

God's Voter Guides?



by Glen Moyer

The election season is now in full swing and it is the perfect time for ...an epiphany.

"Glen," my friend Dave said excitedly, "I had an epiphany while I was exercising today. I finally realized why I stopped going to church."

Dave was never comfortable with the rising influence of the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition, but he didn't let that affect his church attendance. That is, until the day they passed out some "voter guides" at a morning worship service. He left church and never returned.

"I just realized that what really bothered me was that churches were teaching me *what* to think instead of teaching me *how* to think. I don't think churches should do that, especially when it comes to politics."

Voter "Guides"

Instantly, Dave's epiphany became mine. For years I struggled with the voter guides that were enthusiastically distributed to us pastors. I felt obligated to go along with my peers who inserted them into their church's bulletins, but I could never pull the trigger. They made me more nervous than driving on an icy

road, but until now I didn't really know why.

Voter guides tend to submit candidates to a simple *litmus test*

Which side is God on? Which voter guide does he endorse?... Does anyone really believe God is playing along with this? Is God only on "my" side and never "yours" or "theirs?"

against a few, narrowly selected issues. Congregants are then pressured to only vote for those who are in alignment with their particular voting guide. (Incidentally, churches aren't alone. Voter guides are produced by everyone from the NAACP and AARP to the NRA.)

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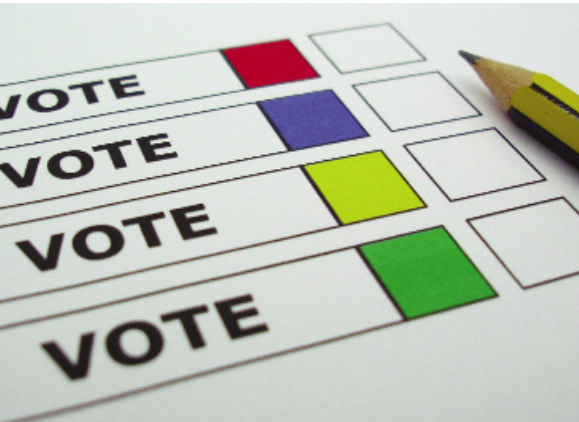


Those who produce the *Catholic Answers* voter guide rate candidates against their five "non-negotiable" issues. "No one," they say, "en-

dorsing the wrong side of these issues can be said to act in accord with the Church's moral norms." The Christian Coalition says, "We must see the political tide of this nation continue to turn away from liberalism and toward traditional family values in legislatures all across the land." Of course they see this happening only when Christians vote for candidates who support the few non-negotiable issues on their voter guide.

Which side is God on? Which voter guide does he endorse? Which candidate? Which issue? I guess it depends upon which church you attend as to how you answer these questions.

Dave is right—churches do tend to tell people *what* to think more than teaching them *how* to think. His epiphany also made me realize that church leaders, like me, can do this in all areas of life—politics is only one. Does anyone really believe God is playing along with this? Is God



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only on “my” side and never “yours” or “theirs?”

Voter guides have a place, but it is limited. For example, a candidate can ace your church’s voter guide in the areas of abortion and homosexuality and yet be a total failure on issues such as racism, global poverty and the environment. How can I, as a follower of Jesus, vote for him or her with a clear conscience?

Truth be told, most folks using voter guides don’t even know where the candidates stand on issues other than those reflected on their voter guide—so ingrained is the “tell them *what* to think” mentality in churches, instead of the idea “teach them *how* to think.”

God is not the author of this or that voter guide—he is the author of life, the God of all “...there is

Answers Action (www.caaction.com) and *Sojourners* (www.sojo.org).

In an excellent short essay called “Voting God’s Politics,” *Sojourners* says, “While we must be careful about translating scripture directly into positions on public policy, the following principles and policies provide a critical framework to shape our perspective on public policy and political leadership. We encourage you to use this guide to educate yourself, then find out the positions and priorities that candidates have taken on these issues.”

Sojourners cites Proverbs 31:9 as their starting place. “Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.” They then outline seven principles which will help you become a more informed and active voter.

“It is for freedom that Christ has set you free.” Free to study the issues and candidates for yourself. Free to think for yourself.

but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live” (1 Corinthians 8:6). He has more than just five non-negotiable priorities. He is neither Protestant or Catholic, Mormon or Muslim, Republican or Democrat.

Going Beyond Voter Guides

Thankfully, there are some groups who see the limitations of voter guides and are now providing additional materials which help teach Christians how to think politically. Two of the best are *Catholic*

1) Compassion and economic justice.

2) Peace and restraint of violence.

3) Consistent ethic of life.

4) Racial justice.

5) Human rights, dignity and gender justice.

6) Strengthen families and renew culture.

7) Good stewardship of God’s creation.

Of course, they go into detail on each of these.

You may or may not agree that

these are God’s priorities for our political leaders to be focused on, but you can agree that this is a great improvement over the typical *litmus test* voter guide. This is informative, not directive.

Imagine pastors giving a series of talks on these topics prior to an election instead of merely stuffing their church bulletins with voter guides. What if faith based organizations took time and space to write and educate folks on these issues?

If this were the 2004 elections I’d say we have a better chance of seeing an Independent occupying the White House than seeing churches and organizations teaching people how to think politically instead of telling them how to vote.

However, this is 2008 and there’s a breath of fresh air blowing across the fruited plain. A revolution is at hand. Christians, like Dave, are voting with their feet, saying, “I’m a Christ follower, not an institutional robot.”

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Galatians 5:1). Free to study the issues and candidates for yourself. Free to think for yourself. Free to vote your conscience, not your voter guide. □

Glen Moyer is a pastor and author—a gifted communicator of the gospel, a storyteller whose insights illuminate the depths of God’s mercy and grace. Clothman is the name under which Glen writes his often humorous columns. You can discover more adventures of Clothman at www.clothman.com.