

# FORUM

## Who Would Jesus Vote For?



**John Whitehead**  
Guest Columnist

I've never been a fan of politics. By its very nature, politics is inclined toward corruption, deception and the accumulation of power. So I am always leery of religious individuals, Christians in particular, who turn presidential elections into a test of one's religiosity.

Until recently, it has generally been assumed that God-fearing Christians vote Republican (Christians counted for more than 20 percent of voters in 2004). Yet to the consternation of those on the Right, that assumption is now being challenged by the emergence of a so-called Christian Left, led by activists such as Jim Wallis, editor of the progressive evangelical journal Sojourners, and by Barack Obama's increasing popularity among younger Christian voters.

As Newsweek recently reported, young evangelicals "say they don't want to be Republican just because that's what's expected. Only 40 percent of evangelicals 18 to 29 identify as Republican, down from 55 percent in 2001, according to the Pew Research Center. This slide correlates to the recent broadening of the evangelical agenda to encompass social-justice and global-poverty issues, as well as to Bush's low popularity ratings."

Thus, determined to maintain their tenuous ties to power, a number of Christian Right leaders have done what they insisted they would never do: they have thrown in their lot with John McCain. Just recently, 90 of the movement's leading



activists met in Denver to confer their support on the Republican presidential candidate and urge him to choose former preacher and conservative Mike Huckabee as his running mate. The tenor of the meeting may be best expressed by Phil Burrell, president of an Ohio organization affiliated with Focus on the Family: "The only evangelicals that will support Obama are the ones who haven't read their Bible."

Now both sides are heatedly vying for the Christian vote, with news reports of McCain cooing up to Christian leaders and Obama trotting out the Jesus-talk at every opportunity. Yet in their eagerness to sell voters on their Christianity, the politicians have forgotten one critical fact: you cannot truly practice what Jesus taught and be successful in politics.

After all, it was the politicians of his day who killed Jesus.

Jesus was a politician's nightmare. He never ran for political office, but he had quite a platform, and these were his campaign slogans: Love your foes. Help those who hate you. Praise those who curse you. Pray for those who abuse you. If someone punches your cheek, offer the other cheek. If some-



one steals your coat, offer him your shirt as well. If someone asks you for something, give it to him. Treat others exactly as you would wish to be treated. Love your enemies and treat them well. If you lend money, do it without any expectation of profit. Show favor to ingrates and scoundrels. Do not sit in judgment of your fellow human being. Always forgive.

What politician today could be elected on such a platform? Not even Jesus.

Indeed, the Jesus of the New Testament was about as far from being a politician as one could get. He refused to play power politics. Instead, he challenged the political and religious belief systems of his day. He refused to compromise on his principles, and he preached a message of unity and love, as opposed to the divisiveness that politics relies on.

Jesus was anti-political. He stood against such things as empires, controlling people, state violence and power politics. He saw politics and human governments as inevitably corrupt and set the standard for confronting governmental powers. He taught a new way to govern—one that was spiritually healthy, creative, concerned

about the oppressed and the poor and promoted a sense of community. His teachings undermined the establishment and the political status quo, not only of his own time but ours as well.

Jesus advocated love, peace, nonviolence and helping the poor. And he spoke truth to power, uncaring of who he offended, even when all the odds were against it. He constantly inveighed against the rich, the powerful and the exploiters. And his egalitarian treatment of women was so shocking in the patriarchal society of his time that his own male followers could not understand it.

In short, Jesus was a radical. As author Garry Wills writes in *What Jesus Meant*, anyone claiming to practice a "Christian politics" other than the kind practiced by Jesus is a usurper. You can't speak truth to power, as Jesus did, and be the power, because as Jesus showed us, how you change the world is not through government or politics but by raising up communities, bringing people to peace, eschewing power, speaking out against injustice, helping those in need, and loving those around you, even your enemies.

This isn't to say that religious people should abstain from voting or vote a particular ticket. But if you're a Christian, you should be doing more than voting for a candidate who promises to be a political savior. As history makes clear, there is no such thing.

*Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute, a civil liberties organization that provides free legal services to people who feel that their constitutional or human rights have been violated. Reach him at [www.rutherford.org](http://www.rutherford.org).*



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## Social action for health care



**Marian Wright Edelman**  
Guest Columnist

There are 9.4 million uninsured children in America today — one child in eight — and millions more are underinsured, but not enough adults are stepping up to change this disgraceful reality. So to raise awareness about the problem, on July 11, thousands of children participating in the Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools® program across the country took part in a National Day of Social Action. In colorful t-shirts, children marched holding signs calling for "Health Coverage for Every Child" and "Children Can't Wait."

Others sent letters and made phone calls to Members of Congress demanding that every child in America have comprehensive health and mental health coverage now. They also sought endorsements from their Congressional delegations of the All Healthy Children Act (S. 1564/H.R. 1688) to expand health coverage to all children and pregnant women.

This summer, CDF

Freedom Schools programs are serving nearly 9,000 children at 132 sites in 61 cities and 24 states. Hundreds of children from the 10 CDF Freedom Schools program sites in the Washington, D.C., area marched from Union Station to the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol. This was not an expensive K Street lobbying effort—you didn't see many blue suits in the crowd. But the cause for which these children were marching must be a top national priority.

The reason millions of children are without health coverage is not for lack of parental love. Many working families simply find paying for private health insurance for their children financially out of reach. Increases in private health insurance costs are dramatically outpacing increases in wages. Since 2001, the cost of health insurance premiums has increased four times as fast as workers' earnings. Even if an employer offers health insurance and a worker is eligible, the family may not be able to afford its share of the annual premium.

And the federal programs — Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) — which provide a safety net for families that can't afford to insure their

children don't go far enough. Health coverage programs for low-income children vary widely from state to state, with different standards for eligibility, cost sharing, and benefits in each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

This lottery of geography affects whether a child has coverage, what benefits are covered, and what treatment children can access and afford. As a result, these variations often have serious consequences for the health and well-being of our most vulnerable children.

In addition, many of America's overlooked and uninsured children are eligible but not enrolled in federally supported health insurance programs primarily because of daunting bureaucratic barriers — often an arduous application process with complicated forms. It's not uncommon for parents with chronically sick children to spend months trying to navigate the system. Some give up without success.

Under the All Healthy Children Act, the income eligibility level would be increased so that more children could get the coverage they need. Bureaucratic barriers to coverage would be eliminated. Children currently enrolled in Medicaid, SCHIP, and other means-tested federal programs

like school lunch and food stamps would be enrolled automatically.

Reimbursement rates to health care providers would be increased so that more doctors would be available to children needing services. This would bring thousands of doctors and dentists into the pool of caregivers who currently won't take patients covered by Medicaid and SCHIP.

Ensuring that children have affordable access to timely health care is smart policy. Every dollar spent vaccinating children against measles, mumps, and rubella saves \$16 in future costs. A child's health status affects his or her academic performance too. The reading scores and school attendance of uninsured children improve dramatically after they become insured and are able to access health care. Good health status in childhood is also associated with increased future earning potential.

Learn more about the CDF Freedom Schools program at: [www.childrensdefense.org/freedomschools](http://www.childrensdefense.org/freedomschools)

*Marian Wright Edelman is President of the Children's Defense Fund and its Action Council. Reach her at [www.ChildrensDefense.org](http://www.ChildrensDefense.org).*

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The Chronicle was established by Ernest Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974, and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc.

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