

ARM Prison Outreach International

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**SERIES: "WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH --
WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" -- PART 6**

Editor's Note: This "MM" is the fourth email message of 2009 in a series that ARM is sending as an encouragement to preachers, chaplains, and Christian workers around the world. This issue is the 88th "MM" sent. All are archived -- just [click here](#) to see links to all messages sent since January of 2002.

This month's message is the sixth of a series of seven being sent on this theme. Larry Farthing, my older brother, deals with some crucial issues for the church and its reputation in each community. How are Christians perceived by the non-believers in our culture? How are congregations seen by non-members in their communities? It is my prayer that this message will encourage you and those you teach, lead, and encourage.

May God bless your labors! -- Rod Farthing, Development Director

The Mailbag

That is very timely, Rod! Older people need to be aware that the younger generation has had many influences, and that they think differently. -- LP

"WHAT THE NEW GENERATION THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH – WHY IT MATTERS AND WHAT WE SHOULD DO ABOUT IT" SERIES

#6: "You're Too Political"

INTRO: Brandon, 32 years of age, says about the church:

"Twenty years ago, when I was looking at evangelical Christianity from the inside, it seemed like a movement bursting with energy to spread the good news to people. Looking at it from the outside today, this message seems to have been lost in exchange for an aggressive political strategy that demonizes segments of society" (*Unchristian*, p. 153).

When outsiders from the two younger generations (Mosaics and Busters/16-29 years old) were asked in a survey to identify the Christians best-known to them, the top five most mentioned were:

- 1. The Pope (16%)**
- 2. George W. Bush (13%)**
- 3. Jesus (9%)**

4. **Billy Graham (7%)**
5. **Martin Luther King, Jr. (6%)**

Among young churchgoers, those most mentioned were:

1. **Billy Graham (29%)**
2. **The Pope (17%)**
3. **George W. Bush (17%)**
4. **Martin Luther King, Jr. (8%)**
5. **Jesus (7%)**
6. **Mother Teresa (7%)**
7. **Mel Gibson (7%)**
8. **James Dobson (5%)**

What surprises you about these answers? What should we make of the fact that the [past] president is thought of as a Christian leader more than many others who might have been listed?

Both non-churchgoers as well as practicing Christians recognize Christian leaders in politics more than they recognize them in any other arenas, except music. Christians have been very successful at getting faith into the political arena in recent years. This has led the younger generations of outsiders to accuse the church of being “too political.”

EXACTLY WHY DO THEY FEEL THIS WAY?

According to the survey conducted by David Kinnaman and his team:

“The number of young people in our culture who now embrace unflattering perspectives about Christians and politics is astounding. Three-quarters of young outsiders and half of young churchgoers describe present-day Christianity as ‘too involved in politics.’ Nearly two-thirds of Mosaic and Buster outsiders and nearly half of young born-again Christians said they perceive ‘the political efforts of conservative Christians’ to be a problem facing America” (ibid, p.155).

In addition, nearly half of the adults of America agree with them!

The reasons the younger generations feel the way they do, and the reasons so many other adults agree with them have more to do with their mindset than our actions. With this in mind, let me point out six shifts that are taking place in the thinking of younger adults and in our society in general:

1. **Political and social views are different than when you and I were young adults. Views on homosexuality, media decency standards, sexuality, and family have**

shifted and continue to shift.

2. More and more people are driven by pragmatism, or a “do what works” mentality, to the expense of principles.
3. The Bible is considered less of a standard than “the will of the people.”
4. There is shrinking support for a “Christian” America.
5. The worldview of more and more people is at odds with biblical Christianity.
6. Today’s younger generations are less likely to begin their political involvement with conservative views.

One young man commented: “A lot of times the church would take a conservative Republican stance, and anyone who did not fit into that mold was judged as not as good a Christian as everyone else” (Ibid, p. 166).

The recent survey revealed that young outsiders who are politically conservative do not feel as much tension with Christianity as do other outsiders.

ARE THEIR ACCUSATIONS LEGITIMATE?

Are we too political? Is it wrong to mix Christianity with politics? Are we violating the principle of the separation of church and state?

I say, “No.”

In all fairness, however, I must tell you that our critics aren’t telling us to stay out of politics; they’re just telling us that they don’t like our methods and attitudes. They think we’re trying to legislate Christian behavior. They think we’re using the political system to further our Christian agenda.

Kinnaman writes:

One young Christian, Doug, explained how his efforts to connect his neighbors to the message of Jesus had been undermined because of an unfortunate unChristian interaction. “My neighbor came to me the day after the election. He said, ‘Do you know what your Christian friends said to my ten-year-old daughter? They told her she should tell me not to support John Kerry because he supports abortion. Kerry is a baby killer.’ I don’t even want my daughter thinking about abortion, let alone having them talk to her about who to vote for. What kind of Christians is that?”

Doug described his frustration: “I had been carefully nurturing a relationship of trust with my neighbor, and much of it was undone because of careless and offensive words to his young daughter about an election.” (Ibid, p. 167)

Sometimes we Christians express our political views in an unChristian manner.

Sometimes we are more active and more vocal in a political sense than we are out of spiritual compassion for the lost. In other words, some churches and some church leaders are more political than evangelistic. There are many who feel that this is what

happened in the case of the “Moral Majority” that eventually gave way to the “Christian Coalition,” and came to be referred to as “The Religious Right.” Some believe that while they succeeded in gaining the world of politics, they lost the next generation in that their attitudes reflect their response to what they see as the *hypocritical* “Religious Right.”

WHAT SHOULD WE DO ABOUT IT?

How can we overcome the perception that we are too political? How should we participate in the political arena?

I just want to point out a few things:

First, historically speaking, churches have played a major role in shaping America.

Those who first settled here were, by and large, Christians seeking freedom from oppression and freedom to worship according to their understanding of God’s will.

The American Revolution arose out of Christian principles and ideals and was partially motivated and instigated by the churches and their leaders. It becomes quite clear as one studies American history that were it not for Christianity and the churches, the United States of America would not exist today.

Our Declaration of Independence, our Constitution, and our whole governmental system is irrefutably intertwined with Christian principles and biblical precepts. Both the inside and outside of our historic buildings in Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. pay homage to our Christian roots.

Secondly, many of today’s political issues are of a moral nature, and the church must clarify what is godly and righteous and what is not, what is according to God’s will and what is not.

Paul wrote to Timothy that the church is “*the pillar and foundation of the truth*” (1 Timothy 3:15).

The church cannot stand idly by while a political system systematically enacts laws that make immoral things legal!

People say, “But you can’t legislate morality!” No, you can’t change what a person believes with legislation. But you can control his behavior to some extent, and mankind has been doing this ever since we left the Garden of Eden!

That which is immoral should never be legalized!

Third, neither the church nor individual Christians should use politics as the means to achieve their God-given goals.

Our goal is to bring about a change in the hearts of men and women, not to control their behavior. For example, I would be overjoyed if Roe v. Wade were overturned and abortion was once again illegal, but that’s not my God-given goal. My God-given goal is to affect the hearts and lives of men and women in such a way that they will have such a relationship with God and live such morally upright lives that there will be no occasion for thoughts of abortion. My God-given goal is to compassionately provide for pregnant

girls and unwanted children. My God-given goal is to convince boys and girls and men and women not to have sex outside of marriage.

Fourth, neither Christianity nor the church should have a political party.

Everybody's heard of "yellow-dog-Democrats" – people who would vote for anybody, even a yellow dog, if he were running as a Democrat. There are Republicans who are just as dyed-in-the-wool. Should a Christian identify with a political party on a no-matter-what basis?

In the last several years it seems as if the church has become "the official religion of the Republican Party" or that the Republican Party has become "the official political party of evangelical Christianity." In his book, *Kingdoms in Conflict*, Chuck Colson makes a case for Christians never having a political party. He says, "It is a huge mistake to become married to an ideology, because the greatest enemy of the gospel is ideology. Ideology is a man-made format of how the world ought to work, and Christians instead believe in the revealed truth of Scripture."

I like what Tony Campolo said in his book, *Red Letter Christians*. When he is asked which political party he supports, he replies, "On what issue?"

I like that.

CONCLUSION:

In Romans 13 Paul writes about our relationship to "*the governing authorities.*" He writes of submitting to them, paying taxes to them, respecting them, and honoring them. I take this as an indication of my participation in the governing process. I believe that as a Christian, I have an obligation to be a good citizen. In fact, I believe that as a Christian, I should be one of the best citizens. I believe it is my responsibility to do my part to see that we are governed properly. Therefore, I will be as political as I believe God would want me to be.

Remain faithful unto death .." Rev. 2:10B

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