

Evangelicals debate how faith influences politics

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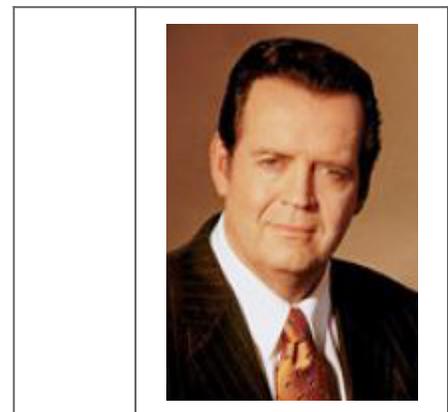
Evangelicals debate how faith influences politics

By Hannah Elliott

Associated Baptist Press

WASHINGTON (ABP)—Jim Wallis and Richard Land agree faith should influence public policy. They just can't agree on how.

The two evangelical leaders— one progressive, one conservative—locked horns in a debate at the recent Values Voters Summit in Washington. The event, organized by the [Family Research Council](#), attracted conservative Christian voters looking for encouragement, advice and leadership going into the 2008 presidential elections.



Jim Wallis	Richard Land
Watch excerpts from their discussion here.	

Wallis and Land exemplified two sides of the evangelical spectrum. Wallis, a best-selling author and head of *Sojourners* magazine and Call to Renewal, is known for his activism on environmental, poverty and human-rights issues. Land, president of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission, is a well-known denominational leader and spokesman for social conservatives.

Wallis stressed his belief that common ground on critical issues among conservative and progressive Christians is possible. They just have to make sure their faith trumps their political ideology, he said.

"I am an evangelical Christian who tries to live under biblical authority," he said. "A fundamental (biblical truth) is the dignity of human life. We are all created in the image of God."

With that in mind, Wallis urged all evangelicals to work together to "dramatically reduce the number of abortions in America"—something at which politics has failed, he said.

"We simply must find common ground to actually save unborn lives," Wallis said, adding that alternatives to abortion, like adoption, could become common ground for the two groups.

But the language of reduction wasn't strong enough for Land.

"We are profoundly offended, and we are horrified that we allow 1.2 million citizens per year to be killed before they've had a chance to be born," he said.

When asked about domestic and foreign policies of the United States, Wallis stressed the need to address poverty, especially the “deep connection between poverty and race.” The Bible has more than 2,000 verses that show God’s concern for the poor, but neither political party has adequately prioritized fighting poverty, he said.

“We need a new grand alliance where liberals take seriously the healing of families ... and where conservatives agree to strategic public investments that actually produce results” for the poor, Wallis said.

Land agreed Christians should be concerned for poor people, but he stressed a different way to combat poverty.

“The best way, the one thing that would eliminate more poverty in the United States than anything else, is to reduce illegitimacy,” he said. “If mothers would marry the fathers of their children, that would eliminate more poverty” than any other single effort.

It all goes back to “the transcendent moral issue of our time,” which is the sanctity of human life, Land said. “I want to help poor children, but I can’t help them if they’re not born.”

Land also spoke about God’s “special claim” on the United States. America is not God’s chosen nation, he said, but the nation is “extraordinarily blessed.” God’s blessing means Americans have obligations to other countries, he added.

“The only reason under God’s sun that people have freedom and dignity anywhere in the world today is because of the armed might of the people in the United States military and (their) courage,” Land said, to loud applause.

In his response, Wallis said national security depends not only on military might but also on the well-being of others. Prosperity in the United States

is tied to the health of the rest of the world, he said. The war in Iraq has undermined America's image around the world and hurt the cause of Christ, he continued.

"We all admit the suffering and violence of Iraq," Wallis said. "I believe it's time to find a responsible way to end the war in Iraq that protects as many lives as possible.

"Christians should be among the hardest, not the easiest, to convince (to go to war) and we should require the highest burden of proof before military force is approved," he added.

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