

# **Public policy should be measured against plumb line of social justice, lecturer insists\_101804**

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WACO-Biblical justice demands either a change of heart or change of resident in the White House, renowned preacher James Forbes told a symposium at Baylor University's Truett Seminary.

Reading from the Old Testament book of Amos, Forbes said he was struck by the image of God measuring policies and practices by a plumb line to determine if the nation was in line with principles of righteousness and justice.

Forbes, pastor of the historic Riverside Church in New York City, called people of faith to measure modern-day politicians by that standard and vote accordingly on Nov. 2.

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James  
Forbes

“We face a time of choices and a recognition that our nation has strayed from some of its founding spiritual, moral and democratic principles,” he said. “People of faith care deeply about the soul of our country. They feel inspired to roll up as the prophet Amos did a series of principles by which to test their leaders' policies.”

Forbes, delivering the Parchman Endowed Lectures at Truett Seminary, presented a 10-point social justice test by which he said politicians, political parties and public policy should be judged.

“If these principles apply, there must be a change either in administration or a change within administration,” he said.

Public policy should be measured against the following plumb line, Forbes asserted:

- ◆ Does it seek the common good rather than the interests of a few?
- ◆ Is it truthful in facts and motives?
- ◆ Does it promote unity and inclusion? Does it help reduce polarization and fragmentation in society?
- ◆ Does it offer good news for the poor? Does it reverse the trend toward an ever-widening gap between rich and poor?
- ◆ Does it protect the vulnerable? Is it good for children, the elderly and the disadvantaged? Does it show sensitivity to the spirit of the Golden Rule?
- ◆ Does it provide for free press, free discussion and the expression of

dissent along with fair and just methods of participating in the democratic process?

- ◆ Does it encourage respect for people and nations other than our own? Does it respect the fundamental dignity and rights of every human being? Does it use diplomacy as a valued instrument of statecraft in resolving international conflicts and refrain from unilateral military action or empire-building and domination strategies?

- ◆ Does it ensure ecological responsibility and sustainability?

- ◆ Does it reflect good global citizenship, involving respect for all cultures and nations and collective responsibility for the common good of the global community? Does it refrain from nationalism, militarism and imperialism based on a sense of national superiority?

- ◆ Does it lead by example? Does it promote a more ethical society and uphold trust in public offices?

Concerning these principles, Forbes later told a reporter: “I would like to see the Republicans embrace them. I would like to see the Democrats live up to them.”

Christians have a responsibility to seek God's guidance and cast informed votes, Forbes told his seminary audience.

“If you vote and you do not have a serious consultation with your God, then you have voted falsely,” he said. “It is a spiritual responsibility to vote as close as you can ... inclined towards the will of God. ... If you want to vote right, you must pray for your vote; you must listen to different opinions before you vote; you must read before you vote; you have to think; then you have to consult with Jesus; and then you've got to make up your mind.”

Forbes chided politicians of all stripes for “retreating from the public

good,” citing economic figures that contend the current gap between “the haves” and “the have-nots” is the widest in 50 years.

The country “didn't get that way overnight, nor is it likely to be reversed overnight,” he asserted. And a course correction will demand spiritual-not just political-reformation, Forbes insisted.

“America will not come back because of this election,” he said. “America will only come back with a great awakening. Then we will begin to see a social amelioration.”

*Based on reporting by Terri Jo Ryan of the Waco Tribune-Herald and Lori Fogleman of Baylor University.*

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