


Opinion: Toward a more mature Christian vote

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(ABP) — The United States is in trouble. Even our presidential candidates, trained to project confidence and strength, now admit that we face profound challenges.

Everyone agrees that we are in the worst financial crisis since the Depression. Our problems are dragging other nations down with us this in this globalized economy. There is no more pretending. We are really hurting.

Those defined as evangelical Christians make up about one-fourth of the electorate. For many of the most devout evangelicals, this election — like every election — is about abortion.

David  For some, it is about their comfort and sense of identification
Gushee with the conservative evangelical faith of Sarah Palin.

That's not good enough. We need a more mature Christian vote.

For almost 40 years, evangelical leaders have been organizing their troops to vote on the basis of faith-and-values considerations.

Conservative evangelical leaders wanted political candidates who sent signals of their Christian devotion and who promised to advance the cause of family values, understood primarily as opposition to abortion and homosexuality.

Politically liberal evangelical leaders wanted political candidates who sent signals of their Christian devotion and promised to advance the cause of

peace, social justice and environmental activism.

Right now, what all Americans should want is a president (and a Congress) that can save America from collapse. As both presidential candidates conceded in Tuesday night's debate, our current crisis imperils not only the economic well-being of every American but also our standing in the world as a great power.

Voting primarily based on religious comfort levels or stalemated culture-wars issues is a luxury that we simply cannot afford right now. In retrospect, it was a luxury we never could afford. We've been rocking along while our nation's economic foundations were slowly rotting, and our national leadership was proving singularly inattentive.

Both candidates during the Oct. 7 presidential debate articulated a mainstream American perspective. Their goals are to fix the economy and to continue to project American power around the world in a way that advances our national interests and ideals. They realize that the latter depends on the former.

They appear focused mainly on these two problems and are not spending much time on religious or cultural issues. Most people will probably vote based on which candidate they think has the better approach and the better skill set for addressing these economic and foreign policy challenges.

This seems sensible right now. If the sun is about to set on the American superpower, let it not be because we were too busy debating gay marriage or the relative merits of Barack Obama's and Sarah Palin's pastors.

I hope that most Christians have not forgotten that God has purposes that transcend those of any nation, that great powers have forever risen and fallen in human history, and that the fate of Christ's church is not dependent on that of any nation.

It may be that America is in for a painful season of suffering and retreat. We may have to turn inward to recover our economic footing. We simply may not be able to afford such a massive military. We may have to leave the Iraqis, the Afghans, the Iranians, and everyone else to their fate as we try to avoid national bankruptcy. We may end up with our power eclipsed by China, or with multiple equals in a multi-polar world. This may happen despite the best efforts of whomever gets elected as our next president.

Wouldn't it be a fitting irony if we are forced to become the more humble nation that George W. Bush said so long ago we should be? A nation more like other nations, unable to rely on its massive military to throw its weight around, forced to depend on international structures of cooperation and mutual security, forced to talk to its adversaries rather than threaten them, with most of its attention fixed on trying to meet the basic needs of its own citizens?

I will be voting this November primarily based on the main issues facing our staggering nation. I will leave the cultural issues to our families, churches, and civil society. And I will find peace in the thought that God's redemptive mission on the planet does not depend on the preservation of American wealth and power.

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