouncer. At another point, two women standing together smile broadly at the camera. I suppose that's the offensive "lesbian" moment.

But even if the United Church of Christ did promote more directly its theological position that God blesses gay people, even to marriage together, is that sufficient reason for censoring its message? I hope you agree with me that it is not, for I would like to reserve that same open platform for other faiths and other values. Surely, we could all come up with extreme, destructive viewpoints that do not merit public access, whether they offer divine justification for their values or not (the KKK comes to mind). But that's not the case here.

Maybe the toughest challenge of living in a democracy is to respect the freedom of other people to live according to values that are not your own. Real freedom, however, does not thrive in a moral vacuum (the ardent secularist) or a moral straightjacket (the ardent theocratic). What does my ideal of democracy look like? I can sum it up in a single sentence: A person arrives at faith freely, practices it openly, and uses dialogue with others about their own life path to deepen their understanding.

[+ Read more commentary by David Batstone](#)

Sojourner's Magazine

12.08.2004

Democratic values

by Bob Burnett

In the aftermath of the Republican victory on November 2, Democrats are debating how the party should respond to the increasing political power of conservative Christians. Two alternative strategies have emerged: One is the "if you can't beat them, join them" position, which contends that Democrats should assert their own religiosity. The other is "retool the message," which argues that Democrats lost because they weren't clear, in general, on what they stand for - other than not wanting Bush to be president - and that, specifically, they did not offer a clear alternative to the Republican rant on "family values."

As a left-wing Christian, a Quaker, I do appreciate the sincerity of many Christians who publicly proclaim that they have taken Jesus into their hearts. My concern is not with the truly faithful, however much I may disagree with their theology, but with politicians who assume the mantle of piety to further their careers. I believe that many Republican officeholders are hypocrites who pose as devout Christians while they are actually dedicated to serving their own ambitions. I don't want to see Democrats lose what little integrity they retain by pursuing the same self-serving tactic.

New York Times

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Voting Without the Facts

By **BOB HERBERT**

Published: November 8, 2004

The so-called values issue, at least as it's being popularly tossed around, is overrated.

Last week's election was extremely close and a modest shift in any number of factors might have changed the outcome. If the weather had been better in Ohio. ...If the wait to get into the voting booth hadn't been so ungodly long in certain Democratic precincts. ... Or maybe if those younger voters had actually voted. ...

I think a case could be made that ignorance played at least as big a role in the election's outcome as values. A recent survey by the Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland found that nearly 70 percent of President Bush's supporters believe the U.S. has come up with "clear evidence" that Saddam Hussein was working closely with Al Qaeda. A third of the president's supporters believe weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq. And more than a third believe that a substantial majority of world opinion supported the U.S.-led invasion.

This is scary. How do you make a rational political pitch to people who have put that part of their brain on hold? No wonder Bush won.

The survey, and an accompanying report, showed that there's a fair amount of cluelessness in the ranks of the values crowd. The report said, "It is clear that supporters of the president are more likely to have misperceptions than those who oppose him."

I haven't heard any of the postelection commentators talk about ignorance and its effect on the outcome. It's all values, all the time. Traumatized Democrats are wringing their hands and trying to figure out how to appeal to voters who have arrogantly claimed the moral high ground and can't stop babbling about their self-proclaimed superiority. Potential candidates are boning up on new prayers and purchasing time-shares in front-row-center pews.

A more practical approach might be for Democrats to add teach-ins to their outreach efforts. Anything that shrinks the ranks of the clueless would be helpful.

If you don't think this values thing has gotten out of control, consider the lead paragraph of an op-ed article that ran in The LA. Times on Friday. It was written by Frank Pastore, a former major league pitcher who is now a host on the Christian talk-radio station KKLA.

"Christians, in politics as in evangelism," said Mr. Pastore, "are not against people or the world. But we are against false ideas that hold good people captive. On Tuesday, this nation rejected liberalism, primarily because liberalism has been taken captive by the left. Since 1968, the left has taken millions captive, and we must help those Democrats who truly want to be free to actually break free of this evil ideology."

Mr. Pastore goes on to exhort Christian conservatives to reject any and all voices that might urge them "to compromise with the vanquished." How's that for values?

In The New York Times on Thursday, Richard Viguerie, the dean of conservative direct mail, declared, "Now comes the revolution." He said, "Liberals, many in the media and inside the Republican Party, are urging the president to 'unite' the country by discarding the allies that earned him another four years."

Mr. Viguerie, it is clear, will stand four-square against any such dangerous moves toward reconciliation.

You have to be careful when you toss the word values around. All values are not created equal. Some Democrats are casting covetous eyes on voters whose values, in many cases, are frankly repellent. Does it make sense for the progressive elements in our society to undermine their own deeply held beliefs in tolerance, fairness and justice in an effort to embrace those who deliberately seek to divide?

What the Democratic Party needs above all is a clear message and a bold and compelling candidate. The message has to convince Americans that they would be better off following a progressive Democratic vision of the future. The candidate has to be a person of integrity capable of earning the respect and the affection of the American people.

This is doable. Al Gore and John Kerry were less than sparkling candidates, and both came within a hair of defeating Mr. Bush.

What the Democrats don't need is a candidate who is willing to shape his or her values to fit the pundits' probably incorrect analysis of the last election. Values that pivot on a dime were not really values to begin with.

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Editorial Reviews

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Jim Wallis is compelling, provocative, and inspirational, with faith that can move mountains and can certainly move people and communities.

Product Description:

Since when did believing in God and having moral values make you pro-war, pro-rich, and pro-Republican? And since when did promoting and pursuing a progressive social agenda with a concern for economic security, health care, and educational opportunity mean you had to put faith in God aside?

While the Right in America has hijacked the language of faith to prop up its political agenda -- an agenda not all people of faith support -- the Left hasn't done much better, largely ignoring faith and continually separating moral discourse and personal ethics from public policy. While the Right argues that God's way is their way, the Left pursues an unrealistic separation of religious values from morally grounded political leadership. The consequence is a false choice between ideological religion and soulless politics.

The effect of this dilemma was made clear in the 2004 presidential election. The Democrats' miscalculations have left them despairing and searching for a way forward. It has become clear that someone must challenge the Republicans' claim that they speak for God, or that they hold a monopoly on moral values in the nation's public life. Wallis argues that America's separation of church and state does not require banishing moral and religious values from the public square. In fact, the very survival of America's social fabric depends on such values and vision to shape our politics -- a dependence the nation's founders recognized.

God's Politics offers a clarion call to make both our religious communities and our government more accountable to key values of the prophetic religious tradition -- that is, make them pro-justice, pro-peace, pro-environment, pro-equality, pro-consistent ethic of life (beyond single issue voting), and pro-family (without making scapegoats of single mothers or gays and lesbians). Our biblical faith and religious traditions simply do not allow us as a nation to continue to ignore the poor and marginalized, deny racial justice, tolerate the ravages of war, or turn away from the human rights of those made in the image of God. These are the values of love and justice, reconciliation, and community that Jesus taught and that are at the core of what many of us believe, Christian or not. In the tradition of prophets such as Martin Luther King Jr., Dorothy Day, and Desmond Tutu, Wallis inspires us to hold our political leaders and policies accountable by integrating our deepest moral convictions into our nation's public life.