

In Good Conscience:

A Call for Moral Independents in the 2008 Election

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Preface

I remember reading somewhere that societies in decline reach a point where they are so corrupt that attempted remedies only reveal and further aggravate the causes of their demise. Sometimes I'm tempted to believe that the American Republic has passed well beyond this point, that our liberty is gone and cannot be recovered. The essay that follows is evidence that I have not yet succumbed to this temptation.

I have no doubt, however, that we are in the midst of the feverish crisis that marks either the recovery of the Republic, or its dissolution. The great principles of right and justice that gave rise to our constitutional system of democratic self-government are everywhere discarded or under assault. Indeed, things are so far advanced that the issues most involved with the destruction of these principles (such as so called "marriage" for homosexuals) are being debated and decided with no reference at all to their implications for the moral premises of liberty.

We live in revolutionary times, by which I mean times when a form of government will either be restored or overthrown – not just in the sense that one group replaces another in power, but in the profound sense that substitutes one premise of government for another. In our case, the premises of aristocratic despotism (the rule of superior ability, force and fear) are replacing those of democratic liberty (moral equality, self-discipline, consent). Unfortunately, the battle between these forces is being waged in an intellectual climate deeply prejudiced against the understanding needed even to comprehend the nature of the battle, much less wage it effectively. This is what makes the prospects for liberty so obscure.

I see one sign of this prejudice in what has sadly become the commonplace reaction to a political tract such as the one you are about to read. "It's too long (for an article). It's not long enough (for a book). It's too academic (for the masses). It's not scholarly enough (for the academics). People won't have the patience to read it, or the intelligence to understand it. You must make it shorter; make it more accessible, more readable, etc., etc., etc. Can you give me a sound bite? What about a 60 second spot?" It seems that just about the only element of the democratic ethos that unquestionably dominates consciousness these days is a pervasive insistence on lowering the standard of public discourse so that the "common people" can understand.

I see at least two problems with this reaction. It insults and underestimates the common sense of the people. It neglects the possibility that the length and substance of a discussion must respect

the nature of the subject being discussed, not just the assumed tastes and capacities of the subjects following the discussion. When the premises of government are at stake, political discourse must involve deliberation about the way in which those premises relate to the issues and circumstances of the time. This requires reasoning. Reasoning involves examining and articulating the premises, then following their implications until we see how they are connected with the issues and circumstances we face. The result is neither a purely academic treatment of principle nor a handbook and call to action. Instead, it relates decision to principle in order to establish a consistent basis for action. This is not the work of an administrator, or even a merely practical politician. It is, however, the challenge of statesmanship in those times when moral upheaval shakes a regime to its foundations.

As for the intelligence of our people, why should we assume that our people can read the Bible or follow the abstruse intricacies of a team's strategy for the NFL draft, yet they can't grasp the rather less challenging discussion of political right and liberty? Why should we assume that the American people, though smart enough to build and maintain the buildings, the machines and the enterprises needed to sustain the most successful material results in human history, have become too stupid to sustain the historically unique hope of liberty their self-government represents?

The essay that follows is about 10,000 words long. The essay that famously helped to rouse and focus the passion for liberty before the American Revolution, Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," was more than twice its length. The essay that follows includes some reasoning about the natural basis for rights, property and government. In "Common Sense," Paine similarly reasoned about the claims of divine right monarchs and aristocrats, and the better claims of governments based upon consent and representation.

Now, the literacy rate in the colonies at the time Paine wrote was probably somewhere between 70 and 80 percent (90 percent or better in the northern region, lower – 65 to 70 percent – in the middle and southern colonies.) Today we claim a basic literacy rate of 99 percent or more throughout a nation much larger in size. It's likely, therefore, that the proportion of the population capable of understanding the reasoning in either essay is at least as large today as it was at the time of the Revolution, and probably much greater. If length is any measure of the challenge involved in reading it, an essay as long as the present one requires of readers today only half the capacity of those who decided the fate of America's liberty in the first place. Someone might object that our people have the capacity but they no longer have the patience. But such patience, like physical strength, develops with use. So first we weaken their tolerance for thought by feeding people a steady diet of slogans and punch lines, and then we use their supposed weakness as the excuse for never varying the diet that's killing their strength.

Whether intentional or not, this approach appears to be consistent with a strategy meant to deprive people of the opportunity to hear and ponder, in the context of active political life, the kind of reasoning that is essential to the maintenance of our free institutions. Ideas were and are the essential basis for maintaining the will to liberty. But more and more our people are being

misled by an understanding of politics that focuses exclusively on material facts and outcomes, to the exclusion of reasoned arguments, arguments that relate current issues to the permanent ideas and principles on which our claim to self-government is based.

We pretend that the 60-second sound bite mentality is imperative in the age of television-based mass communication. The medium is the message. In the computer age, however, shouldn't we consider the possibility that the medium has been programmed to require this truncation of thought, not the other way around? The best way to assure that reason is excluded from political discourse is to insist on a form of political communication based on sound bite conclusions and emotional punch lines, with no space for the kind of reasoning that refers to the premises of thought and aims to prove that the conclusions one reaches arise from and respect those premises. Such exclusion means that, on matters of principle, rational thought can no longer be the basis for choice. Instead, choice results from impulses connected with purely emotional responses. The most compelling speech will be the one that best employs the emotional goad to push people in one direction or another. (From hence comes the purported eloquence of demagogues such as Barack Obama.) Political outcomes are then determined by manipulation rather than deliberation. People don't make choices. They are herded toward predetermined results. Obviously in this situation, they no longer govern themselves. They are governed by whomever engineers this manipulation.

Can we achieve the restoration of self-government using the manipulative approach that contributes to its destruction? I don't think so. If we reject government based on the forceful manipulation of passion, we must reject the forms of communication that make our people fit subjects of it. We must rediscover and insist upon the form of political discourse that taps the motivating power of passion through the natural intermediation of reason and principle. This may require that the body politic use sinews somewhat weakened by idleness, but we will never win back the form and substance of our liberty if we do not exercise the faculties that make it possible.

With this apology, therefore, to potential readers put off by the length of this column, or the style of extended reasoning that it contains, I hope for the patient attention of any willing to accept it. I pray that it will provide some help and encouragement to those like me who will not give up our allegiance to the American Republic, nor our faith in the self-evident truths that make, and may yet keep us, free.

Dobson's choice

Not long ago, Dr. James Dobson declared that he could not in good conscience cast his vote for Sen. John McCain. He did so in light of the senator's positions on key issues of moral concern, including his support for embryonic stem cell research and his unwillingness to defend the natural family as the basis for the institution of marriage. Now, according to an AP article, Dr. Dobson may be changing his mind.

"Conservative Christian leader James Dobson has softened his stance against Republican presidential hopeful John McCain, saying he could reverse his position and endorse the Arizona senator despite serious misgivings. 'I never thought I would hear myself saying this,' Dobson said in a radio broadcast to air Monday. '... While I am not endorsing Senator John McCain, the possibility is there that I might. ... There's nothing dishonorable in a person rethinking his or her positions, especially in a constantly changing political context.'" Citing Barack Obama's extremist positions on these key moral issues, Dr. Dobson says he is now inclined to believe that "he must consider McCain's record against abortion rights and support for smaller government, and added McCain 'seems to understand the Muslim threat.' He also indicated McCain's choice of a running mate will be a factor." (Associated Press, July 21, 2008) The AP article goes on to report: "Of his new position, Dobson said in the statement to the AP, 'If that is a flip-flop, then so be it.'"

No one can or should deny another the right to change his or her mind in light of new information or a better understanding of the facts. Dr. Dobson may be correct when he cites a "constantly changing political context." However, he presented his opposition to McCain as a matter of conscience, not political calculation. As Dr. Dobson wrote in an essay defending his position of conscience, *"Polls don't measure right and wrong; voting according to the possibility of winning or losing can lead directly to the compromise of one's principles.* In the present political climate, it could result in the abandonment of cherished beliefs that conservative Christians have promoted and defended for decades. *Winning the presidential election is vitally important, but not at the expense of what we hold most dear.*" ("The Values Test," the New York Times, Oct. 4, 2007) From this perspective, the question is not whether the political facts have changed, but whether there has been a change in the moral truth that should govern conscientious choice. In this respect, the moral facts about both Obama and McCain were clear when Dr. Dobson first declared his position of conscience. Nothing has changed.

Since 2002, when Jill Stankovic and others exposed Obama's acceptance of infanticide against babies who survive a failed abortion, Dr. Dobson and other leaders of the moral constituency have known about and presumably understood the depth of Obama's commitment to the evil practice of abortion. Throughout the Democrat presidential primary campaigns, they could hardly have missed his consistent embrace of so-called "gay rights" and his advocacy of appeasement, withdrawal and accommodation with evil in the fight against terrorism so vital to our national security. Similarly, in the course of the Republican primary campaign, the facts about John McCain's retreat from his early commitment to the pro-life position were repeatedly brought to light in ways that included information from one of his Senate colleagues, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, making clear that behind the scenes he time and again opposed bringing pro-life issues to the Senate floor. McCain's unprincipled approach to the marriage issue was also widely known, including support for so-called civil unions and his opposition to the Federal Marriage Amendment.

The demands of conscience

When dealing with matters of conscience, knowledge of material facts is not the only consideration for good judgment. Moral conscience demands that facts be viewed, ordered and prioritized in light of the principles that distinguish right from wrong and good actions from bad. Where conscience is concerned, information is a term that cannot be understood without reference to those principles, and the substantive process of deliberation through which a conscientious person translates them into decision and action. When a conscientious individual changes his mind about a matter of conscience, our respect for his integrity demands an explanation that justifies the change in terms of this moral due process.

This is especially true when dealing with the issues of deep moral consequence that confront this generation of Americans. Though it's often ignored these days, good conscience is an essential component of happiness. The people who agitate for "abortion rights" and "gay rights" do so at least in part because the stigma of illegality and immorality casts a shadow of discontent over the lives of people who have abortions or engage in homosexual acts, even when no one physically interferes with or punishes their actions. Human beings are not sticks or stones, but self-conscious, emotional beings. Their happiness has a component of consciousness that makes it difficult to be content in the presence of a standard that condemns what they do. Try as they might, this "bad conscience" (their inner, even if secret knowledge of a standard that condemns their actions) may sour their disposition, their sense of their own worth, even their enjoyment of life itself. Some people may be unwilling to take this seriously when it comes to sexual acts, but many understand it completely when they or someone they know has to deal with an unintended pregnancy. Few are so brazen as to believe that the decision to have an abortion is a happy one, few so callous that they remain unmoved by the thought of a woman, especially a young girl, wrestling with the prospect that she must choose between ruining her plans for life and taking the life she did not plan.

Since bad conscience can cause so much unhappiness, people who uphold and fight for moral conscience must do so with great care. It is morally wrong simply to disregard the happiness of others. Those who do so disregard the standard of love that is in fact the highest principle of moral life ("faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.") But if good conscience is vital to happiness, love requires that we painstakingly respect the requirements of good conscience. People may feel happier for a while when they close their eyes to those requirements, but it is like the habit of taking a powerful drug – a momentary good feeling that masks the gradual destruction of the capacity to experience good in any way at all. When a drug addict, such as an alcoholic, renounces the habit, the experience of withdrawal can be enormously hard and painful, but it is necessary if his capacity for happiness is to be preserved or restored. Though someone who refuses him a fix or a drink may be resented for the pain perpetuated by his refusal, yet and still this refusal proves his love.

Similarly, a painstaking refusal to ignore the requirements of good conscience can be the way in which the discipline of love manifests itself in the thought and actions of those who seek to uphold its standards. Since they seem to ignore the pain and discomfort suffered by people

whose actions violate the standards they uphold, they will of course be accused of lacking love and compassion. They will be subject to the suspicion that they derive some satisfaction of pride or self-righteousness from the suffering others must endure on account of their "intolerance." In the end, the only sure refutation of this suspicion is that they themselves are willing to suffer as much and more for the sake of the standard they espouse. Though this was not ultimately the reason Christ willingly suffered and died upon the cross, yet down through the ages His willingness to do so has informed and instructed those who seek, however imperfectly, to live out their acceptance of the discipline of love His life exemplifies.

One would hope that people who want to uphold standards of moral conscience would show painstaking respect for this discipline in all that they do. Of course, since we are dealing with human beings, it may be that the best we can hope for is that they remember and acknowledge the standards, even though human imperfection sometimes gets the better of them. It is the effort they make toward this acknowledgement that can help others to receive their moral advocacy with patience rather than suspicion. Sometimes this effort involves admitting and seeking forgiveness for wrong actions or mistakes. Sometimes it may simply involve making sure that decisions are not made without carefully weighing their merits in light of the standards we espouse. In either case, it means never treating the possibility of wrong as a casual matter, a consideration secondary to some other concern. The first foundation of good conscience may be the priority we give to its requirements.

The Christian standard

This is especially true of Christian conscience. Was it not of Christ that the prophet spoke when he said, "He knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good"? (Isaiah 7:15) Time and again in His ministry Christ stressed the importance of putting moral considerations ahead of everything else. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," He said, "and these things shall be added unto you." (Matthew 6:33) "What shall it profit a man," He said, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36) And again, "... fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28) And finally "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48)

Jesus was clear and unequivocal about the right priority, and the importance of respecting it. God comes first. Moral considerations take precedence. Evil is never an alternative, though the body be pained or destroyed when we reject it. Never once, anywhere in the Scripture, does Christ suggest that His followers may choose the lesser of evils. He does command that even in the face of physical violence and death, they seek to do good: "Love your enemies, Do good to those that hate you." (Luke 6:27); "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you. ..." (Matthew 5:44) From His words the apostle rightly instructed, "See that none render evil for evil unto any man, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves and to all men." (1 Thessalonians 5:15) If

Christ's life, death and resurrection prove anything, they prove that God has absolutely provided a choice for good in every situation. Christ enjoins His followers to make that choice no matter what. Though it lead to ridicule, physical torture and even painful death, they are called to walk with God in the certainty of resurrection and eternal life.

This was of course the Spirit in which the apostles and martyrs of the church lived and sometimes gave their lives as witnesses to the truth of Christ's continuing presence on earth. In America today, are His followers called to witness any less emphatically? Are they not called, like Christians in every age and circumstance, to walk in the Spirit that makes it possible? Are they not called to make manifest, in whatever way they can, that Christ lives in and through them, and that He is their choice no matter what the cost?

Dr. Dobson declared that "in good conscience" he could not vote for John McCain. Respect for his integrity requires us to assume that a man of his professed faith and commitment to Christ spoke with sincere respect for the Christian standard of conscience. Comparing what Christ requires with what John McCain represents, he reached the accurate conclusion that McCain fails to measure up. But now, it seems, he is preoccupied by Barack Obama. Comparing McCain with Obama, he now entertains the possibility of voting for McCain. In this comparison, what has become of the standard, which is Jesus Christ? From Dr. Dobson's words, both Obama and McCain depart from that standard, though McCain not as much as Obama. What does this mean? Is the difference a matter of degree, or a matter of principle? Given Christ's instruction, the difference in principle must be decisive, for God is the first principle, and our relation to the will of God the first priority. Does Dr. Dobson mean to say that support for Obama's candidacy departs from good conscience in principle, whereas support for McCain's does not? If so, a change of heart may be justified. If not, it is sadly mistaken.

McCain abandons principle on the issue of abortion

Of all the issues confronting our country today, the assertion of so-called "abortion rights" most clearly epitomizes the nation's departure from moral principle. Sen. McCain has taken the position that once *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, the issue of abortion can properly be left to the state governments for decision. But the moral premise of our republican form of government, the premise that makes the consent of the people necessary for just government, is the Declaration principle that all human beings are endowed by God with unalienable rights, including first of all the right to life. If the states can pass laws that depart from this premise, it means they are not required to preserve the foundations of republican form of government. But "if the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalms 11:3) McCain's position not only discards the Declaration's first principle of justice, it also violates Article IV, Section 4, of the U.S. Constitution, which requires the federal government to guarantee a republican form of government in all of the states. Thus as a matter of constitutional principle, John McCain departs from good conscience. (Since, on taking office, the president swears as a matter of conscience to

uphold, protect, and defend the Constitution, a candidate's approach to matters of conscience cannot be taken lightly.)

Despite this evidence of his disregard for principle, Dr. Dobson cites Sen. McCain's pro-life voting record as evidence that he is somehow preferable to Sen. Obama. Now, someone who intentionally kills an innocent child violates moral principle in every case, but not everyone who opposes the killing does so as a matter of conscience. Their opposition may be a matter of sentiment or calculation rather than principle. Some people who advocate "abortion rights" were revolted by descriptions of partial-birth abortion, but their opposition to this repugnant method of abortion did not alter their departure from moral principle. Indeed, some people support the ban on partial-birth abortion because they think the publicity given to such an overtly gruesome way of killing erodes support for "abortion rights." Far from respecting the principle of God's will for life, they act as they do in order to preserve the evil that violates it. Similarly, when people like Jill Staneck described the murder of children born alive after a failed abortion, many "abortion rights" advocates (including, for example, Hillary Clinton) supported a measure to end the killings, but in this case also their vote did not alter their substantive rejection of moral principle.

McCain abandons principle on the issue of destroying human embryos for research

By contrast, the issue of destroying human embryos to harvest their stem cells for research barely registers as a matter of sentimental revulsion. In many respects, it poses the issue of respect for the unalienable right to life as a matter of pure moral principle, with little to inspire advocates for embryonic life except their respect for the self-evident truth that the right to life is a matter of God's will, not human choice or calculated benefit. The issue, therefore, offers a good means to distinguish between people who are pro-life as a matter of principle and those who are not. John McCain is willing to permit this life-destroying research method. Like the overt supporters of so-called "abortion rights," he votes pro-life when he believes the situation calls for it. But when the costs (or in the case of embryo-destroying research, the speculative benefits) are high enough, he abandons the position of conscience. His decision is based on calculation, rather than principle. Some people justify this, since they doubt the humanity of the embryo. They believe that, given this uncertainty, the benefit of the doubt should go to those whose lives might be improved by the results that may be achieved using the harvested stem cells. But as President Reagan rightly concluded, "Simple morality dictates that unless and until someone can prove the unborn human is not alive, we must give it the benefit of the doubt and assume it is. And thus, it should be entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." (Remarks at the Alfred M. Landon Lecture Series on Public Issues, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kan., Sept. 9, 1982) When there is doubt, the benefit of the doubt goes to preserving the life in question rather than taking it. In our society we take this truth so seriously that even the life of someone who may have committed heinous murder must be preserved until guilt is proved "beyond a reasonable doubt." Reagan understood this. Clearly, John McCain is no Ronald Reagan.

McCain: Blind to principle on the issue of marriage natural right and the family

The destruction of nascent human life is an issue of moral principle too often decided by emotion. The push to legitimize so-called marriages for homosexual couples is also an emotional issue, but unlike abortion, it is almost never argued in terms of principle. Yet in the context of the American creed, it involves the most fundamental principle of all.

The Declaration's assertion that governments exist to secure unalienable rights derives its authority by reference to the Creator and respect for what the Declaration calls "the laws of nature and of Nature's God." The whole doctrine that justice requires a republican form of government, based on the consent of the people, depends on this understanding of the universe as a law governed whole whose structure and activity give rise to relationships that human beings are morally obliged to respect. The most fundamental of these relationships is human equality, as a moral fact without regard to any material differences between one human being and another. In political terms, especially, the principle of God-ordained human equality vitiates the notion that material superiority of any kind entitles one human being to command or rule over another. It implies, to the contrary, that every human being, whatever his or her material condition, represents a limit or check upon the prerogatives of superior human power which every other human being, however powerful, is morally obliged to recognize and respect. In this sense, the doctrine of equality implies that in the moral realm ("the kingdom of God") the weak have claims that command respect from the strong.

This idea runs contrary to the experience of human life in almost every respect. Wherever we chance to look in human history, we see societies governed by the prerogatives of power. By and large, human experience supports what the character Thrasymachus asserts in Plato's "Republic": "Justice is the good of the stronger." But there is one instance of human society where the weak command and rule the strong, where people with more developed abilities and attributes respond with alacrity even to the inarticulate cries of others helpless to intimidate them in any way, and where they do so with a sense of obligation so complete that duty takes on the aspect of devotion and subservience every semblance of pride and contentment. And far from being unusual, this society has existed everywhere on earth, amongst people of every language, custom and creed, always preserving in its rudiments the combination of powerlessness and command that universally undermines the notion that rulership is the exclusive prerogative of power. Such is the natural sway that children have over the parents whose union they represent.

Because human beings are born in a state of the utmost helplessness, the survival of the species itself depends on the possibility that those who are stronger and more capable than an infant will feel and respond to the obligation to care for its needs. The tie that binds the caring parent to its child is both the proof and the paradigm of the relation of natural justice that arises from the obligation of one human being toward another. That all are created equal is clear in the equally helpless condition in which all enter the world. That by nature government is based on consent is proved by the simple fact that people acting upon nothing more authoritative than the promptings of their own hearts offer to helpless babes servitude more prompt, more assiduous and sacrificial than could be commanded by the most absolute monarch of the world.

The family thus exemplifies the natural first principle of just government. The key to understanding its significance is that in the first instance authority arises from the control that nature ironically associates with the weak and undeveloped condition of the child, not from the parents' superior physical development and strength. By reflecting on the juxtaposition of weakness and commanding authority, we begin to see the relationship between the natural obligation imposed by the family relationship and the meaning of consent. The parents' willingness to follow the promptings of natural obligation gives the child's weakness its power over their strength. In the presence of this natural sense of obligation, the good of the weak takes precedence over the strong.

But since human will is not just a matter of instinct, the human response to natural obligation does not operate with the consistency characteristic of less self-conscious animals. Once consciously understood, the natural inclination may be resisted and ultimately undone. This can mean greater freedom for the individual, but it also weakens the natural subjection of superior strength to the moral requirements of nature. Freed from the natural sense of obligation, the manifestations of human power may take the path of least resistance, the path that leads to the subjection of those whose weakness marks them for domination.

Family and government by consent

Seen in light of these reflections, the fact that the Declaration prefaces its assertion of human equality with a reference to "the laws of nature and of Nature's God" is not a rhetorical flourish, but the acknowledgment of a necessary connection. The concept of government based upon consent is inseparable from the natural sense that obliges strength to respect the claims of weakness. Free of the trammels of this natural sensibility, self-conscious power acknowledges no limits except those imposed by superior power. Emboldened by the idea of an authoritative natural standard, however, the weak may find strength in the unity that results from their common understanding that the Creator has taken care to connect the fate of the whole species with respect for the natural inclination that constitutes the first human society – the relationship between the child and its parents – and that because of this relationship the greatest possible human weakness commands respect and even obedience from the strong.

The Declaration's assertion of equality and unalienable rights relies on the authority of nature (as it reflects and implements the Creator's will). On the one hand, the natural family embodies the evidence of this natural equality (all humans begin as helpless infants). On the other, it provides the paradigm of consent that obliges the strong to respect the needs of the weak so that humanity can survive despite its vulnerable beginnings. This paradigm, in turn, exemplifies the first instance of human belonging or property. The parents affirm that they belong to the child by actions that accept their responsibility for its well-being. As they acknowledge what they owe to the child, they affirm the mutual bond that constitutes their proper tie one to one another, a bond grounded in the will and authority of nature (represented by the child's imperious needs) and formed by their will in response to that authority. Ironically, in this first assertion of proprietary

right, ownership is not a function of ability or labor, but of helpless dependency secured by the workings of what Shakespeare called the "compunctious visitings of nature" upon the human heart. The right involved is the right action of the parents in response to the natural impulse of their hearts – in other words, their natural inclination.

This way of understanding the principle of property (i.e., its first origins in human society) is not altogether different from the views of political philosophers such as John Locke, who saw the connection between property rights and labor. The culmination of childbirth is not called labor for nothing, and the parents' act of procreation is also performed by the sweat of their brows. In this way, property is revealed as the response to natural inclination through which individuals accept their responsibility to preserve the appearance of the natural whole in one form (the child) to which they are bound by prior consent of their will when it appeared in another form (the work of procreation).

Because the contemporary debate over the institution of marriage takes place in the context of the push forcibly to legitimize homosexual behavior, the more fundamental issue of natural right that is at stake is never explicitly addressed. Is the paradigm of natural right represented by the procreational family still the basis for the American understanding of just government? Does nature have any authority in establishing the obligations human beings have toward one another, or is society the incidental result of the interplay of human choice and relative power? The advocates of homosexual marriage offer a concept of family that is based on human choice, without reference to any natural obligation. But once the element of natural obligation has been discarded, what limits the power of choice when confronted with the demands of those who have no power?

In the paradigm of the natural family, the connection between right and obligation is clear, and it establishes the connection between responsibility and authority. In the first instance, the child exerts natural authority over the parents because of their response to a natural inclination. By this response they consent to take action for the sake of the child, to take responsibility for its helpless condition. In doing so they acknowledge that they are the authors of its being in that condition, its parents, and so assume the authority that comes with this acknowledged responsibility. By this understanding, parental authority entirely derives from the interaction of nature and the consent of the individual, without reference to any society or institution beyond the family itself.

But where no natural tie exists, what is the basis for parental authority? Does the mere fact that one individual is willing to care for another establish the authority to do so? What if many individuals have the same inclination? Does authority go to the one with the strongest desire, or to the one with the greater strength to enforce that desire? Without reference to the right established by nature, such opposing claims cannot be resolved except by accident, conflict or the intervention and mediation of some agent who represents a power greater than the parties

involved. But the notion that accident establishes right leads to chaos; that conflict establishes right leads to perpetual war; that greater power establishes right leads to perpetual tyranny.

Disregarding the natural basis of family leads to tyrannical government

Because our present debate over marriage takes place in the context of an already established institution of government, we tend to discount the first two possibilities. But the third raises the specter of a fundamental change in the form of government we have enjoyed. If family is simply a matter of choice, conflicting choices imply the surrender to government of more and more power to decide what constitutes a family and what establishes and limits parental authority. Yet the power to define family means the power to distribute the benefits, burdens and obligations of family life without regard for the desires and inclinations of some or all of the individuals involved. Where the natural family derived its existence from the consent of its participants, the family produced by arbitrary choices depends for its existence on the fiat of government decision, as it supports or invalidates those choices. Individuals can have no prior claim of right when the concept of right is established exclusively by positive law and regulation.

The difficulty posed by conflicting family claims is so great that the Bible uses such a conflict to illustrate the epitome of wise judgment in human affairs. In the biblical story, two women lay claim to the same child. With no basis for decision but their conflicting claims, King Solomon commands that the child be cut in two and physically divided between them. When one of them is moved to surrender her claim in order to preserve the child's life, Solomon takes this as proof that the child belongs to her. He relies on the "compunctious visitings of nature" to reveal and enforce the standard of right. But this account forces us to consider the consequence of substituting human choice for the discipline of natural obligation when deciding what it means to belong to a family.

In the biblical example, the child's existence is threatened by a human decision that takes no account of its nature, i.e., of the natural standard that distinguishes a living child from, say, a loaf of bread. The child is treated as a commodity that may be valued or discarded as a matter of convenience. In our day, this is no merely theoretical possibility. As a matter of convenience, we sanction the killing of babes in the womb. As a matter of convenience, we sanction the destruction of embryos for research. As a matter of convenience, we are moving to implement an understanding of marriage that deprives children of the natural belongings (their family relations) that are the primordial paradigm of all property rights.

Despite pervasive protestations that the welfare of the child is of paramount concern, the primary consequence of the current effort to define family in terms of choice is to eliminate any regard for the authority the child, by its very nature, exerts over its parents. People blithely promote homosexual marriage, or civil unions, including the artificial conception of children to be reared by homosexual couples, with no mention made of the fact that such children are deprived in principle of at least one of their rightful parents. By nature the child has the right to a kind of

natural dominion over its progenitors, including the opportunity at least to try out the appeal that its helpless condition makes to their natural sensibility. Moreover, a child systematically deprived of any knowledge of at least one of its biological parents cannot fulfill the filial obligations that arise from the natural connection, or avoid the oedipal risks connected with such ignorance. These things may or may not be important to the "purblind worldlings" whose noisy clamoring these days drowns out the nagging whispers of natural reason, but we must raise the question on its behalf: Why it is right to deprive children of their natural belongings so that the very people thus willing to sacrifice their rights can indulge their sexual preferences, or their vain desire to congratulate themselves for their self-righteous tolerance of so-called diversity?

Homosexual marriage and the principle of natural human equality

In this respect, just as abortion suppresses the child's right to life, homosexual marriage suppresses the child's natural belongings, the first rights of property in the primordial sense of the term. But once we abandon respect for the authority of nature as it establishes the rights of the child, we have in principle abandoned that respect when it comes to any human beings whose situation makes them as helpless or vulnerable as children with regard to their superiors in power. Thus the issue of homosexual marriage actually poses the question of our allegiance to the principle of natural human equality, the principle from which we derive the form of government meant to secure our liberty.

The people who promote homosexual marriage often claim as well to work for equal economic justice for the poor (that is, those weaker than others because they command fewer material resources). As we have seen, however, the suppression of respect for the natural family actually deprives the weak of nature's support for their equal claim to property rights. And as we noted above, individuals can have no prior claim of right when the concept of right is established exclusively by positive law and regulation. Without the appeal to natural justice, possession becomes the whole law of property. Them that has, gets. Those with greater physical strength or prowess; greater intelligence or cunning; greater courage or temerity may assert that the results produced by their superiority establish a legitimate claim to hold and rule whatever (and whomever) their might has conquered. Though in our day the elites to whom this rule awards sovereignty pretend, and seek to demonstrate, that the decisions of power freed from the constraints of natural principle will do justice to the poor, I suspect that their concern with the weak will not outlast the twilight of the democratic institutions founded upon respect for "the laws of nature and of Nature's God."

At the moment, the people are still emboldened by the belief that the absolute strength of the Creator God supports their claim to rights and dignity. Once the ideologies of dehumanizing science (e.g., the dogma of evolution) and unfettered human will have extinguished this belief from their consciousness, the democratic age will end. A new dark age of autocratic aristocracy will begin, a new night of the human soul, with no light but from the flickering fires of passion that reveal new possibilities of human debauchery. There is more than a hint of this in the dark

visions of the future produced by the entertainment media, whose works reflect the vain imaginings of contemporary elites. The "Star Trek" future of hopeful exploration has been shouldered aside by the "Blade Runner" vision of banal violence as humanity, stifled by delusions of godlike creativity, battles monsters of its own creation. It's just entertainment, of course. Or so they say. But as it reflects the burgeoning popular culture of video games and massive, multiplayer worlds on the Internet, can we safely ignore its implications for the soul and consciousness of the upcoming generations whose time it preoccupies? By means of such pastimes, the soul is inured to the prospect of a universe without natural justice, in which the only concept of right is the one established by the human will to power and vindicated when the debris settles around those who are the last ones standing.

In light of such grim possibilities, can the issues involved in the assault on the natural family be treated as matters of political convenience or emotional whim, as John McCain and others like him do? McCain's statements on the issue of homosexual marriage, civil unions and the need to protect traditional marriage by constitutional means show no regard for the profound destruction of moral principle that will result from overthrowing the claims of the natural family. Like Barack Obama, he takes positions exclusively calculated to win votes from the constituencies he needs for political victory, no matter if they risk the soul and moral foundations of the republic. At the very least, he wants to harvest votes from people deeply concerned about the besieged moral foundations of our liberty even though he obviously lacks the understanding needed to defend them. He cannot see, or perhaps even conceive of, the connections between our moral ideas and practices and the survival of our institutions of self-government. Such a leader might be barely adequate in the "weak, piping time of peace." But when, on every front insidious war is being waged against the moral pillars of our freedom, his inadequacy is not just lamentable, it will be deadly.

Surrendering to relativism

It's clear that as a matter of good, and most especially of Christian conscience, Dr. Dobson was right to reject McCain's candidacy. On the fateful moral issues of our time, McCain is the archetype of political expediency. Christ emphatically rejected such expediency for principled moral decisions. ("What shall it profit a man ..." etc.) Relative benefits cannot justify actions that violate the absolute standard of God's will.

Dr. Dobson and leaders like him have many times declaimed against and rejected the moral relativism and "situational ethics" that masquerade as moral reasoning these days. If they now express support for McCain they not only promote a candidate who represents this corruption of moral conscience, by their actions they represent it themselves. The sequence of events in Dr. Dobson's case makes this clear. He said he could not vote for McCain as a matter of principle, but may do so now because McCain is the better choice when compared to Barack Obama. Since Dobson and others denounce Obama as evil, this makes evil the standard of comparison. The true standard disappears. This is an example of moral relativism, pure and simple; a bad example

offered to their fellow citizens in the context of the weightiest public responsibility most Americans ever face, their vote for president of the United States. Christians of old chose suffering and death precisely in order to make it clear that they stood with Christ when it mattered most. By their surrender to relativism in presidential politics, these leaders stand Christian witness on its head. Their message is clear: When the world is at stake, vote as if Christ isn't part of it.

McCain's stand on national security is dangerously self-contradictory

Nations have more often been undone by unskilled or treacherous defenders than by irresistible conquerors. The flaw in the "lesser of evils" arguments being used to promote John McCain and others like him is that even a lesser evil may be evil enough to kill. Such leaders are like the wound that took the life of Romeo's friend Mercutio: "not so deep as a well, or so wide as a church door; but 'tis enough, 'twill serve." To a city under siege, the noisy army that lies in wait upon the surrounding plains may seem the greater evil, but the postern gate quietly left open by treachery or ignorant neglect more often proves to be its real undoing. In this respect, Sen. McCain represents danger in the very area of national security that Dr. Dobson cites as a possible reason for preferring him over Obama. On the one hand, he takes a firm line against policies of withdrawal, appeasement and accommodation in the war against terrorism. On the other, he has been in the vanguard of those who promote policies that neglect the security of our national borders and encourage the tide of illegal immigration that will inexorably subvert the sovereignty of the American people. He seems ready enough to defend the ramparts, and even come to grips with our enemies, but then he wants to swing the back gates wide open and keep defenders away from the areas where enemy sappers can be heard busily working to tunnel beneath the walls.

The lesser evil more deadly?

From the perspective of principled republicanism, the choice between Obama and McCain is like the choice between a vile smelling poison that kills quickly and a tasteless one served up in a savory stew. The first seems more dangerous until we realize that the second is more likely to be consumed. Republican leader like Sen. McCain also remind me of a briefing I once attended at the World Health Organization when I was Ronald Reagan's ambassador to the U.N. Economic and Social Council. The briefing included a description (suitable for the non-scientist, of course) of the insidious workings of the AIDS virus. Apparently, HIV cells destroy the cells programmed to defend the body against infection, then masquerade to take their place. When dangerous organisms attack HIV-affected organs, no signal goes out to stimulate the production of antibodies to counteract them because the HIV cells, which do nothing in the body's defense, nonetheless appear to be on guard. The body is therefore left defenseless, to be ravaged by opportunistic infections.

I cannot vouch for the scientific accuracy of this description when it comes to AIDS, but my own experience confirms its accuracy as a description of the condition of the body politic in America

today. During the Republican primary season, none of the candidates touted by the media or promoted by the corporate money powers offered a substantive, consistent and proven republican alternative. The two who most prominently professed to speak for the moral constituency (Romney and Huckabee) were different versions of the same masquerade. Romney wore the false robes of a pro-life convert to mask his true record as a supporter of so-called abortion rights and homosexual marriage in Massachusetts. Huckabee touted his true record of support for moral conservative positions as governor of Arkansas to distract from his true record of big-government socialism in every other respect. Then Fred Thompson stepped forward using a false claim of conservatism to mask the true absence of any substance at all. All the while, every effort was made to make sure that a capable, consistent, substantive conservative voice would never be heard. Since I raised that voice, I can speak firsthand to the sleazy contrivances used to keep my name off of ballots, my voice out of debates, and even to keep votes cast for me from being recorded. From beginning to end, the Republican primary process was a manipulated sham aimed at making sure the conservative base of the party found no true rallying point round which to gather its undoubted strength.

These candidates produced the result the AIDS analogy would lead one to expect. In terms of the conservative constituency of the Republican Party, Sen. McCain is an opportunistic infection that threatens to ravage and destroy its defenseless body. Tragically for America, in the larger context of our national political life he still plays the role of the AIDS virus, masquerading as a republican while opening the way for Barack Obama, the opportunistic infection that will ravage the defenseless body of our republic. If we accept the McCain/Obama choice, we resign the republic to its demise. I guess the "lesser of evils" crowd will take comfort in the notion that though infected with HIV, the patient actually died of pneumonia. Unfortunately, this is false comfort, since the choice they make increases the virulence of the opportunistic infection. In today's political terms, their surrender to moral relativism makes Barack Obama's election to the presidency more and more inevitable.

Who helps Obama?

This is ironic given the fact that Sen. McCain's backers rely so heavily on the wearisome fallacy that anyone who fails to support him helps Obama to victory. But a little common-sense reflection reveals this as sophistry. Obama's strength comes mainly from a combination of hype from the leftist media and entertainment industry, monolithic support from blacks and a quiet play on America's almost pathetic hankering after an outcome that can be portrayed (however inaccurately) as proof that the bad old days of racism are firmly behind us. Apart from the hype, Obama is actually a left-wing extremist whose socialist views are out of line with those of many Americans, and whose abandonment of American moral principle would assure the organized opposition of many others. Even his claim to represent some historic breakthrough for black Americans is demonstrably false. But given the degree to which John McCain shares Obama's big government predilections and his consistent abandonment of moral principle, he is in no position to rally opposition to Obama on these most salient points of his vulnerability.

Others can hardly be blamed for not supporting McCain when he offers them nothing to support. If people are obliged to support one person who doesn't represent them in order to stop another who also doesn't represent them, they end up with a government that doesn't represent them. The American founders rightly identified representation as the defining feature of our republic (see, for example, James Madison in Federalist Number 10, "a republic by which I mean a government in which the scheme of representation takes place ..."). Now, thanks to the "choice of evils" crowd, we are being skillfully maneuvered into a voting mentality that effectively destroys it.

Thanks to his cotton candy rhetoric, and a lot of help from fellow travelers in the so-called information media, Barack Obama has thus far advanced through a haze of prefabricated enthusiasm calculated to take the edge off his extremist views. This serves to distract from the combination of deceitful vapidness and downright evil that mainly constitutes his otherwise scanty political record. Every now and then a little bubble of truth bursts the façade of this Potemkin image. People get a quick whiff of the unsavory truth, but just as quickly the cotton candy spinmeisters explain it away, leaving behind the pretense that the matter has been laid to rest. Did he justify infanticide? Of course not: no one would do that. Only his mean-spirited critics would suggest it. His voting record and statements prove the critics right, however, so the media ignore them. Did he spend years imbibing the swill of a preacher of racial hate and violence vainly sporting the name of Jesus Christ? A little denunciation clears him of the deed, a well-crafted scene of public repudiation and seeming rupture, and all is well. Has he consistently advocated policies of disengagement, accommodation and withdrawal in the face of terrorism? A little jaunt to the front lines, a nodding, obsequious tour of Europe and voila, a leader ready for the sternest tests of America's endurance.

If media-fabricated perception is reality, Obama can be considered fit for the presidency of the United States. We should remember, though, that the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center looked like pillars of stability the day before they crumpled like rice paper. Some aspects of our situation in the world defy all our grand delusions. It was not the terrorists' wonderful science or their overwhelming military might that brought the Towers down, but the sharp edge of their fanatical spirit, forged in the moral battle waged since the fall from Grace on the plain that stretches out between the poles of good and evil. That plain rises in the inner universe where love conceives, where hate is born, where from motives mingling the one and the other the human heart forms purposes that cannot be discouraged by material weakness or turned aside by the prospect of death and wounds. Vapid rhetoric and fabricated glamour will not sustain the moral will of the American people through the struggle grounded upon that battlefield. They will need the clarity of true moral principle that lets people see what they live and would die for, if need be.

The self-evident truths set forth in the American Declaration of Independence have been the key to such clarity of purpose through all the challenging times when the survival of the republic hung in the balance. They informed the deliberations of the framers of the Constitution. They

inspired those like Daniel Webster who forged the nation's love of the Constitution as the guarantor of Liberty and Union. They guided and tempered the sternly compassionate statecraft of Abraham Lincoln in the terrible Civil War he fought on the moral ground that they made possible and necessary. And when the 20th century time and again produced coalitions of tyranny to reassert in modern dress the ancient evils of government by fear and conquest and fanatical deception, they lifted the sights of ordinary folks beyond the empty promises of totalitarian utopias, and gave them the common sense to confront the claims of raw power with souls made strong by their simple allegiance to the simple truth that confirms the dignity of the powerless, though it be denied by every human power on earth except their own.

Obama's greatest vulnerability

But his record proves that Barack Obama, – like most left-wing politicians, but unlike most American voters – simply rejects these Declaration principles. That's why his sacrifice of these principles with regard to the paramount moral issues of our day should galvanize many Americans against him and also why his neo-Marxist policy preferences will be repellent to many others. Despite much sloganeering about unity and change, he offers people no real basis for unity and no change except for the worse. This is especially true of the monolithic congregation of black voters gathered under the banner of his candidacy. As they were invoked in the 19th century battle against slavery and the 20th century's great struggle for civil rights, the Declaration's principles of God-given human equality and unalienable rights became an integral part of the heritage and identity of black Americans. They resonated deeply with that combination of spiritual resourcefulness and an unyielding thirst for justice that ultimately steered the hearts of those who risked death in the Underground Railroad, or injury and death in the long marches and night watches against racial segregation, prejudice and injustice.

When Barack Obama declared that there is no principle that protects the life of helpless, innocent babes born despite every effort to abort them, he spoke from a spiritual wilderness alien to the experience of innocent, disenfranchised black men and women who, like those children, survived every attempt to abort their lives, their dignity, their livelihood and even their sense of spiritual worth in order to become a people whose quiet righteousness sustained them against the dogs and the fire hoses, against the police assaults and the night riding KKK assassins, until it finally moved the conscience of the nation to see and to do what was right.

During the height of the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King often evoked the Declaration's famous insistence on human equality and unalienable rights. In that context, he repeatedly made it clear that black Americans, and those who joined them in non-violent battle for justice, did not fight for blacks alone, but for all Americans and indeed all people everywhere whose common humanity makes them the subject of the Declaration's promise of justice for all. As people stood together in their determination to bear faithful witness to the truth of this promise, they represented a unity that goes beyond rhetoric and beyond the passionate enthusiasm of the moment. It becomes the sure foundation of a community of principle and

decent hope, a "res publica" (public thing, common possession of the people) for which people of good conscience will sacrifice in life and even in the face of death so that it stays alive for the generations to come. This is the true ground of unity for the sake of which brave soldiers endure the hellish risks and pains of war; true statesmen sacrifice the baubles of popularity and easy political success; true patriots love America most when as a nation we stand not for ourselves alone but for all those everywhere who stand with us in the name of just humanity. What was "Common Sense" when Thomas Paine wrote of it is still common sense today: "The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind."

But how can we claim to stand for justice for all people everywhere when we deny justice to the helpless, innocent offspring God has entrusted to our care? How can any leader claim to represent our unity when he adamantly supports that denial, even though it means tolerating infanticide and denying the very truths that make us free? In the 20th century, as we fought against the totalitarian tyrannies of Eurasia, there were American leaders like this, who would decry the Nazi or Communist violations of justice and human dignity while they adamantly defended racial segregation and discrimination against blacks here at home. The tragic irony is that the man, Barack Obama, whose victory some people dare to suggest will be a fitting culmination of the historic struggle against those evils, actually represents the same hypocritical betrayal of justice as those anti-communist defenders of racist inequity. Like all the advocates of so called "abortion rights," however, his stand does not affect the rightful claims of one group only, but of any innocent human beings threatened with extinction by those who have physical power over them.

I realize that some people say they support Barack Obama because they believe in social justice and policies that promote equity for the poor, the weak and the disenfranchised. It is deeply and tragically ironic to see them promoting for the presidency a man who has discarded and disregarded the self-evident truths that oblige conscience to respect the claim of moral equality that justifies this belief. If we care only about ourselves and what happens in our own time, it may be enough to have leaders who choose to do what is right while destroying our allegiance to the principles that make it so. But if we mean to fulfill our Constitution's ultimate goal, and secure the blessing of liberty not only for ourselves but our posterity, then we cannot sacrifice the integrity of our nation's commitment to lasting principle in order to get contemporary results for ourselves. Here again, Christian conscience decries the bad bargain that may win a vote today while losing the moral heart of our liberty.

No choice but evil?

John McCain and Barack Obama are both versions of this bad result. I earnestly pray that the reflections offered here will lead those who want to act in good conscience to think again about their willingness to support either one of them. Of course, those who seriously uphold the standard of Christ cannot be content with merely refraining from bad action. They will accept the ultimate challenge of Christian morality, which as we have said involves doing good even

though it means enduring pain, suffering and even death. The "choice of evils" brigade will be quick to point out that, as things stand in the present election cycle, this is impractical, impossible and doomed to failure. Even if they are right, Christians ought to act on the wisdom of God, though it appears foolish from a merely human vantage point.

However, I suspect that more often than not the wisdom of God offers the only path to real success even in human terms. Christ did say that if people faithfully seek God's kingdom (i.e., act on the premise of His sovereignty), "all other things will be added unto you." The actions of ambitious politicians indicate the decisive power of the moral constituency. In the present election cycle, for instance, though Barack Obama's views on the great issues of moral principle clearly and consistently contradict Christian conscience, nothing has been more striking than his assiduous efforts to court Christian voters. (In one such speech he often took my name in vain. He even suggested that since he already had a pastor, [Jeremiah Wright] he didn't need me to tell him what Christianity is all about. I invite fair-minded people to compare my speeches and writings with those of Rev. Wright and judge for themselves who takes more seriously the standard Christ embodies for us.)

Doubtless Obama realizes that he must take precautions to guard against the possibility that black Christians will see the contradiction and act on it. His sensitivity on this score has its parallel on the Republican side. To cynical Republican politicians, the conscientious Christian voter is the white elephant at the auction, priceless and therefore hard to move. But they know that unless it's properly motivated, the Republican elephant can forget about victory at the polls. That's why, despite all the initial media hype about his great chances of getting the Republican nomination, Rudy Giuliani (well-known for his pro-abortion views) never stood a chance of doing so. It's also why such pains are being taken to focus on John McCain's putatively pro-life record, rather than his proven abandonment of moral principle.

Even in a two-way race for the presidency, a morally principled candidate who got Christian voters to vote according to their Christian priorities would probably win the election. Even more clearly, however, in a true three-way race, the Christian plurality could be decisive. Under the Electoral College system, the winning candidate in each state is the one who comes "first past the post," i.e., who wins the largest plurality of the vote. In most states, that winner takes all of the state's electoral votes. The percentage required for the winning plurality depends entirely on how many candidates win a significant proportion of the votes cast. In a three-way race, this means that 35 to 40 percent of the vote should be sufficient for victory – even less if minor vote getters garner more than 10 percent amongst them. This is how Lincoln won the presidency in 1860 with only 39 percent of the popular vote. Under such circumstances, the question isn't whether there's a moral majority. Only a moral plurality is required, and that could be less than two fifths of the votes cast. This fact explains the elaborate system now in place to prevent Christian churches from uniting under the banner of true Christian conscience. It does not explain why the leaders of the Christian moral constituency let themselves be fooled and intimidated by

arguments based on a third-party candidate's inability to win a simple majority of the vote *when no such majority is needed for victory*.

Despite the fact that Mike Huckabee's overall support for "big government" policies damaged his appeal to many conservative Christian voters, he still managed to garner more than 30 percent among Republican primary voters in many states. He achieved this result despite the fact that most of the moral constituency (indeed most Republican voters in general) stayed away from the polls. In this year's general election, the fact that neither so called "major" party offers a good choice for Christian conscience greatly increases the likelihood that a candidate of proven principle could rally a winning plurality. Of course, in the absence of such a candidate, many voters of conscience will again stay away from the polls. Without their turnout, McCain will undoubtedly lose, but it doesn't stop there. The candidates these conscientious voters would support for other offices will also suffer. Since most such candidates wear a Republican label, it will be a bad day for the Republican Party.

Why is it so hard for leaders of the moral constituency in American politics to see the strength of their own position? First, because they act out of fear, and second, because their disregard for the absolute standard of God's will makes them "halt ... between two opinions" (1 Kings 18:21), leaving them "double minded" (James 1:8, 4:8) and therefore susceptible to manipulation and division. Their fear blinds them to the power of the faithful. This is the last thing one would expect from people who say they look to Christ as their guide. As we have seen, Christ's standard requires that we fear no one but God, and no outcome but what divides us from His will. The heralds of Christ's coming sounded the note that is the key to the power of Christian conscience when they said, "Be not afraid." In harmony with them, the apostle Paul reminded Timothy, "God gave us a spirit not of fear; but of power and love and self-control." (2 Timothy 1:7) Yet instead of the fearless advocacy of Christ's standard, these leaders make themselves tools of the politics of fear, retreating into the sorry logic that supports one evil because they are afraid of another, instead of rejecting both with the courage that comes from their faith in God and Jesus Christ.

The hesitancy and double-mindedness of the moral leaders opens them to the blandishments of politicians and donors who help them to secure resources and a place at the table of power in exchange for the use or abuse of their influence with morally concerned voters. Having built a little success with this kind of help, the ambition for more leads them to become increasingly reliant upon it, until the day comes when the fear of what they might lose by forthright advocacy replaces the prospect of gain. In either case, the focus on material success leads to a calculating mentality that by degrees changes from a calculation of goods to a calculus of evil. This is the change they now seek to establish as the standard for the moral constituency in our political life.

I earnestly pray that the people who make up the moral constituency in our politics will show the faithful courage their leaders do not. To do so, they must declare their independence from a two-party system that offers no choice but for evil. They should "seek first the kingdom of God and

His righteousness," actively looking for the candidate who most effectively stands for His will. When they find such a candidate on the ballot, they should vote for him or her. When they know of such a candidate, though not on the ballot, they should write in the name. If in some states they are not allowed to do so, they shouldn't wait until Election Day to make a good old American fuss about this infringement of their voting rights. They should not settle for less than what they know is right for their country. Why? Because they love their country, and because they love the Creator God who made them free. And most of all because the Good Neighbor who suffered and died on the Cross to save them from death and sin is not willing that our nation should be lost to a "choice of evils" because those who profess to follow Him will not show in their love of country the same sacrificial love that He showed on Golgotha, and still shows for all of us.

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