



In search of a worthy platform

In this *Whitworth Today* we're taking a look at how worldview affects our political decisions and preferences. I haven't read the feature articles yet, but I'm eager to do so. Our country faces huge political decisions in the coming months.

Frankly, I find that too often my answer to the question of how our worldview affects our politics is "precious little." In fact, I wonder how often our politics end up determining our worldview. My hand-wringing over this concern began in 1980 during the Ronald Reagan-Jimmy Carter presidential campaign.

I was having lunch with three folks who worked at a conservative Bible college. Having attended such a school (and I remain deeply indebted for all that I learned), I should have known enough to clam up when they started to talk politics. Well, I was smart enough to proceed with caution, but dumb enough to proceed at all.

As they were blasting President Carter, I thought I'd try for a mild ceasefire. I said, "Well, whatever you think about the job he's done, you have to give him credit for being a person of faith." Wrong. I was then regaled with all the reasons why Reagan was a better Christian than Carter, who probably wasn't really a Christian at all, according to my lunch companions.

This would have been a good time for me to remember an appointment or something requiring an immediate

farewell. Instead, I plowed forward. "Let me get this straight," I recklessly replied. "You guys believe that divorce is bad, movies are bad, going to church is good and tithing is good, right? Well, Reagan is 0-4 on this scorecard, while Carter teaches Sunday School, reports shamelessly that he's born again, tithes, and is still married to his first wife." This prompted a sudden and noble surge of grace from my mates, as they had already done the good work of forgiving their candidate for these few shortcomings. I suppose my friends would have been surprised to learn that I voted for Reagan. I did so because I thought he would provide stronger leadership and would surround himself with better advisors than I'd seen in Carter's four years. But I hope I made that voting decision, and all the ones that have followed, without either sanitizing or demonizing the candidates.

Over the years, I've learned a couple of lessons from similar encounters on both ends of the political spectrum.

- We don't really love living with conflicting ideas. Rather than differentiate our perspectives, we like to unite them. For this reason, following Luther's advice to hate the sin and love the sinner is easier said than done. Similarly, we seem to have a hard time separating the quality of an idea from the quality of the person. In spite of President Bush's incontestable appreciation for and reliance on his faith, you don't hear many of his critics saying, "He's done a terrible job, but I'm sure he's doing what he thinks is most pleasing to God." You also don't hear much about John Kerry being a wonderful person with horrible ideas. We incline toward consistency.

- While most of us Christians want to claim that faith is the cause and politics is the effect in our worldview, political beliefs run pretty deep. Both capitalists and socialists can build cases for their economic systems from portions of Scripture, but usually we use the Bible to reinforce rather than form a political or economic belief. I stopped asking Christian conservatives why they feel we need less government if they believe human nature is evil at about the same time that I stopped asking non-Christian liberals why they think we need more government if I'm okay, you're okay, and most everybody else is okay.

At Whitworth we stump for the importance of a worldview, arguing that it should bring consistency to our lives. We ask students how their view of God and nature influences the decisions they make on a daily basis, whether they're choosing a movie or helping a person in need. We fight against the fragmented life that accommodates inconsistent choices. But sometimes faithfulness to a Christian worldview forces us to rethink what consistency means. I think a consistent worldview may force us in the direction of an "inconsistent" perception of candidates – a perception that sees motives through the eyes of grace, even when we disagree with actions or ideas.

The arena of politics provides a wonderful laboratory for testing the strength of our worldviews. I hope we all pass the test in ways that are pleasing to God.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Robinson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.