

Response to the Presidential Election by Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

I had spent the weekend before the election with Jim Wallis of Sojourners in Washington DC, and already then he had given me what has turned out to be the correct analysis of the Bush win. It is amazing that few of the polls or pundits ahead of time did not see this issue as so central--so called "moral values". It is, at its core, a culture war that we are involved in, and has little to do with reason, logic, truth, or any actual Christian morality.

What the Republicans and conservatives have been able to do over the past 20 years is put on themselves the mantle of principle, morality, and so called family values. The Democrats, however, are so subject to the pressures of liberal ideology, especially secular feminism, that they cannot give any nuanced or principled position on issues like abortion, gay rights, or bio ethics. They always end up looking like they are saying "anything goes". This is very scary to middle America, because our culture is so deconstructed and secular, and seemingly falling apart. We want to know someone is going to hold a value orientation, and that there are some absolutes out there.

We want absolutes and a reference point so bad, we actually manufacture some, whether they are, in fact, absolutes at all. The Bible has made it very clear that the only absolute is God himself, and not any moral stance, nation, country, church, or explanation. Neither abortion nor homosexuality were ever a litmus test for Christian belief for the first 2000 years of the church! Only the Creed. Jesus never once talked about either of them. If any moral position, was held absolute for the first 300 years, it was this: Christians would be non violent, and would take care of the poor. Jesus talked plenty about both of these (That is historical and Biblical record).

It does not seem to matter that power, greed, deceit, capital punishment, oppression of the poor, imperialism, arrogance, and war mongering are also immoral, and clearly non-Gospel and non-family values. These are vices that the American conservative does not worry about at all, in fact, Western capitalism is built on them--so they cannot be recognized as important or moral issues. (For the most part, liberalism does not critique them either, however. Notice that Kerry could not really disagree with the war, or our basic consumerism, materialism, capital punishment, or American imperialism.)

At any rate, it leaves Democrats in election after election, looking like the fuzzy "allowers" instead of the principled believers. That is the way the "red states" think, and represents the culture war that the liberals do not understand. Jim Wallis would strongly recommend Thomas Frank's book **What's the Matter with Kansas?** as the best analysis of what has happened in America. As I quoted in the last Radical Grace, "the Right is Wrong, but the Left just doesn't get it!"

In a word, the Republicans have overwhelmingly succeeded at GETTING PEOPLE TO VOTE AGAINST THEIR OWN ACTUAL SELF INTEREST by an appeal to what looks like moral high ground. Fits everything I know about ego structuring and the inner search for righteousness. This has actually outweighed people's concerns for terrorism, the economy, truth, life itself, etc. Many Hispanics, blacks, and poor people actually voted for Bush, even though he structurally cares nothing about them. But he makes them feel like they are standing for something moral! That is all the insecure ego needs.

In the upcoming years we must find ways to address this "body oriented" morality, which has always held churchy people captive, but now seems to be widespread. The body holds human shame and inferiority, and people can be most controlled at that level--just as the elders tried to do with the woman caught in Adultery, and America tried to do in the Clinton/Lewinsky debacle. No matter that Bill Clinton's lies did not kill 100,000 Iraqi people! We want body morality, not really a demanding Biblical morality. No concern about social values, or justice values, or basic truthfulness, just puritanical concern for keeping human bodies so called "pure," by preoccupation with issues like abortion, those terrible gays, and stem cell research. All of which can be addressed by a more nuanced morality. But America does not like nuance or compassion. We like sound bite morality and quick put downs (on both sides, by the way).

Few of us, Democrats or Republicans, Evangelicals or Catholic, are consistently pro-life at all. But we are all "pro moral superiority", which allows us to feel moral, while actually risking nothing or going nowhere genuinely new. (Note that neither Reagan nor Bush have actually risked any political capital to oppose abortion, they just SAY they are against it. It is merely verbal one upmanship, and Americans are foolish enough to buy it). These body issues, these pretensions at being pro-life, demand very little change of 90% of the population, but allow us to remain preoccupied with trying to change others. How convenient for the ego. How disturbing for the future of religion and state.