

Faith in the
VOTING BOOTH

LEITH ANDERSON AND GALEN CAREY

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Faith in the Voting Booth

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JOHN 3:16 AND FOREIGN POLICY

Thirty-two-year-old medical doctor Kent Brantly, along with his wife, Amber, and their two young children, left their Texas home in October 2013 and moved to Liberia, in war-torn West Africa. Brantly felt called by God to give two years of his life providing desperately needed medical care at the Eternal Love Winning Africa (ELWA) hospital in Monrovia, the capital city.

A few months later, as the deadly Ebola virus began spreading through Liberia and neighboring countries, Amber and the kids were evacuated back to Texas, but Kent stayed behind to continue serving in what had quickly become an international humanitarian crisis. The Centers for Disease Control warned that unless extraordinary measures were taken at great expense, as many as 1.4 million people could be infected within four months.¹ There was no vaccination and no known cure for the disease.

Despite rigorous precautions, Dr. Brantly became infected with the virus—the first American known to contract Ebola in the 2014 outbreak. Through a series of extraordinary interventions, Brantly received an experimental drug and was evacuated to the Emory University infectious disease center in Atlanta, Georgia. Thousands prayed. Brantly was treated and eventually recovered.

Thanks to the marvels of modern communications, Brantly's evacuation was widely reported, and millions of Americans became

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aware of his ordeal. *Time* magazine honored him as one of the five Ebola fighters named as Person of the Year.²

While most evangelical missionaries don't make the cover of *Time*, Brantly's story is far from unique. He follows more than a century of medical missionaries and humanitarians who have served in Africa, pioneering much of the modern medical work on the continent.³

Christian engagement in forgotten corners of the world has won the respect of noted *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof, who wrote that "a disproportionate share of the aid workers I've met in the wildest places over the years, long after anyone sensible had evacuated, have been evangelicals, nuns and priests."⁴

Much of this evangelical humanitarian work is privately funded, but aid from Western countries has also played a significant role in advancing health services, often in partnership with religious missions and nonprofits. In responding to the Ebola crisis, for example, the U.S. Agency for International Development funded the work of many private agencies, including Samaritan's Purse, the evangelical agency that sponsored Dr. Brantly. This public-private partnership accomplished more than either government aid or private charity could achieve on their own.

It's easy to see why evangelicals support medical missionaries like Dr. Brantly. We care about people who are suffering, both physically and spiritually, and we reach out to them just as Jesus has taught us to do. Evangelicals have become aware and concerned about international issues in part because we know so many people who are living and working in other countries as missionaries or humanitarians. More than 1.5 million evangelicals actually travel overseas each year on short-term mission projects.⁵

We also know immigrants and refugees from other countries, because we have welcomed them into our churches and

communities. For example, as many as 100,000 Liberians now live in the United States, and many of them belong to evangelical churches.⁶ But why does our government get involved? What national interests are at stake? Liberia and the United States are separated by thousands of miles of the Atlantic Ocean. No direct flights connect our two countries, and we have no vital economic ties or military bases in Liberia.

Yet, an invisible virus illustrates how connected we are. The relative handful of Ebola cases seen in the United States in 2014, which caused disproportionate anxiety and even panic in some communities, were traced to West Africa. Viruses don't require visas and don't stop at international borders. Had Ebola spread as dramatically as was predicted, the risk of an Ebola outbreak in the United States would have sharply increased. We faced the choice of fighting Ebola in Africa, or waiting for it to reach our shores.

These connections can be multiplied as we zoom out from the specific case of Ebola and consider other threats to public health, as well as the potential for environmental disasters, terrorism, cyber warfare, forced migration, and the unthinkable risks of nuclear war. Any of these threats could profoundly impact our lives and our nation. As much as we may want to hunker down and focus on domestic concerns, this is an option our interconnected, globalized world doesn't afford us.

As Christians, we are drawn to engage with our global neighbors, motivated by God's love and the call to be witnesses to the gospel "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). We do this as part of our calling, whether supported or opposed by our government's foreign policy. But our international connections give us insights and concerns that warrant our engagement. As citizens, we want our country to play a constructive role in the world and to keep us safe. By voting for candidates who will implement wise foreign policy,

including support for poverty-focused international assistance, we help secure a more peaceful, prosperous world, which helps us as well as our neighbors in Liberia and throughout the world.

FROM A CITY ON A HILL TO A GLOBAL VILLAGE

American foreign policy is closely linked with American identity. Shortly before landing in New England in 1630 with a small group of English Puritans, Captain John Winthrop told his passengers that the world would be watching them. He challenged them to be a model of Christian charity, following the prophet Micah's charge "to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8). They would be, he said, a city upon a hill, with the eyes of the world upon them.⁷

Winthrop's speech contains two ideas that have echoed throughout American history. On the one hand, he envisioned a community inwardly focused on establishing themselves in the New World. They had left England behind; they would not be returning. On the other hand, they were establishing a new political community that would be closely watched. They had, in some sense, a special mission to share with the world. Winthrop quoted from Moses' farewell address in Deuteronomy 30. Like the ancient Israelites, they were about to enter a new Promised Land, and by implication, they would be a blessing to the nations.

The vision of America's special place in the world can be seen in the Monroe Doctrine, which in 1823 declared the Western Hemisphere off limits to European powers.⁸ It also led to the ideology of Manifest Destiny—which became a rationale for the westward expansion, a checkered history that includes conquest of Native American tribes and annexation of large parts of Mexico.⁹ More recently, President John F. Kennedy and President Ronald

Reagan, among others, have used the “city on a hill” theme to articulate their vision of America’s inspirational and leadership roles in the world.

Should our government even care about and try to influence what happens beyond our borders? Several reasons are offered for saying no. Some say that it is none of our business, that our overseas interventions unjustly impose our will and frequently make things worse. Others point to unresolved problems in our own country, and advocate letting other countries fend for themselves.

Supporters of a strong national defense advocate a muscular foreign policy that projects American power and influence throughout the world. In this view the world is a dangerous place, with foreign powers—and now terrorists—seeking to conquer or harm us. Only by maintaining a strong military and responding forcefully and even proactively to any threats can we assure our own safety and prosperity. The judgment of history, the advocates point out, has not been kind to appeasers, who buy peace today at the cost of greater threats tomorrow.

Interventionists also support active engagement, but with a broader agenda. Americans have built a unique nation blessed with freedom and prosperity. We should use our strength to promote our democratic and humanitarian values on behalf of oppressed and struggling people around the world. President George W. Bush’s HIV/AIDS initiative is a good example of this. By making the world a better place, we benefit from greater security and economic growth. But more important, we will be standing up for our values and doing what is right.

Foreign policy realists believe the focus on values is often naïve. Rather than confronting dictators and demanding change, we should make deals even with our adversaries when doing so would advance our interests. Our interests include maintaining access to the commodities our economy needs, assuring markets for our

exports, and containing or overthrowing any hostile powers that might threaten our security. We need not be squeamish about the company we keep. In fact, over time as the economies of oppressed countries improve, the people in these lands are likely to demand greater freedom and human rights.

Which perspective best describes your views on foreign policy? On what basis do you prefer this approach to the others?

UNITED? NATIONS

Following the upheavals of two world wars, world leaders met in San Francisco to approve the United Nations Charter, establishing a new international organization dedicated to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations, and facilitating cooperation in solving international problems.¹⁰ The United Nations has not been popular among evangelicals. A strong bias against Israel, perceived threats to our national sovereignty, and an expensive, bureaucratic operating structure are some areas of concern. Evangelical publishing houses have produced books and films with fictional portrayals of the U.N. Secretary-General as the Antichrist. But for all its faults, the United Nations has enabled its nearly 200 member countries to work together in ways that would otherwise be difficult to achieve.¹¹

The U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, much like the Bill of Rights in the U.S. Constitution, establishes the equal dignity and worth of every person. Article 18 is particularly important, providing a strong statement on freedom of religion, including the right to change one's religion. This right, while far from being universally honored, provides the basis for appeals for change in countries that practice religious persecution.¹²

International treaties are important tools for establishing

agreements between nations on areas of common concern, such as the treatment of prisoners of war, the regulation of air and sea transport, nuclear nonproliferation, and the preservation of regions such as Antarctica. Critics often worry that ratifying treaties is a surrender of national sovereignty. There is concern that other countries will restrict our freedoms. While such concern is sometimes legitimate, treaties can also advance our national interests by securing the cooperation of other countries on issues of importance to us. As a nation committed to the rule of law, the United States benefits from clear rules of international conduct to which all countries can be held accountable.

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES

God is not an American. He is not necessarily on our nation's "side" in our dealings with other countries. In fact, if God did have a favorite nation, it was biblical Israel, which the prophet Zechariah referred to as "the apple of his eye" (Zech. 2:8).¹³ We need political leaders who, like Abraham Lincoln, will say that "my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."¹⁴

Psalm 24:1 tells us that "The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it." God made everything and continues to oversee his creation. John 3:16 adds that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Paul tells us in Philippians 2:11 that "every tongue" will confess Jesus Christ as Lord.

As Christians in America or China or Zimbabwe or any other country think about foreign policy, we do so first of all as members of God's multinational family.¹⁵ Only within that context do we turn to the interests of our particular nation.

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In Psalm 33 we find a powerful reflection on the nature and character of God and his dealings with the nations. While not specifically a psalm about foreign policy, it highlights important truths that should guide every nation. The United States, like all nations, will be judged by God's standards of justice and righteousness. Consider these qualities in Psalm 33 that should characterize every nation and its relations with other nations:

- **Integrity:** “For the word of the LORD is right and true; he is faithful in all he does” (v. 4). Does our nation honor its treaty obligations, keep its commitments, and deal honestly with other countries? Corruption is a big problem in governments and societies around the world, including in our own.¹⁶ Various estimates put the annual cost of corruption as high as \$500 billion to \$1 trillion in lost productivity and wasted opportunities.¹⁷
- **Morality:** “The LORD loves righteousness and justice” (v. 5). These two closely related terms are characteristics of God, and they communicate what he requires of all people and nations, even those that do not profess to honor him. Paul tells us in Romans 1:18–20 that God has made his expectations clear in the very order of creation, so that all people (including us) are without excuse. Throughout the Bible we see examples of God judging the nations, such as Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and the Canaanite tribes, as well as Israel itself.

What God requires are not special religious rules, but basic moral concepts that are written on our heart and embedded in our conscience (Rom. 2:15). We need not be apologetic about insisting that our foreign policy, as with all of our government policies, upholds the basic standards of morality and truth that we know will promote human

flourishing. The values that make a nation pleasing to God are those that our nation should promote internationally.

- **Religious freedom:** “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD” (v. 12). In a secular democracy, calling fellow citizens to turn to God is not the government’s job. We don’t want a government that commands worship of God at home or abroad. But our foreign policy should promote the freedom of people in all countries to respond to God according to their conscience and belief. Both the State Department and the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom publish annual reviews of religious freedom conditions around the world.¹⁸
- **Security:** “No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save” (vv. 16–17). The warning against trusting in horses, a key source of military strength in ancient times, is repeated in Psalm 20:7: “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.”

In a time when Israel’s own stable of warhorses seemed insufficient, Isaiah warned against trusting in alliances with other military powers: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, who rely on horses, who trust in the multitude of their chariots and in the great strength of their horsemen, but do not look to the Holy One of Israel, or seek help from the LORD” (31:1). The Egyptians, said Isaiah, are no match for God. When God acts against the Egyptians, “those who help will stumble, those who are helped will fall; all will perish together” (v. 3).

Supporting a strong national defense is not at all inconsistent with trust in God. However, if we rely on our military strength and use that power to get our way in

world affairs, we are venturing into risky territory. Military power or superior weapons alone do not guarantee success. Witness the backlash to the use of drones in the struggle against terrorism, or the uselessness of nuclear weapons in any battle that we ourselves hope to survive.¹⁹

- **Peace:** Christians are instructed by Paul in 1 Timothy 2:1–2 to pray for our leaders so that “we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” Most Christians have embraced the principles of “just war theory,” which acknowledges the legitimacy of going to war in certain limited contexts.²⁰ Others believe that nations should never go to war, or at least that Christians should never participate in military conflict, a position known as pacifism. Still others embrace a theory of “just peacemaking” that some describe as a middle way. Whichever ethical framework we embrace, the goal of our foreign policy should be to establish and maintain peaceful relations and to resolve differences through negotiations wherever possible.²¹

As the world’s most powerful nation, the United States plays a critical role in resolving disputes between other nations. We have extraordinary convening power, with diplomatic, economic, and military resources that can help pressure warring parties to negotiate. Resolving international conflicts helps us as well as other countries. Wars cause civilian and military deaths, produce refugees, disrupt trade, and destabilize alliances. These effects don’t stop at international borders.

To take an extreme example, consider the possibility of a nuclear war between India and Pakistan, two nations that have had uneasy relations for years. By some estimates, even a small-scale nuclear exchange between these two countries located thousands of miles away from the United States

could lead to a global famine that would threaten the lives of two billion people—more than a quarter of the world’s population.²² Our own country would be deeply impacted by such an unimaginable tragedy.

In an age of terrorism we need to be concerned not only about countries, but also about other groups that pose a threat to peace. Our foreign policy needs to address the roots of terrorism without inadvertently creating new terrorists who are angry at our anti-terrorism interventions.

- **Meeting human needs.** “But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine” (Ps. 33:18–19). God used the Egyptian government under Joseph’s leadership to avert widespread famine, and God continues to work through governments today to accomplish his purposes.

Over the past three millennia much has been learned about weather patterns, agricultural methods, and food security strategies. A Famine Early Warning System enables world leaders to predict with increasing accuracy where food shortages are likely to occur.²³ To our shame, we often ignore these warnings, leading to needless loss of life. Even sudden onset disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, are known to occur most frequently in certain regions of the world. Wise building codes and other regulations can prevent much loss, and relief supplies can be prepositioned in the areas likeliest to experience disasters.

In a world economy marked by vast disparities in wealth and income, wealthy countries have both an interest and an obligation to help poorer countries grow their economies, develop their people, and address humanitarian crises. Wise trade agreements can help. Early on, in Genesis 4, we see

labor diversification with animal husbandry, agriculture, music, and toolmaking all mentioned. Trade allows people to do what they do best, develop their God-given potential, and exchange the fruits of their labor with others.

Critics of trade agreements often cite projected job losses as imports substitute for domestic goods and services. Of course, a job lost in one country may represent one or more jobs gained in another country. And if the trade agreement leads to increased exports, there will also be new jobs created at home. The best evidence suggests that trade has relatively little net impact on the number of jobs, but has a positive impact on average wages.

Beyond the economic issues, critics point out that if trading partners do not have comparable health, labor, or environmental standards, the net effect of trade may be to move production to the location with the lowest standards. For this reason, trade agreements often include provisions addressing those issues, so that trade is not only free, but fair.

AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST

One of the first actions every Christian voter can take regarding foreign policy issues is to become better informed about the world beyond our borders. In addition to reading widely, take advantage of opportunities to get to know people from other countries and other religions, whether in your own community or by traveling. World Relief, the humanitarian arm of the NAE, connects volunteers with specific refugee families.²⁴ Could you host such a family and in the process become a better-informed voter on foreign policy issues? You could also support a missionary family and learn

more about the country where they serve. Some of us can learn another language, which provides a unique window on the world.

This is also the time to remember that we too have a diplomatic mission: as Christians, we are ambassadors for God (2 Cor. 5:20). Ambassadors represent the one who sent them. When they face opposition, they utilize a whole range of diplomatic skills to establish rapport with those they seek to influence. We can do the same as we represent our Lord.

On some occasions private American citizens may be able to contribute to better relationships with other countries through the connections we establish with their citizens. This is known as Track Two diplomacy.²⁵ (Track One is what our official ambassadors do.) In 2014, at the invitation of the State Department, I (Leith) joined a Catholic cardinal and a Muslim imam to travel to the Central African Republic during a time of civil war. We met with local evangelical, Catholic, and Muslim leaders to encourage them to work together to stop the fighting.

As you consider voting for presidential and congressional candidates, ask to what extent each candidate would uphold the values of integrity, morality, freedom, security, peace, and meeting human needs. Do they exhibit these qualities in their own lives? Do they have relevant international experience? What have they learned from that? Do they speak respectfully of other countries, or do they resort to narrow nationalism? Have they bothered to learn another language? And do they support religious freedom globally so that your Christian brothers and sisters can worship freely?

As you follow world events on the news and through your international relationships, pray regularly for your leaders and for those affected by wars, disasters, and oppression. Let your elected representatives know of your foreign policy concerns. And in your own world, share God's love and be ambassadors for Christ with all those God sends your way.