

CHRISTIAN LIFE REPORT

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Church and State

by Mark Foley

WE are losing our nation. "WE" are the Church... those who have identified ourselves with Jesus Christ who carry the title "Christian" and who are charged with responsibility to influence the culture in which we live. Current data indicates that the cultural influence WE are charged to exercise is either not being delivered or is watered down beyond recognition.

Our nation has never been challenged as it is today. Yet, the greatest threat to the health and security of the United States is not nuclear proliferation of a rogue regime in the Middle East. It is not terrorism. It is not fluctuations of world economy. It is not one political philosophy or another.

The greatest threat to America sits in church pews every Sunday morning across the land. Persons who call themselves Christians have so embraced the influences of culture that there is *no longer any distinguishable difference between their lives and the lives of those who make no such claim.*

Why is that a threat? Because, in Christ, WE have access to the most powerful transformational healing power the world has ever known, and, generally speaking, WE neglect its employment in our communities. That neglect borders on criminal negligence...possessing the ability to prevent or avoid danger and to neglect or willfully refuse to exercise that ability with needless disregard for human life.

Guilty or not guilty?

What is the real purpose of your church? No... not the one written on the covenant hanging in the hallway or carved in stone on the front steps or the one of which you speak from Matthew, chapter 28. I ask an honest assessment of the real but unspoken purpose among the majority of those who gather this Sunday. Is that purpose primarily *Christ-centric*...

externally focused upon intentional expansion of influence outside the church? Or, is it primarily *church-centric*...internally focused upon the gathering and benefits experienced by those gathered inside the church?

Jesus was clear on the importance of effective external influence..."For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.

Then these righteous ones will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?

And the King will say, 'I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me! ...I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.'" (Matthew 25:35-40, 45 NLB)

THEY watch, hungry or lonely or scared as WE go to church. And, THEY don't believe WE are serious.

WE have some adjustments to make...NOW. A nation is at stake.

(Author's note: a magnificent exception to this general observation occurred in April as over 8,000 trained volunteer responders poured into devastated areas of our state following the tornados. Their chainsaws sang hymns and their field kitchens taught scripture.)

(Foley is president of the University of Mobile)

*The articles in this issue were gathered from various sources
The opinions in the Christian Life Report are not necessarily the opinions of the Christian Life Commission*

A Future Worthy of Our Past

by Joe Godfrey

During his second inaugural address on January 21, 1985, President Ronald Reagan made the following statement:

...With heart and hand, let us stand as one today. One people under God determined that our future shall be worthy of our past.¹

If we are to accept President Reagan's challenge, the question each generation of Americans must answer is this: How can we make our future worthy of our past? There are at least three factors that must be considered in answering this question.

First, we can make our future worthy of our past by knowing and remembering our past. We must read and study the original writings of our Founding Fathers. We should teach our children the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the accompanying documents, such as *The Federalist Papers*, that give explanation as to what our Founding Fathers meant and intended when they wrote these historical documents. We must teach our children what motivated the Founding Fathers and help our children to discover the values that governed the lives of the Founding Fathers. And, we must understand and teach our children about the influence that God's Word (the Bible) had in the lives and thinking of the Founding Fathers.

Secondly, we can make our future worthy of our past by standing firm in the present. Each generation of Americans must establish its convictions and uncompromisingly hold to the timeless truths presented in God's Word. We must base our personal values on the values revealed in God's Word—His law and justice, but, also, His love, grace and mercy. We must speak up and speak out in the public arena, presenting a biblical worldview and confronting our culture with the inconsistencies in their own arguments. And, we must, by the power of God's Holy Spirit, consistently live by the principles we claim to believe.

Thirdly, we can make our future worthy of our past by

trusting the God Who holds our future in His hands. We can be courageous in the face of adversity and even in the face of opposition or hostility, knowing that God is in control and that Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We can stay hopeful, no matter the economic conditions, the moral climate or the cultural and social pressures to conform, knowing that Jesus has promised to come again!

What God said to the people of Israel in Joshua 1:5-9 applies to believers in America today!

5 "No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. I will be with you, just as I was with Moses. I will not leave you or forsake you.

6 Be strong and courageous, for you will distribute the land I swore to their fathers to give them as an inheritance.

7 Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go.

8 This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night, so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.

9 Haven't I commanded you: be strong and courageous? Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (HCSB)

(Godfrey is Executive Director of Alabama Citizens' Action Program-ALCAP)

¹*Inaugural addresses of the Presidents of the United States: From Washington to Clinton.* 1998. Oak Harbor WA: Logos Research Systems.

A Chaplain's Report After the Tornado

by Darryl Wood

Maude, an eighty-six year-old widow, sat in a lawn chair underneath one of the few trees left on her property in Lawrence County. While serving as a Disaster Relief Chaplain the weekend after the April 27 tornadoes, I approached Maude.

After introductions I asked, "How are you?" She looked over her shoulder at her roofless house. Then she peered down the hill in the other direction to the crumpled church building where she worshiped. With her bottom lip quivering and her eyes moist, Maude raised her hand to the sky and began to sing, "I will trust in Him. . . ." Maude testified to the sufficiency of her faith. She'll recover.

Earlier that morning I attended an outdoor worship

service at Mt. Hope Baptist Church in the same county. Among the congregation were bereaved friends of some who lost their lives. Others whose houses were reduced to rubble sat in the crowd, and a few business owners and farmers whose livelihoods disappeared on that fateful Wednesday night attended.

Pastor Ricky Watt expressed thanks for the courageous survivors and the unending labor of volunteers. His message of hope and the prayers for healing in that community inspired all present. I returned home after my assignment to reflect on the gift those fine people gave me.

They reminded me of the strength of the faithful in the midst of a storm. (continued on page 3)

Government and Christians

by John Killian

Perhaps no factor has impacted our federal and state elections as has the rate of voter turnout among evangelical Christians—those who consider themselves born-again. While we should be careful not to brand evangelical Christians as a monolithic voting bloc, one cannot ignore that the numbers show that evangelical Christians vote overwhelmingly for those candidates who support the right-to-life and traditional family values.

In the 2008 Presidential Election, sixty-three percent of Christians voted, while ten million evangelical Christians were eligible to vote and were not registered while another nine million evangelicals were registered but did not vote. If voting patterns for evangelical Christians had held and a larger percentage of those voters had made it to the polls, the election outcome would have been different.

In the 2010 mid-term elections, two million more voters, who profess a born-again experience, voted nationwide than did in the 2006 mid-term elections. As a result, we have seen legislators elected who are more responsive to pro-life and pro-family legislation, as we have seen few pro-gambling initiatives and more states passing legislation upholding the right-to-life.

Should Christians engage themselves in political action? Several scriptural principles would indicate that we must be involved.

First of all, we understand that God has determined His righteous evaluations among nations. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus spoke of a judgment among nations. The Psalmist wrote of the nations that forget God (Psalm 9:17). We find a nation with the Lord Jehovah as God is a blessed nation (Psalm 33:12). Solomon explained that *righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people* (Proverbs 14:34).

Certainly, Christians want to be involved in influencing the actions and priorities of a nation.

Secondly, Christians will often need to appeal to government. Our desire is that we can live as Paul wrote Timothy that we pray for those in authority that we might enjoy a *quiet and peaceable life* (1 Timothy 2:2). Whether Joseph's appeal to Pharaoh, Daniel's appeal to King Nebuchadnezzar, Esther's appeal to Ahashuerus, King of Persia, or Paul's appeal to Caesar, believers are often in need to appeal to government for the well-being of our people.

Thirdly, God's people are instruments of justice in the world. The Prophet Micah challenged Israel that the Lord required that His people *do justice* (Micah 6:8). Isaiah reported that the Lord was displeased when no one would intervene to act justly in Israel (Isaiah 59:15-16). The very purpose of government is to administer justice according to Romans 13. Christians must speak out for justice in our system. Whether the sick or infirm threatened by euthanasia, or the unborn threatened by abortion, God's people should be at the forefront of speaking out for justice. When governments are unjust, when tax laws penalize initiative, the people of God are to speak out for justice.

While the Lord's Kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), we are still citizens of this world. We are not seeking to establish the Lord's Kingdom, as He will establish His Kingdom upon His return. But we are to be involved in government with our influence, our voting, and our prophetic word on the issues facing our place in this world that we might influence this world for eternity's sake.

(Killian is pastor of Maytown Baptist Church, Mulga, AL, and First Vice President of the Alabama Baptist Convention)



"An Evening with Chuck Colson"

Sunday, July 17, 2011 - 7:00 p.m.

A commentary on today's culture from a Christian worldview
Samford University, Wright Center

For more information go to www.samford.edu/chuck-colson.aspx

Free Event



A Chaplain's Report After the Tornado

(continued from page 2)

Sadly, dozens of people with whom I visited expressed no such faith. Devastation and despair reflected off their faces. They asked, "Why me?" "Will it get better?" "What am I supposed to do now?" My feeble presence seemed inadequate.

But I left each with the message that God never discards anyone. He knows their hurts and cares about each individual circumstance. The Psalmist said, "Let all who take refuge in You be glad, . . . and may You shelter them" (Psalm 5:11). The hope of God's shelter

can sustain the homeless, the bereaved, and the shell-shocked.

Join me in praying for the thousands across our nation undone by the ravages of the April storms. Search for ways to volunteer your help or offer aid. And never forget that your storm may be next. Have you found refuge in the Lord's shelter? He will uphold you when the winds blow.

(Wood is pastor of FBC Vincent and a member of the Christian Life Commission)

The Skies Poured Out...

by Hannah Brown

A Bible quote from the Book of Judges graced the front of a house in Cedar Crest to read, "*The Earth shook and the skies poured down.*" Next to that quote, the wall proclaimed, "*This too shall pass.*" - "*The Crimson White.*"

My city is gone. It's been almost a week.

A long week, a short week, since I've had to remind myself, what is my city, was my city.

A week ago from now, I knew it was going to be bad. Teachers' faces understood as they saw their students roll their eyes at news that the probability of bad weather was at a 5 out of 5. But still, there was something in the rolling eyes that wondered if this time was any different from all of the others. It was different.

A requiem plays from my living room television, names and ages scroll across the screen. The local news is playing. Those names on the requiem are the song of Tuscaloosa tonight. I'm alive, I lost nothing. So many people can't identify with either of those statements.

I drove with my mother to my school today to retrieve a chemistry book. A ten minute drive down McFarland, a turn onto 15th Street, then to Kicker Road. It was as simple as that, then I would be at my school. I would drive down McFarland, past the Krispy Kreme, turning left where CVS was to my lower left, a gas station was to my lower right, University Mall to my upper left and another gas station to my upper right, just in front of Midtown (home to "my" Starbucks and Barnes and Noble) and continuing past Target and Home Depot. Tomorrow, when I return to class, Highway 82 and 15th Street will be closed. Krispy

Kreme doesn't exist anymore. CVS has been decimated. Both gas stations are gone. Fifteenth Street is completely different. It will never return to how it was. Three of five ways to get to my school are inaccessible. Our route today was double the length and the logarithmic value of the emotional toll is near infinity. Really, it's just all gone, but pieces are still there. Piles of rubble line the roads that are garnished with power lines and leaves from felled trees. The houses of the neighborhood which surround my school don disaster crosses in international orange. The roads are unrecognizable. The hundreds of times I've turned onto 14th street, I didn't know where I was as my mother flipped her blinker.

It still hasn't set in yet. I'm not sure that I realize what has happened. It doesn't seem like this could all be gone in 15 minutes, but looks like years will be necessary to recover.

This is my city. Well, was my city. My city was uppity, stylish, fun-on-Friday-nights and football-on-Saturday, it was diverse—full of upper middle classers, and lower classers alike. But now, a new city is being born. We're all alike, now. Those with are living as those without, to help those without live like those with. A radio host said it well this afternoon, "Churches are being churches." Alberta lost it all, but still, the **church** remains on her rock.

It's all changing. The fields are white for the harvest, sprinkled white with protective tarps and disheveled sheet rock. I'm even more proud to call this evolving city of desolation my city. May this change be for the glory of God. May we all change with it.



tuscaloosa

(Brown is a student at American Christian Academy, and a member of Open Door Baptist Church in Tuscaloosa)



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