

# What Would Jesus Do?

by Aubyn Fulton

**T**he Bible is not a political handbook, anymore than a science textbook; there are no directives in Scripture to vote for either Democrats or Republicans. However, the Bible does describe basic principles of the Kingdom. At the beginning of his ministry Jesus nicely summarized them this way: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4: 18-19, NIV).

It is easy to use these principles to decide for whom not to vote: those not committed to social justice policies that improve the living conditions of the poor, reduce circumstances that lead to crime and crowded prisons, increase access to quality health care, and improve the lot of the oppressed.

Based on these biblical principles, it is clear that I will not be voting for either Pat Buchanan or George W. Bush this fall. Both candidates have a long record of pursuing policies that do not strengthen and expand the principles of the Kingdom. Whether it is tax policies that favor the wealthy, opposition to increases in the minimum wage, advocacy for oppressive big businesses like the gun, tobacco, and oil industries, or opposition to universal health care, both Buchanan and Bush have demonstrated that they are not committed to the Christian duty to stand up for the oppressed.

Over the years I have learned to tolerate the conservative politics of so many of my Adventist friends and realize that they, too, believe (however mistakenly) that their political choices are in harmony with the gospel. I now understand that reasonable people—and committed Christians—can honestly disagree on the best means to pursue social justice.

However, I still believe that the principles of Jesus require us to support politicians who are most likely to speak for the poor and oppressed against the entrenched interests of the wealthy and powerful, and work to make diversity—not division—the basis of our unity. By these criteria George W. Bush and the current Republican Party he represents fail miserably.

I find it more difficult to use biblical principles to decide whom I should vote for. Although Al Gore would clearly be more likely than George W. Bush to support the social justice policies I believe are mandated by the gospel, he, too, is beholden to large oppressive corporate interests. Many self-appointed Christian leaders have loudly attacked the Clinton administration for the president's personal moral lapses. Unfortunately, they have overlooked the much more important (from a biblical perspective) lapses in the Clinton/Gore administration's willingness to take advantage of relative prosperity to make some fundamental structural improvements in economic and social justice.

Of the four men currently running for president, Ralph Nadar probably comes closest to advocating the kind of good news for the poor and oppressed that Jesus identified as the core of his own ministry. Nadar has shown that he is willing and able to stand up to the oppressive corporate interests and to speak truth to the powerful.

Nevertheless, I will be voting for Al Gore and volunteering in his campaign to encourage others to do so as well. The serpent's wisdom discussed in the Bible suggests that, because Nadar has no chance of winning the vote, the most likely course to result in real, if relatively small, progress toward the biblical agenda of social justice is to cast a vote for Gore and against Bush. Pursuit of biblical principles in politics, as in so many other areas of life, is an imperfect work in progress.

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**Aubyn Fulton is a licensed psychologist and a professor of psychology at Pacific Union College. He has a Ph.D. in clinical psychology and an M.A. in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary.**  
afulton@puc.edu