

Letter from a Christian in 2012

Who is the United States, and what are its people made of? The most reliable way of predicting people's future actions is by looking at their past actions. Our Lord himself taught, "You will recognize them by their fruits." It's interesting when we reflect on the history of America from a Christian point of view and with a critical eye what we uncover in its checkered past.

Some Christians claim we need to return to our "Judeo-Christian" roots, to the time of yesteryear when America was more faithful and therefore more blessed. But I ask, when was that time? Was it when we doubly denied Christ, swearing an oath to fight for the fledgling American government against the injustice of the King? Was it when we expanded westward, trampling on the basic human rights of Native Americans as we sang and marched into our "Manifest Destiny?" How did the Native Americans view our confident pronouncement that the hand of "providence" was aiding our quest?

Was that time of pristine beauty the continuance of the enslavement of Africans until 1864? Or was it in treating African-Americans as second-class citizens under the law until 1964 and 1965? Was that time of our righteous roots the virtual enslavement of Chinese immigrants to build our railroads; celebrating our infrastructural success with our hands awash in their blood?

Recognizing the great and immoral failures of America's past should insulate us against fear mongering warnings of the present day. America is a mixed bag of blessings and curses, of religious toleration and religious bigotry, of fear and learning to trust. And, as a Christian, I should add, America is no more special than any other country in the world. My primary citizenship isn't in America, after all, it's in God's kingdom. That kingdom happens to be global in nature; many skin colors, personalities, gifts, challenges, and beautiful diversity across the board. So my identity is not fully wrapped up in this place and this people; but that doesn't make them unimportant either.

After all, when America retains its position as the most powerful country in the world, with vast potential to impact the world for good, and I've been given a voice with other citizens in shaping our priorities and values, why not work hard towards "a more perfect union"?

The letter that follows is a picture of changes that are likely or at least very possible if we Americans work together to hold our elected officials accountable. **The letter also includes, however, some of my dreams for America and the world that likely won't become a reality in four years. But is there anything wrong with dreaming and acting toward big changes?** And, after all, doesn't most change happen on the grassroots level anyways? While Senator Obama chose to leave his community-organizing role to more "powerful" and "influential" positions, does that kind of thinking always hold true? That the more power we get, the more of an impact we can exert on the world? I'm deeply suspicious of that, being that the letter to the Philippians talks about how my Lord used his "power." As I recall, we're told that he,

“being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him....”
(verses 5-9)

So it seems that in choosing to seek humility in our service rather than power grabs, God will exalt us. Could it be true that when disciples of Jesus humble ourselves rather than seeking the corrupting influence of “power,” God fills our humble actions with power? So whether John McCain or Barack Obama is elected to the highest level of power in our land, we can set an example for them of what leadership really looks like; whether they’re paying attention or not.

I’m also deeply frustrated at the slander and hatred supposed “Christian” leaders engage in. Is it possible that in their moralistic crusade against the supposed Godlessness of others, they can lose the heart of Christ and become twisted in their pursuits? Is it possible that the institution of Christianity can actually be driven by a deep insidious evil force if we are not rooted in how Jesus approached power and responsibility and change?

I’m hopeful that Christians will show over the next four years that leaders like James Dobson and his comrades are tired, frustrated, short-sighted, hypocritical, and confused men in need of real leaders to show them the example of Christ. In the following letter, the emptiness and pitiful moral quality of the Dobsonites will hopefully show in sharp relief against the power of servanthood and humility.

The entire letter is written as a “What if?” exercise, but that does not make it empty speculation, because every future “event” described here is based on established societal trends that provide a larger context for our analysis. One simple observation one might make is that neither of the major political parties represent the fullness of Christ’s call. Or, as Shane Claiborne states it, “No candidate or party fully embodies the values of God’s upside-down kingdom.” When we realize the mixed bag of partisan politics, we may then become less confident in our pronouncements of one’s party’s flaws and supposed immoralities.

Many of the changes suggested in this letter, if they occur, will create significant challenges for Christians to respond to. The letter, then, is addressed particularly to their concerns so they will be aware of what is at stake in the November 4th election and far beyond. Maybe this letter can encourage them to embrace suffering.

Some may respond to this letter by saying, “Well, I hope hardship and even persecution come to the church. It will strengthen the church!” My hope is that these persons will be prepared for anything to happen to the church, and if we suffer, then so be it. Hoping for suffering is not wrong, but a shining courageous call to lead our world out of rebellion and into truth. After all, how can we not expect suffering when our way of life clashes with a world millennia deep into its depth of rebellion?

Paul urged us not to foolish revolution in the mold of the American or French Revolution, but instead called us to a different goal.

“If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.’” (Romans 12:17-21)

Does not this section of Scripture help us to read Romans 13:1-7 in context, leading us to remember that though kings and governments and magistrates wield the sword, we lead a revolution of love and follow a King executed for insubordination to the Roman crown? Could it really be true that in suffering for doing what is right, it is “a sign of our salvation”? (Phil 1:28)

Maybe in this electoral season, Christians can still choose to seek the Biblical call to wisdom, which is not obsessed with one or two hot-button issues, but instead considers in-depth all of the political issues which impact human life here in America and around the globe. Christians on all sides should continue to respect and cherish one another’s friendship as well as the toleration of difference people are given in the United States to differ on issues and speak opinions.

October 30, 2012

Dear friends,

I have grown tired of how leaders like James Dobson have made a mockery of Christ and stained the integrity of the church by lifting America to a place above God's church. For forty years now, these confused leaders have led American Christians to the belief that we should care more about America's founding fathers than a lifestyle patterned after Jesus.

Now, in October of 2012, after seeing what has happened in the last four years, the challenge of true discipleship has become much harder. In spite of the message of a leader who called Americans to transcend our differences and work together to "form a more perfect union," evangelical leaders like Dobson have continued to engage in partisan politics, encouraging their followers to blindly follow their orders.

The 2008 election was a true landslide, with Barack Obama being given a mandate to lead America to a place beyond the crusading, shallow, unwise mindset of "born-again" Christian George W. Bush. Clearly, Obama has been a mixed bag over the last four years, but in some clear ways, he has transformed Americans' trust in government as well as America's standing in the world. Many Christians transcended the bitterness of Dobson to vote for Obama; **even as they felt deeply conflicted at some of his politics and beliefs**. These Christians saw through the emptiness of Dobson's ranting about the "far-left" and chose to hold Obama accountable for his call to be unified and work together for lasting change.

The Supreme Court

On January 20, 2009, President Obama's inauguration went smoothly, and he repeated his campaign mantra of working for the "change we need" in America. Many Americans connected with his message, even seeing in his multiracial appearance the smelting together of different worldviews and ways of learning.

In the days following, however, many Americans found that what they had respected in Obama on the campaign trail also had the potential to be a character flaw. In the debates he took part in, Obama often showed the potential to go beyond surface political issues to consider all perspectives in making a decision. While this approach reflects the pursuit of wisdom, when taken to an extreme, it can show a paralyzing inability to make a decision with integrity and courage. The Supreme Court was a good example of Obama's conflicted approach.

As Obama had clearly stated in the third presidential debate against Senator McCain in 2008, he was committed to going beyond certain litmus tests that persons apply to possible judge nominees. Due to his commitment he made to appoint judges with a strong intellect and predisposition to "what real world folks are going through," Obama devoted himself to that task with diligence and wisdom. As we now know, Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and John Paul Stevens stepped down from their responsibilities due to

old age.

The President stumbled on his first appointment, a deeply liberal justice that didn't reflect his commitment to looking beyond litmus tests. President Obama, recognizing the importance of his commitment in the debate (and under significant pressure from an unprecedented call from the American community to keep balance on the Court), chose to make Roe vs Wade one issue among many rather than the most important issue. A strong grassroots bipartisan interfaith movement arose in America calling Obama to appoint a justice with a commitment to fairness and the vital virtue of wisdom, and he relented in choosing a justice that dissatisfied both polarized liberal and conservative interests and delighted those sick of both James Dobson AND Al Franken.

As a result, Obama has been vilified by the two extremes, yet has held up tremendously the last four years. The worry lines on his face have deepened, and his hair has grown more gray, but the voice of the Americans willing to work together rather than engage in political trench warfare is the voice he has paid attention to as time has marched on. In seeing his face earlier this year in the State of the Union address, I noticed his eyes were tired and voice strained; the marks of a man under intense pressure. Leadership has not been easy for our President, and he has realized that his high rhetoric and polished demeanor haven't always carried the day.

As an aside, I have found it a bit humorous to hear Dobson and friends continuing to rant about judges "legislating from the bench" when decisions haven't go their way and triumphantly crowing that the Court justices were "faithful interpreters" and "originalists" when decisions have been agreeable with them. Dobson and his friends have been steadily slipping in influence over the last few years even as their rhetoric steps up since Christians have chosen to submit to and trust evangelical leaders who lead them beyond the two issues of abortion and homosexuality and into a more broad social platform that includes the prior two issues alongside the call to social justice, to global responsibility, and to care of the incredible creation that God provided for them. Christians now increasingly view Dobson as a dinosaur of an unwise past; a relic of the day when Christians seized power in their ill-fated moral crusade that resulted in corruption and the immorality of unjust means for a supposed just end.

Human Sexuality

The issue of sexuality is an issue in flux all over America. It has been interesting over the last few years to see the Supreme Court take the position that choices of sexuality and relationships are not ultimately constitutional issues (except in cases of clear hate crimes), and so they have left that decision to states. In the interim, the discussion surrounding homosexuality has raged in even greater intensity on the social level in America. As a result, public sentiment has begun to change across our society regarding homosexuality. People have realized that their prior anti-homosexual instincts were often driven by a basic fear of folks different than them, and with their shallowness confronted, their opposition has been wilting; with good reason, one might say. Different states that had passed a marriage amendment defining marriage as "between one man and one

woman” have actually had those amendments voted down in recent years as the culture continues to move toward a more tolerant position.

In case I run the risk of isolating homosexuality in this discussion, fairness demands the comment that marriage as an institution has continued to decline amongst heterosexuals, and even more hypocritically, the divorce rate of “born-again” Christians has continued to rise above the general cultural rate. This movement has mystified Christians and caused them to ask whether the central problem we face isn’t homosexuality in isolation as a “pet sin,” but instead a fundamental confusion about sexual identity and monogamous lifetime covenants in our culture. As a result, Christians have been significantly chastened in their formerly triumphant statements about “healthy” sexuality and now are listening to alternative positions more openly.

It certainly is true that homosexuality has been more increasingly embraced by American culture, both Christian and non-Christian alike. A large reason for that move amongst Christians (whereas the more general cultural shift was sketched above) has been that many Christians are now reacting against Biblical arguments for human sexuality. Sadly, this is another direct result of how evangelical leaders like Dobson have used certain parts of the Bible to legitimize their positions (because they’re “conservative”) while ignoring other equally important parts (because they’re “liberal”). This backlash against the Bible as a foundation has resulted from that evangelical hypocrisy and inattention to the whole. **Decades of neglect to all the “weightier” matters of the Bible have created their consequence.**

In all states, certain civil rights such as hospital visitation and shared insurance policies have been extended to homosexual couples, and most folks would agree (some in a conflicted way) that this is generally a healthy thing.

An alternative voice (some call it a “third way” has begun to rise up across America, recently, as some churches are increasingly taking the position of refusing to marry both homosexual couples AND non-Christian heterosexual couples as Christians have begun to walk the hard road of drawing boundaries between themselves and other Americans. This has not been without cases of extremism, but because Christians have realized progressively that to be Christian is to have a commitment to obeying everything Jesus said, the rallying cry of these “third-way” Christians has been, **“Go see the justice of the peace! Whatever is legal does not make things healthy!”**

The general cultural movement regarding sexuality has had an interesting direction to it, as persons on the “progressive” side of the homosexuality issue have often flung epithets like “close-minded traditionalist” at those opposed to the practice. However “new” science, specifically in genetics research, has cast new doubt on the arguments of “progressives” that homosexuality is a biological unchangeable identity. There is mounting genome evidence that our social environment shapes us all the way down to the very building blocks of DNA that make us up. In short, we are never a set “identity,” but creatures in transition. It has been hard for our culture to embrace this new science,

especially since it has arisen with a message that contradicts the science of the last fifty years. It has created this interesting conundrum where “progressives” have become “traditionalists,” decrying the new science to support their argument with outdated research. I guess the Galileos of certain ages become the close-minded Catholic Church of the next. At the very least, this has reminded Christians that we should never depend fully on science’s supposed “conclusions” to give us the full truth, as it is a discipline always in flux.

This current social climate has affected several major institutions in American society, awakening Christians to the need for more consistent action to make their voice heard.

First, Christians have had to come to terms with the truth that they need to speak up more often and more insistently to provide a “Christian” perspective among other “Christian perspectives.” Many Christians for many years have considered James Dobson, Ralph Reed, and other evangelical leaders as rogue leaders with little conception of complete discipleship to Jesus, which has led to them pushing a moralistic conservative American crusade with a little Jesus sprinkled in wherever convenient. This conflating of America and the church into a twisted civil religion has become more and more shocking in the last four years as these leaders have ramped up their bitter, vitriolic rhetoric. Christians committed to obeying everything Jesus commanded them (Matthew 28) have been seeking to more consistently confront Dobsonite perspectives in the public square to provide an alternative perspective. Human sexuality has been one of those issues.

Second, Christians have had to accept (bitterly) that the consequence of the supremacy of Dobsonite voices has been a major cultural backlash against the institution of Christianity across the land. Secular Americans have rejected moralistic conservative crusading American Jesus (as well they should), but now have that twisted image in their heads every time they think of Christianity. Jesus still remains a highly respected man, but the institution of Christianity is in shambles today. Courageous Christians have begun to engage in deeply counter-cultural actions to turn around public sentiment over the long haul.

As a simple example, Dobsonite Christianity showed a significant middle-class, white, suburban, capitalist bias. Therefore much of his fears of “cultural drift” showed grades of classism, racism, and ethnocentrism. These Christians have chosen to move into urban and rural centers of poverty to reverse those fears; embracing instead racial reconciliation, shared communal life with radical generosity as a foundation rather than free-market principles, and community organizing to speak up for a percentage of our population that has long been avoided by the Christian institution in the past.

Abortion

The issue of abortion is one where President Obama has been disappointing. While I respected his stated desire to reduce abortions in the 2008 election cycle, I found his legislative record less than satisfying in this regard. And when he stated that no potential

mother makes a decision for an abortion lightly in several debates, I couldn't help but laugh at how he could say that with a straight face; then I felt like crying.

Abortion is a moral issue, and the last four years have not seen much change in policy in that regard. Obama's attention to poverty clearly led to a sense of hope filtering into urban and rural locations where abortions remained high, but that has clearly not been enough. At least the numbers of abortions are holding steady now rather than rising in number. Can that be looked at as relative progress?

I've struggled with several questions over the last few years. Is there any way that legislation could reach the place where abortions are allowed only in desperate situations of life or death for a mother; or for rape and incest? Is there any way that doctors who exploit that loophole to provide abortions on demand could be prosecuted for murder or at least something? Is there any way that public sentiment could change in America to where persons could see a fetus as more than a patch of skin, and sexuality as more than a fun time without significant consequences? **And here's the really big one for me; Isn't it true that abortions take place whether they're illegal or not? So isn't it most important to work on a grassroots level (pregnancy help centers, mentoring relationships, building relational trust in depressed areas) whether the law reflects our commitment or not?**

These are the questions that haunt me, but they don't stand alone in my consciousness. In fact, I believe the following issue matters just as much both in terms of quantity of lives and quality of life.

U.S. Military Policy

In his role as commander in chief, President Obama has been reluctant over the last four years to send armed forces to any new overseas commitment, as he wisely recognizes that military action more often has a long-term effect of inflaming hostilities among people groups rather than bringing peaceful resolution. In his responsibility as commander-in-chief, he certainly hasn't avoided military action as a last resort, however, which made the suggestions of some in 2008 that he would sit idly by sound strange and childish.

Iraq: President Obama fulfilled his campaign promise and began regular withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, completing it in the promised 16 months, by April 2010. All was peaceful during those months, but then in May 2010, al-Qaeda operatives from Syria and Iran poured into Iraq and completely overwhelmed the Iraqi security forces. A Taliban-like oppression has taken over in Iraq, and thousands of "American sympathizers" have been labeled as traitors, imprisoned, tortured, and killed. The number put to death may soon reach the tens of thousands. Al-Qaeda leaders have been emboldened by what they are calling the American "defeat" and their ranks are swelling in dozens of countries.

Most reasonable observers have commented that, though this message is hard to hear, the backlash against American interests in Iraq has been long-expected, as America disregarded all international sentiment and hard evidence to pre-emptively invade Iraq.

The resulting massive amount of civilian deaths and displacement created great social upheaval that was masked by the U.S. occupation, which limited the flow of perceived “negative” information outwards. In fact, experts have been observing the swelling of al-Qaeda ranks for eight years now as a direct result of the military actions of the United States. They have pointed out that al-Qaeda ranks are now increasingly numbered with family members, friends, and acquaintances of persons killed by the Americans.

Terrorist attacks: President Obama directed U.S. intelligence services to cease all wiretapping of alleged terrorist phone calls unless they first obtained a warrant for each case. Accused terrorists captured overseas, instead of being tried in military tribunals, are given full trials under U.S. court guidelines, and the procedure of exporting suspects to secret CIA prisons to torture them to extract information has been summarily ceased. **In all of these cases, President Obama has reminded the U.S. that in order to claim leadership in the world, we need to lead in civil and human rights in addition to other areas. It’s a classic case of “Do as I do AND as I do.” Example is always the best leadership. After all, didn’t our parents always tell us, “If others were jumping off a bridge, would you do it too?”**

Given that not all suspects have been shown to be terrorist or terrorist sympathizers, this change in foreign policy has been most welcome for American citizens who were greatly angered by the immoral arrest and internment, torture, and invasion of privacy actions of the Bush administration. While those clearly unearthed some degree of terrorist activity, **the descent into immorality lowered international respect for American leadership and radicalized elements of the very societies America was wishing to bring stability to.**

As a result of Obama’s more reasonable and wise foreign policy commitments, the Islamic faith has become relatively less radicalized, which has enabled more centrist Muslims to consistently speak out against the extremist elements of Islam and call them to account. Most persons believe the repressive regime that has arisen in Iraq is limited in time and scope as international pressure has combined with a consistent Muslim voice to undermine their legitimacy on any level.

In addition, President Obama challenged the nation to increase foreign aid to the poorer nations that were the breeding grounds for terrorism, so people could have an opportunity to escape from the cycles of poverty and violence in which generations had been trapped. Obama’s challenge was followed by a companion challenge for exchange programs and volunteer programs such as the Peace Corps to courageously build relationships with countries in the Middle East. Though there have been several tragic hostage situations and deaths in the interim, hopes are high that paying attention to normal human relationship-building will pay dividends in the future that no military action could even sniff at.

Military Policy

One thing the military did not expect has been the dropping in percentage (though slight) of Christians amongst their ranks in the last four years. Those willing to go deeper have

found a greater aversion amongst Christians to warfare and the practices of the military in shaping recruits. Some have taken to calling this drop in numbers the “George Bush effect,” as younger Christians were disenchanted by the obscene crusading mentality of the 43rd president and now are looking deeper at reasons behind why Americans go to war. A small but meaningful group of Christians state their unwillingness to go to war stems from a three root causes.

First, a foundational confession that Christians have neglected in the past to their great peril. A willingness to swear an oath under the Uniform Code of Military Justice would be to deny their Lord’s admonition, “do not swear an oath at all.” (Matthew 5:33-37) Christians certainly come out at different places on the question of warfare, but more and more Christians are courageously confronting this oath of service to the military that removes the moral option of disobeying unjust orders. This, coupled with the dehumanizing techniques the military employs to brainwash soldiers into mindless obedience in basic training camps, has led to Christians confronting the American military institution. Certainly, this unwillingness to knuckle under to such a respected American institution has led to Christians being met with verbal and physical abuse as well as a significant social cost as former “friends” have rejected them.

Second, Christians are now being confronted with the fact that American military conquests are increasingly being carried out to protect America’s economic standing in the world. Whether the conquests were efforts to destabilize democratic regimes in Latin America unfavorable to America in favor of dictators who obeyed American whims, or whether conquests were to secure basic cheap fuel to drive American economic growth (Iraq), Christians are now looking deeper into why America fights wars and whether certain military actions were necessary and moral. Relevant important documentaries like “Why We Fight” and “Iraq for Sale” have opened American consciousness to the scheming of economic interests to drive military pursuits. As a result, increasing numbers of Christians are choosing to “opt out” of the military entirely.

And third, Christians are now seeing with increasing clarity that there is a deep social class element to the American military. By and large, the rich and powerful in America start wars that are fought by the lower classes, with the results of the wars benefiting the rich and powerful. Christians have become more aware of how the government buys the lives of poorer citizens by offering them amenities the rich have always taken for granted (college education, seeing the world, retirement, taking care of families) in exchange for giving their lives for the interests of the rich. This realization has paralyzed a great many Christians (as most shocking information does), and so a massive social movement hasn’t arisen yet, but there is a groundswell of dissatisfaction with the present that may bear fruit in the future.

Foreign Policy:

Russia: Conservative evangelicals continue to have an irrational fear of Russia that’s largely driven by the pulp-prophecy fiction of Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Their rantings about “Gog” and “Magog” are increasingly relativized among fellow Christians as screwy theology. As a result, many Christians now only read “Left Behind” or watch

other evangelical subculture media on this subject if they want a good laugh or a good cry at how wacky and fear-driven these books are.

Through what has now been dubbed the “Obama Doctrine,” relations with Russia are moving toward normalization as American foreign policy has engaged the Russians in multiple discussions on how they can cooperatively lead the world in moving beyond an oil-based economy (which brings destabilization as developed nations fight over fuel) and into alternative fuels and a different kind of economy more focused on sustainable growth. Obama’s willingness to pursue this kind of relationship, together with US economic incentives for Russia to back away from imperialist land grabs, has many observers more confident that Russia and America can indeed lead together in this new world rather than seeking the competition of their seventy years of prior strained relations with one another.

Latin America: President Obama has moved to strengthen U.S. ties with the Venezuelan socialist regime led by Hugo Chavez. Obama realized early on that most of Chavez’ frustrations and rhetoric were driven by heavy-handed Bush administration policies and exclusion of Venezuela from substantive foreign policy engagement. As a result, Chavez’ rhetoric has slackened, as persons within Venezuelan politics have advised him to see that Obama wasn’t looking to undermine the Venezuelan government, but to foster relationship with it.

Among other things, Obama has realized that American relations with Cuba have largely been driven by an irrational twentieth-century Communist fear. After finding that most Americans favor rescinding the Cuban embargo (in spite of powerful ideological groups with deep pockets that drive the public discourse) and desire open relationship between the countries, Obama took the politically unpopular step of normalizing relations with Cuba. After the initial shock of the action, Cuba became a non-issue.

Iran: For the first two years of the Obama Administration, Iran continued to agitate against America, but after realizing that Obama really meant to withdraw from Iraq and wasn’t seeking to install America-friendly puppet states that would provide the U.S. with cheap oil, the Iranian government ratcheted back their rhetoric. Most people knew their speech in the past was driven by a fear of being invaded by the Americans and losing their sovereignty and sense of identity anyways, so the astute application of the “Obama Doctrine” to Iran has created a greater sense of trust between the two countries.

Israel: President Obama has been very non-committal about changing policy directions with Israel, which has been very disappointing to me. On the one hand, he has realized the power of the pro-Israeli interests in America, and because he fears not being re-elected, he has by and large continued the status quo of unequivocal support. He continues to make comments about “ensuring Israeli security,” and has not led persons to consider the wisdom of leaders like Desmond Tutu and Jimmy Carter who have decried Israel’s repressive policies toward Palestine. On the other hand, he claims to be aware of the human rights abuses of the Palestinian people and talks about the situation, but hasn’t worked hard for substantive policy-level change here. He waffles on this issue

continually, to the frustration of all parties involved, and refuses to step up and lead the world on this issue to confront Israel's apartheid policies.

Health Care

The United States remains caught in what seems to be an intractable dilemma on the issue of health care. On one side of the issue, most Americans desire a single-payer health insurance system, with public sentiment regarding the large numbers of uninsured in America to be a deeply moral issue. On the other side of the issue, powerful for-profit health insurance companies have recognized that great threat and have lined the pockets of legislators and administration officials in an effort to continue making human life a commodity to be bought and sold. In the meantime, more Americans are realizing that accusations of single-payer health insurance as "socialist" are childish, fear-driven responses of a bygone era. Extensive study into the nationalized health care systems of the UK and Canada have shown that their systems work in a much more humane and logical fashion that the American health insurance companies have sought to portray them, yet progress toward single-payer remains slow. Meanwhile, the numbers of the uninsured continue to rise, insurance companies' profits remain obscene, and Obama's plan has proven to be a band-aid rather than a solution.

Taxes, the economy, and the poor

Many Christians who voted for Obama did so because they thought his tax policies were fairer and his "middle-class tax cuts" would bring the economy out of its 2008 crisis. Their hopes for a quick end to the 2008 crisis proved to be too idealistic, but Obama's commitment to regulating Wall Street and a number of other arenas that had run roughshod over the average American citizen has transformed the way business and governmental fiscal policy is done in our country. A good number of citizens are now speaking out that the military budget has gotten completely out of hand and that the best economic plan would be to slash the budget by 25% and reorient the military as a less conventional and more tactical force. Just like the health care question, this sort of suggestion has run into powerful interests in our country by the name of Northrup Grumman, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, and selfish citizens who don't want to lose their individual jobs in factories that provide parts for the military-industrial complex. In other words, one of the biggest obstacles to social change in America remains the intense individualism that leads to terrible selfishness on the part of the average citizen; there's little to no sense of the common good, and this is a frustrating problem.

Taxes: It turns out that the people President Obama called "the rich" really were rich. It also turns out that the higher one's income travels, the less in terms of percentage one gives away to charitable interests. Therefore, some strong leaders like Dennis Kucinich continue to remind us that selfish people need boundaries that they won't establish themselves in order to work towards these persons realizing the common good is more important than their individual comfort. While these persons were climbing towards greater and greater wealth in the America of the last fifty years, the bottom had fallen out

on the poor.

President Obama increased the tax burden on the wealthy so much that many business owners decided they didn't want to work any harder when the government was taking so much away. Obama's response? **“Suck it up, and grow up a little. You have a responsibility to the common good in America, and when America experiences economic stability in all social classes over the long-haul, that benefits you as well. Your era of unregulated wealth accumulation is over.”** Many Christians realized this kind of thinking as deeply Biblical, as the books of Deuteronomy and Leviticus call the people of Israel to regular acts of generosity as well as law-demanded return of land and possessions after a prescribed amount of years. These business owners and entrepreneurs attempted to move their money, their factories, and often themselves overseas, yet President Obama tightened trade restrictions, stridently worked to limit free trade and encourage fair trade, and tightened the noose on those working to have their individual interests trump that of the collective whole.

Obama's campaign tax proposals included “tax credits” for the lowest 40% of earners, who were said to “need the most help.” Yet since the bottom 40% were not paying any federal income taxes in the first place, Obama decided instead to invest the monies in a massive push for faith-based initiatives that target their work with persons in deep poverty. And, unlike his predecessor Bush, Obama maintained strong regulatory oversight of what organizations received money and what they did with it. Because this policy not only pays attention to the economics of poverty but also the relational needs of the poor, there has been an incremental difference in centers of poverty that many folks hope will become a sea change in how persons in poverty are treated and how the American government leads the way in enabling them to work with hope and responsibility to contribute to our society.

Budget deficit: The federal budget deficit remains a severe problem under President Obama, as he reaps the consequences of President Bush's ill-fated war in Iraq and the economic fallout of the unregulated Wall Street fiasco. While the controversy rages on whether the bloated defense budget should be a place of focus for slashing expenses, this country has been locked in partisan bickering and wealthy corporate interests continue to rule the day in the interim. The messiness of this situation means that Obama's run for re-election will be a tough one, since the country remains in an economic quagmire that many suggest will drag on for quite some time.

Union organizing: Many conservative Christians have sold their soul to free-market principles and refuse to support community organizing and union work, which have been vital groups for increasing the standard of living for the lower levels of the United States economy. Obama has been on the side of this union organizing, and with his support, several industries are completely unionized. When prices of goods produced by these industries shot up, **a good number of Christians joined the public outcry that the companies in their selfishness were maintaining their profit by passing off the costs on the American consumer.** Since trade regulations have been tightened and companies no longer have a free ride, some courageous companies have recognized the immorality

of their actions and led the way beyond profit as the bottom line and instead have begun to consider how they feed into the common good. These companies have since been added to Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) lists, and investment in them has shot up amongst socially conscious citizens.

Energy: World demand for oil continues to climb, yet President Obama held strong to his commitment to bring America toward energy independence; both for the immediate relaxation of the costs of transportation and heating and the long-term sustainability of human life on this planet. Obama hesitantly allowed additional drilling for oil in the US and offshore, but only as a stopgap measure in the long-term process of seeking sustainability. **Many Christians have lauded Obama's policies, calling the call to sustainability a Genesis 1 Project, in the spirit of our cherishing and conserving the good gift of creation given to us by the God of the Universe.**

Oil consumption has gone down relatively in America in the last four years, so America has been traveling in the right direction, but Western Europe continues to be the example for the world in carbon emissions and sustainability. Americans have now begun bitterly lamenting the waste of resources and knowledge when President Reagan reversed all the investment President Carter had directed towards alternative energy, ripping the bottom out of that promising economic field in favor of massively investing in the military budget. The economy has been fluttering, sometimes up and sometimes down over the last four years, but consumer confidence is going up as Obama has worked for regulatory change and business incentives to "go green."

As for coal, President Obama directed the Environmental Protection Agency to implement strict new carbon emission standards that drove many coal-powered electric plants out of business. The country has less total electric power available than in 2008, and periodic blackouts to conserve energy occur on a regular schedule throughout the nation. The price of electricity has tripled in places like California, which also faces rolling blackouts during peak energy periods. The impact on our economy, and our homes, has been devastating. **But again, those who have studied such things for a long time see this as the consequence of many years of environmental neglect and the stifling of American ingenuity in this area of responsibility.** This devastating impact may affect Obama's chances of re-election, but if the direction remains solid with whoever the next president happens to be, Americans are holding out hope for long-term good to come from this hard time.

Prosecution of Bush administration officials

In his first week in office, Obama followed the precedent of several presidents and fired most U.S. attorneys, replacing them with his own appointments. Their willingness to investigate President Bush's policies, unlike his appointees, led to a massive expose of the Bush Administration's twisted actions. The Justice Department soon began to file criminal and civil charges against nearly every Bush administration official who had any involvement with the Iraq war.

During his campaign, Senator Obama said, “What I would want to do is to have my Justice Department and my Attorney General immediately review the information that's already there and to find out are there inquiries that need to be pursued.” In order to facilitate these proceedings, President Obama rescinded President Bush’s executive order that had prevented presidential papers from being released, and millions of pages of previously secret White House papers were posted on the Internet. Attorneys have spent four years poring over these papers looking for possible violations of law. Dozens of Bush officials, from the Cabinet level on down, are in jail, and most of them are also bankrupt from legal costs.

Most Americans believe this is just, and the proper consequence for eight years of imperialistic, criminal policies that made a mockery of the American Constitution and America’s moral standing in the world. Evangelical leaders who blindly supported President Bush as a “born-again” Christian have taken a public hit much like Billy Graham did following his ill-fated blind support of Richard Nixon.

My conflicted feelings?

As a Christian, I must say that I have always seen America as a mixture of good and evil; just like any other country in the world. Clearly America had some religious underpinnings in its foundation, but any deep look at how America came to be and what its society looked like in the beginning reveals that it has never been “Christian” in totality. **After all, calling oneself Christian means that you’re willing to obey everything Jesus commanded, and America has always fallen far short of that; choosing instead to pick and choose what it wanted to obey or disobey.**

I’ve felt myself shifting in my seat more uncomfortably now as I’ve been maturing in my understanding of the Christian faith and how that intersects with America. I no longer respond to Dobsonites’ ranting about America “losing God’s favor and protection,” since he doesn’t know the difference between America and the church. **But I have to admit he has a point on some things;** his desire to see abortion cease I share (though his method to achieve that end is twisted), and his desire to see healthy sexuality I share (though again, his method is twisted).

When it comes to Obama, I can’t help but see the man has some serious wisdom. And when I get past his abortion stance (which seems two-faced and looks like groveling at the feet of the political left), and travel deeper into his political stances, I see some downright beautiful things. A foreign policy that doesn’t resort to militarism as a first option? How many young children and families will live in our world one more day and not be collateral damage because of his leadership? And beyond the quantity of life, how will the quality of life of citizens around our world be enhanced by a leader not crusading around on an ill-fated quest to “spread the light of freedom?” Can a clear-headed American foreign policy impact Islam to step away from the temptation of radicalism and embrace the better parts of their religion? Will a leader who refuses to ignore the poor

encourage others to give their time, energy, and attention to the complex issue of poverty and bring incremental change to that seemingly intractable problem? Is a basic posture of commitment to the poor as moral of an issue as abortion?

Having a leader like Obama for the last four years has pushed me to consider some of the wider questions of our world; and to ask how faith intersects those questions. He is certainly no golden boy without flaws, but he is a charismatic, uniting figure. Will he lead for another four years, then yielding the floor as the Constitution says he must to whomever may come next? We will see, but one thing is true.

There's only one group I know of that's the light of the world. It's not America, it's the church.

There's only one leader worthy of giving my life to imitate and pursue after. It's not Obama, it's Jesus.

I feel confident in choosing to vote for him back in 2008, I guess. But isn't voting supposed to leave you feeling a little chastened when you know the person's going to let you down at some point in the future? When it's impossible for a disciple of Jesus to lead the free world, because the free world demands that you bow before the altar of militarism, suspicion, and covert action to ensure the country keeps its position?

I know one thing. Any supposedly Christian leader who suggests I should only care about one or two social issues in my thinking and voting will be a leader with one less listener. This world has enough unwise, shallow thinkers who blindly do what they're told. I refuse to occupy that role. Sorry Jamesy boy. One less Dobsonite here.

Sincerely,

Nathan Myers, 2012