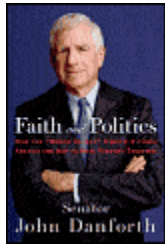




Faith and Politics: How the "Moral Values" Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together

John Danforth , Joanne J. Myers

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Faith and Politics

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good morning. I'm Joanne Myers, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to thank you for joining us this morning.

Today it is an honor to welcome Senator John Danforth to our Breakfast Program. As part of our ongoing series on Religion and Politics, he will be discussing his book, [*Faith and Politics: How the "Moral Values" Debate Divides America and How to Move Forward Together*](#). His book will be available for you to purchase at the end of the hour today.

How religion manifests itself in public life is a matter that should concern us all. For many, faith has become the most influential factor in deciding matters of politics, social justice, and public policy. As a result, moral issues are filtered through religious lenses and have been vaulted to the forefront of political dialogue. Although Americans of every religious persuasion are bringing their faith to bear on the political problems of the day, conservative Christians appear to be the most active in taking their faith from the pews to the ballot box, as they seek to enforce their private morality on the public at large.

As Senator Danforth writes in *Faith and Politics*, "The Republican Party"—his party—"has become beholden to conservative Christians, also known as the Christian Right, who have corrupted religious doctrine within the political marketplace, inserting matters of faith into areas of government where it ought not be." Our speaker argues that the Christian Right is both combative and divisive. "No one should presume to speak with absolute certainty of God's truth," he says, as he takes the Christian Right to task. He faults them for focusing on what he terms "wedge issues," which drive people apart and are familiar to all of us—abortion, stem cell research, gay rights, and the [Terri Schiavo](#) case, to name but a few.

Although *Faith and Politics* could be read simply as a timely and provocative commentary on the Bush Administration, it would be a mistake to do so. Senator Danforth's concerns go much deeper. I believe his message is not only a Christian one, but one that speaks to people of all faiths who wish to practice their beliefs in a way which will inspire trust and seek to focus on common ground.

Senator Danforth served three six-year terms in the Senate, representing the great state of Missouri, and voluntarily retired in 1995. But not being one to idly sit by the sidelines, from time to time he has accepted appointments from the White House, which have included serving as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations and as Envoy for Peace in the Sudan.

Since his earliest days as a politician and as an ordained Episcopal minister, John Danforth has intuitively understood the need for America to be moderate when infusing faith and religion into political discourse.

Using religion and politics as a springboard for considering the current state of the American psyche, he writes about the importance of choice. He tells us that we can be reconcilers or dividers; we can use faith as a political weapon or as a peacemaking tool to strengthen our country and build a global community of shared interests.

Please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our guest, Senator Danforth. He is one who has most assuredly practiced what he preaches.

Remarks

JOHN DANFORTH: Thank you.

The introduction was so comprehensive and said everything that I intend to say that the time has come for questions and answers.

I am very, very happy to be here and I thank you for your hospitality. I want to talk about my book and then I want to open the floor to you for whatever you would like to talk about.

My concern is about the, I think, excessive polarization of American politics and how American politics, because of this excessive polarization, has become stalemated so that it is very, very difficult to address seriously matters that our country should address.

Two or three years ago, I went to a strategy meeting held by the high-echelon people in my own party, the Republican Party, and they were talking about the forthcoming campaign, which was then to be the 2004 campaign. In the analysis, they said, "We have found in our polling that just a small percentage of the American people are undecided." They said something like 6 percent of the electorate was undecided. So the strategy in the election was going to be not to appeal to the undecided, but to try to energize the base of the Republican Party.

Not too long ago, there was an article in *The New York Times* which made the same point about both political parties. It was said that the effort of both Democrats and Republicans had become one of energizing their political base. Each party has its base, of course, and to fire up the base and to appeal to the base has become the be-all and end-all. This is different from when I was in politics.

But it used to be that roughly a third of the country were Democrats and roughly a third were Republicans and roughly a third were Independents that didn't want to be identified with either political party. So the strategy then was to appeal to those Independents. I had to do that as a Republican office-seeker in a state that during most of my life was strongly Democratic. I had to appeal to the Democrats; I had to appeal to Independents. Because people had to appeal to the center, politics gravitated to the center.

Now, if the strategy is energizing the base, that is entirely different. So the center of American politics has become marginalized by this appeal to the base.

The base of the Democratic Party is what you would call liberal. It is heavily oriented toward labor unions. The trial lawyers are a big part of it. What happened to [Joe Lieberman](#) in Connecticut is an indication, I think, that the Democratic Party has moved to the left.

The base of the Republican Party is religious; it's the Christian conservatives. What opened my eyes to what is going on in my own party was the case of Terri Schiavo. She was the woman in Florida who for something like fifteen years had been on a feeding tube. It turned out that after her autopsy her brain had shrunk to half of its normal size and she was blind. Her husband had said that she had evinced a desire not to be kept hooked up to a feeding tube forever. That was a factual question. It was contested by her parents. But it went around and around in the Florida courts for a very long period of time.

I think there were about four or five different proceedings at the trial court level. The point of a trial court is to try to determine questions of fact. The questions of fact were: What was her expressed intent, if you can determine it; and what is the state of her health, is she in a persistent vegetative state or not, and is

there any chance of her recovery? Repeatedly, after hearing a lot of medical evidence and hearing evidence from the husband, the Florida courts had held that she was in a persistent vegetative state, she was not going to recover, and that she had expressed an intent not to be kept alive artificially.

The parents weighed in and the parents appealed to politicians, beginning in the state of Florida; and then, when that ran its course, they moved their attention to politicians in Washington. This became a big cause for the Christian right. People were holding rallies, vigils, candlelight meetings, prayer meetings, praying for Terri Schiavo, and trying to influence the political process.

Enter the Republicans in Washington, members of Congress and the President of the United States. Congress passed special legislation. The special legislation transferred jurisdiction to the federal court and said, "Okay, let's change this from the state court to the federal court."

The President, on Palm Sunday of that year, 2005, flew from Crawford, Texas, to Washington to sign the special legislation. That's what got my attention because, first of all, it seemed to me to be terrible that the federal government was going to engage itself in determining when a feeding tube was going to be taken out of somebody. I thought that it was threatening to all of us whose worst fear is that someday we are going to be totally incapacitated and somebody is going to get into this act who we don't want in the act. I have a living will, I have a durable power of attorney; I don't want to be kept hooked up. That to me is a nightmare, that my future or the future of somebody I love is going to be politicized.

But it was, and Congress got into this act. It was such a departure from what my political party, the Republican Party, had stood for, because the Republican Party had not stood for getting involved in case-specific intervention in individuals' lives. The Republican Party had taken the position historically that deference should be given to state and local governments—this was the case of the transfer of authority to Washington. And particularly, the Republican Party had believed that the role of the federal judiciary was limited—so here was new jurisdiction conferred on the federal court. So I viewed this as really an indication of a takeover of my political party by the Christian Right.

Then I started reflecting on other instances where the Republican Party had seemed to be really doing the bidding of one particular religious group: in the case of the display of the Ten Commandments in an Alabama courthouse; or the presence of a monument of the Ten Commandments on the capitol grounds in the state of Texas; in the matter of stem cell research, where basically the Republican Party has taken a party position of attempting to block or slow down early-stage stem cell research; and then the famous case of gay marriage, attempting to amend the Constitution of the United States—and this was something that was voted on just this past summer. This is clearly a controversial issue, what is marriage, but I had not thought that it was controversial that the Constitution of the United States is not the place for this kind of issue to appear, that the Constitution is about the structure of government, it is about the relationship of government to the American people, but the Constitution is not about social values. Prohibition was the one venture into transforming that kind of a social issue into a constitutional proposition. That lasted a grand total of thirteen years before it was repealed. All of these in my own mind joined together and it indicated an identification of my political party with a particular religious group.

Now, religious people, faithful people, are involved in government and involved in politics, and this has been true for a very long time. It has been true since Joseph advised Pharaoh or Moses confronted Pharaoh. Religious people in our country, on the left and the right—witness the civil rights movement or campaigns against the death penalty—religious people have believed that it is their responsibility to engage in politics. I am one of them.

But there is a difference between engaging in politics and transforming politics and government into an extension or an enforcer of your religious point of view. We have recognized in this country, right from our inception, that the connection of politics and religion, government and religion, is inherently a divisive combination. That is why in the Constitution we provide for the fact that everybody is free to exercise religion but the state is not going to establish religion.

What has happened now in American politics, because both parties are appealing to their base at the

expense of the center of American politics, is that religion has become a wedge. It has become something to energize the base, but in energizing the base it is then a divisive force in American politics and it has tended to be destructive of the center.

Now, what I am trying to do, and what I was trying to do in writing the book, and what I am trying to do on the book tour, is to try to evoke a response. I mean, look, anybody who has ever served in the United States Senate loves the sound of his own voice. But I really didn't write this or I'm not saying this to you because I love the sound of my own voice, however true that might be.

I think that the antidote to the divisiveness of American politics is the greater engagement of more and more people in the political process. I think that the antidote to the destruction of the center of American politics is to reconstitute the center of American politics. And I think that the antidote to the use of religion to divide us is the greater engagement of people of faith saying, "Wait a second. Religion is not inherently divisive."

So the question that I put in the book in the very first chapter is to raise the question: Is religion, is Christianity, divisive or is it reconciling? Now, a case can be made for either position. A case can be made that it is divisive because Jesus said, "I don't come to bring peace, I come to bring the sword. I come to divide father against son and mother against daughter," and so forth. But if you read the rest of that passage, it is clear that what Jesus was talking about was not divisiveness for its own sake, but rather his claim that his lordship took precedence over any other allegiance.

A much more prevalent concept in the New Testament is reconciliation. St. Paul said, "We are to be ambassadors of reconciliation." Jesus said, in what is called the High Priestly Prayer, that he prayed that we all may be one. I believe that that message of reconciliation is very important because right now we have become so divided as a country that the common ground has been taken away from us and we are unable to deal constructively with extremely important problems.

How do we deal in a post-9/11 world with terrorism? Well, right now this is pretty much of a political football—both sides, both parties, positioning themselves for thirty-second commercials in a campaign. But there are serious questions here.

What is the future of Social Security and Medicare? That has been a question since my early days in the Senate, but it is getting more and more urgent. It is hard to address that issue politically under the best of circumstances. But if we are further divided by religion, it is even more difficult to address.

How do we establish an energy policy that makes us less dependent on imported sources of energy? How can we do that? There has to be some center, some common ground on which we can meet. And again, the strategy of American politics is not to build on a common ground, but to destroy the common ground for the sake of very clear positions which are opposite each other.

Let me just say one word about foreign policy issues, because I do have some of that in this book and I know that is one of your interests. Religion can have a very positive effect, and I have seen it. When President Bush asked me to be his Special Envoy for Peace in Sudan, I think we played a very constructive role in Sudan. I know that. It was clear to me his motives in asking me to do that job when, in a Rose Garden ceremony, he introduced me as the Special Envoy, because the people who were present were Christian activists. A lot of them were conservative Christians and they were concerned about Sudan. A lot of people who aren't conservative Christians, a lot of religious people, were concerned about Sudan. That was good, because it focused our attention and it focused the attention of the world on Sudan.

So concern for the world around us, compassion for people in the world, even though from the standpoint of total political realism it is not necessarily justified, but a concern beyond our own interests, I think that is one of the gifts that religious people can bring to American engagement in foreign policy.

So religion can be a reconciling force, it can be a leavening influence in political considerations, but religion also has the capacity to be terribly, terribly divisive. It is divisive in American politics today. It is

clearly divisive in the world. You can't pick up the newspaper without reading about sectarian violence in Iraq, people killing each other in the name of religion. The same is true in other parts of the world—Kashmir; Sudan, where the North-South program was in part a religious program.

So what's my prescription for dealing with all of this? My prescription is that more and more of us become engaged in addressing this, more and more of us raise the issue of what is the appropriate role of religion, and how should religion be involved in public issues and how should religion not be involved in public issues. I believe that if you ask the average American, "Do you believe that religion should divide us as a country?" most people would say, "No, of course not." So I'm asking the question. I want people to have the chance to answer that question. I enlist you as fellow questioners and fellow discussers of this whole question of faith and politics.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: It seems to me the essence of morality in religion in the deepest sense is your compassion for others, particularly those in need. If we had more of that dialogue, maybe what separates us as Democrats and Republicans wouldn't anymore. I think it is an issue that needs to be asked.

JOHN DANFORTH: Thank you very much. I think that is correct. Religion has the capacity to divide us, and it often has very hard edges, and it creates the impression that I'm on God's side and you are not, and that I think becomes dangerous. But on the other hand, it has the capacity to raise up for us questions of concern for people who are in need. I have seen that. I have seen that in connection with Sudan, I have seen that in connection with Cambodia back in the late 1970s. And it absolutely crosses faith lines and it crosses ideological lines, so that liberal Christians, conservative Christians, people who are of different faiths, such as Jews, and I'm sure Muslims, have come together and shared a common concern. I think building on those common concerns is something that could be very hopeful.

QUESTION: Senator, I think you acknowledged that religion has always been divisive historically, so I'm not sure that that is going to change very much.

My question really to you is this: The Republican Party at one time was the Progressive Party, which sought to get more federal involvement in the affairs of the country in every way. The Democratic Party was the states' rights party. That has changed over time. But your call for more involvement on the part of people is not necessarily going to provide the center. People who got newly involved in Connecticut were largely responsible for Lamont's victory over Joe Lieberman. I think that is what we are going to find, because people who come in, even if they are newcomers, may have in fact some of the same views as the so-called base of either party. So you are not necessarily going to get any more kind of balanced participation by getting more people in there. The union base in the past used to be a stabilizing force in the Democratic Party.

So at some point where do you really see all of this heading? I think sophisticated polling identifies where you are really going to get the new votes, or the votes that are going to get your party. You say they're about evenly divided. So now sophisticated polling can identify where you really have to get people to the polls. But that may in fact at this point in time make things a little harder.

JOHN DANFORTH: Well, I am an optimist. I have to say that I don't think you are right, and I hope you're not. I believe that the American people are not fairly represented by the polarized state of American politics. Now, that's what I believe. Maybe I'm proved wrong.

But what I hear—and I'm not a sophisticated pollster—basically from people is, "When we see the talking heads on television always representing the two poles, because that's what makes good TV, neither of these really represent us." What I hear from people when they think about and talk about the state of American politics is disgust. What I hear from people is that the extremes don't represent them, that they have been abandoned by this.

I think that is the state of affairs. I think they have become marginalized and I think that they want to make their voices heard. I hope so. I really believe that if you asked most people if religion should divide

America, if it should be a divisive force, they would say no. I think that most people, if you asked, "Don't you think that we should attempt to move beyond just these wedge issues and try to deal with obvious questions—I mean if Social Security in fourteen years is going to start drawing money out of the Treasury to pay the bills, we've got an economic problem. Don't you think we should deal with it?" Now, that's the third rail of politics.

But I am just betting that if you put it to the American people, they would say, "Let's get on with the show." I don't know how else to do it, other than to say let's raise up these questions and let's start talking about them, and let's certainly recognize that when religion is involved as a political agenda—I don't mean as sort of a mindset or a way of how people think about the world around them, but as a full-fledged political agenda—that really is a departure from our tradition as a country, most people would say, "It is a departure, and it is a departure from where we think things should be."

QUESTION: I wonder if you could put your thoughts on the global stage, because there seems to be a division between Islam and Western religions played out over the terrorism issue. Do you feel that religious leaders have a role to play in somehow finding a center between the Islamic world and, very broadly, the West? And how could that role be played?

JOHN DANFORTH: When I was the President's Special Envoy for Sudan, it was clear that part of the North/South problem—I'm not talking about Darfur, the North/South problem—part of that was religious, because it was an Islamic government and there were these black African Christians who felt that they were persecuted. Now, that was in part the Arabization of Sudan, but it was in part religious. I thought that it would be useful to have a kind of a mediation service to address the religious component of what was going on in Sudan. What would be the application of [Shariah](#) law in Khartoum, for example, would be something that could be mediated.

When I was at the United Nations, I had the same thought there, that under the auspices of the Security Council, which is after all responsible for trying to maintain peace in the world, there should be some sort of mediation facility for the religious component of disputes. Obviously, religion is part of the problem. So I tried to promote that idea at the Security Council, and honestly, I got nowhere. I wasn't there very long, but I didn't get very far.

But I don't think it is likely to be done by the Security Council. I don't think it is likely to be done by governments. But I think this is now a responsibility for religious groups themselves to address this. I don't think they are. If religion is the problem, as it is, then it is the responsibility of religious people to find solutions to the problem.

Now, the Pope made his statement, which was construed as being offensive to Islam, and there is a lesson in that. That is, anything we say about religion, we have to be very, very sensitive as to how that is heard. But one thing he said was we should have more interreligious dialogue. That is obviously the case to me.

The Security Council has tried for years to define what terrorism means. It cannot do it. It has never done that. Some say, "Well, when it is in the cause of freeing a country from occupiers, then attacks on civilians are permissible." But go back to [St. Augustine](#)—the idea of noncombatant immunity has been key to the whole concept of what is a just war.

So I think we would benefit from religious leaders on an interfaith basis to be actively engaged in defining what are the limits of war, and what is just war, and does it include or does it not include noncombatant immunity.

So the short answer to your question is yes, I think that there is a role for religious people to get involved in trying to mediate and address these issues.

QUESTION: Your statement about reconciliation in the New Testament is certainly a very important clarification. In fact, that one sentence, I think, almost makes worthwhile your graduation from Yale Divinity School.

It occurs to me that one of the reasons we have division is the habit of stereotyping of the enemy, domestic and foreign. I know it is important for us in religion to speak truth to power. There are times when power should be speaking truth to the rest of us, and your speech I think is a great example of that, and I really am grateful for your witness.

Is it possible that in the great tradition of the United States Senate we could find party politicians who at least understand and occasionally express enough respect for their opponents as to confirm to the rest of us our common humanity? Can we get over the stereotyping of left and right, red and blue, liberal and conservative, in a way that ought to be compatible with religion's affirmation of the humanity of us all? It really distresses me that we have stereotypes galore going on in our politics, domestic and foreign. We need to understand that guy from Iran who is saying those terrible things about us and the Holocaust and all of that.

Well, I could go on. I'm sure that this is a concern of yours. Do you have hope that politicians in this country can begin to get rid of the stereotyping and tackle the great questions that face us all that in many ways do transcend politics, and that certainly transcend being an American?

JOHN DANFORTH: Well, politics is a contact sport. As far as I know, it has always been a contact sport, because politicians run for election, and that is combat in a way. When you serve in political life, say if you serve in Congress, you are either supporting legislation or opposing it—people vote yes, they vote no—and you are trying to win votes. So there is definite competition in politics. The question is, I think, whether in addition to that there is the basis for some common ground and trying to work things out.

I had the privilege the entire time I was in the Senate of serving on the Senate Finance Committee. It was a very, very important committee, dealing with everything pertaining to taxes, international trade, Medicare, and the very, very big issues. It was a terrific committee. To get anything done on the Finance Committee, you always had to have bipartisan cooperation. You had to have it.

But, particularly starting in the last couple of years that I was in the Senate—and it exists today—there was more and more of an emphasis on each party having clarity of position. So let's make sure that we are all united in our party position, that our position is clear, and that we've got our opponents in an embarrassing situation on hot issues. So that has become the nature of politics.

We would go to our Tuesday party luncheons, and they would be basically pep rallies for everybody standing together on these very hot-button issues that would have great appeal. So what politics has become is the thirty-second commercial, the twenty-second sound bite, and a great premium placed on party line positions that are very, very clear.

Now, is it possible to get back to some more common ground and some sense of more bipartisan cooperation? There is. It's hard, but there is. I give some examples in the book on how I think it could be done, on how the center could be reconstituted, an example relating to the 1991 Civil Rights Act of doing that, and how we can get off this wicket where we are now in American politics.

I think politicians are part of the answer, but I also think that the American people are part of the answer. I think that the people really have to speak up, a lot of them. Again, I'm repeating myself, but that's the reason for me being on the stump right now. The people have to speak out about the polarization of American politics now, about their dissatisfaction. They have to speak out in the form of attending political meetings, speaking to politicians, sending in emails, writing letters, writing letters to the editor—any way that they can speak out about the necessity of trying to have at least some common ground.

Where religion, which you and I believe should be a force for reconciliation in our country, where religion becomes, instead of a force of reconciliation, a dividing wedge, then particularly I think people of faith have a responsibility to say, "Here is our understanding of what religion should be and it is something other than the notion that God has invested me with total knowledge of what politics should be and, by God, I'm on God's side and you aren't." That's what politics has become now.

When [Falwell](#) has a bumper sticker that says "Vote Christian," what does it mean? It means all these little ideas, that's Christian; and if you don't agree with that, what are you?

So I think that there is really an obligation, not just to say, "We hope politicians will do better." Politicians, like businesspeople who say the customer is always right, are always going to do what the demand tells them to do. If the demand is from the base constituency that says "jump through hoops, we're never satisfied with what you're doing, get more and more extreme"—I think that's what happened to Joe Lieberman in Connecticut, by the way—then that's what they are going to be. On the other hand, if they hear a message of "let's try to get our act together," that's what they will be.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Senator, for that fine talk. Two or three points.

I was in Congress for twenty-two years, the last ten chairing an education subcommittee, and I worked very closely with my Republican colleagues, and most of the legislation that came out of my subcommittee had strong bipartisan support. I am going back to South Bend next week to campaign for the Democrat for my old seat. So what you are talking about is very much on my mind.

I was very distressed when the new Republican leader of the House of Representatives, Mr. Boehner, said a few days ago that Democrats seem to want to protect the terrorists rather than the American people. That is not helpful, particularly coming from a leader of the party.

I am going to be quoting next month an editorial, of which I will send you a copy, by Theodore Roosevelt in 1918 in the *Kansas City Star*, in which he said, "Those who say it is unpatriotic to criticize an American president in time of war are not only themselves unpatriotic and servile but are treasonous to the American public." It is a terrific quote.

We have started at New York University now a Center for the Study of Islam, which I think is very important, because most Americans have never met a Muslim and we don't know very much about Islam. I, for one, have been distressed that there have been so few voices of so-called moderate Muslims speaking out against extremism and terrorism on the part of other Muslims. I said that only last month at an international conference in Kyoto of the World Conference of Religions for Peace, where 800 delegates from most of the major faiths spoke out. Immediately, a Muslim leader heard me, came speeding to my side, and said, "You sound like the Western propaganda machine." So I would like to hear more moderate voices.

I think that what you are calling for, namely that people of faith and Americans generally become more active in American politics, is right on target.

QUESTION: Senator, you mentioned that in the past, people of faith have been very much involved along with politicians in civil rights movements and in the anti-capital punishment movement. You mentioned that presumably with approval. Then you also mentioned the fact that people of faith were involved in the Terri Schiavo case and along with politicians involved in the amendment to the Constitution that would prohibit gay marriage, and one senses that you were opposed to that type of involvement. Now, where do you draw the line? Where is it appropriate for people of faith to get involved with government people to advance causes which they believe their religion dictates and where is it inappropriate?

JOHN DANFORTH: I think it's always appropriate. I think in our country people have a right to speak on any issue and weigh in on any issue. People have, obviously, a right to try to express their religious beliefs in any forum that they want and in any way they want. I respect that.

There was an article about me in *The Washington Post*, a long article, in the spring, and so Rush Limbaugh devoted a whole segment of his program to me. He said, "What Danforth is trying to do is silence Christian conservatives." I absolutely am not. I am not trying to silence anybody. I am trying to get more people to speak, not less. I am trying to get people to speak representing a variety of points of view.

I think just basically two thoughts. I think, first of all, those of us who do have a religious faith I would hope would recognize that when we express ourselves in politics we should do so with a sense of humility. As Isaiah said, "Our thoughts are not God's thoughts." We cannot presume to be the custodian of God's political views, that there is a difference between whatever political views we have, no matter how strongly we hold them, and God; and that everything that we say, every political agenda that we have, is relative to the love Commandment. That is the absolute, that we love our neighbors as ourselves, not that we are for or against gay marriage, or for or against this, or capital punishment. All those people will agree on, disagree on, maybe agree strongly on. But some sense that we are somewhat less than godlike in expressing our religious views. That is point one. I think humility is something that people of faith should bring to political dialogue.

Point two: When a political party becomes a sectarian party, when politics becomes the implementer of a religious point of view, that is divisive, that is what splits a country apart. That is why we politicians—I used to be one—can factor in the views that various people have. But basically we cannot say, or should not say, that our political party or our political system is the implementer of one particular religious point of view.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Senator. I have two questions. They both have to do with the proportions that you allocate to the causes of the malaise that you see. I share your regret that we have this polarized political system and that we don't have more moderation and kind of rational dialogue. But it seems to me that there may be more causes than religion, the "religification" of politics. That is, there may be other things. I wonder if you would comment about how much you think religion contributes to this as opposed to other factors.

My second question has to do with the partisan nature of wedge issues. The last two Democratic presidents we had, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton, were both very comfortable with religion. They were clearly religious men, spoke in churches and were completely comfortable with it, and never used religion as a wedge issue. But we now have a president who leads the way on this. I mean he was in the forefront of the Terri Schiavo case, for example. He has made claims that he doesn't speak to his own father, he speaks to a higher one, to get advice about what kind of policies he should follow. I think he has deliberately led the way in playing these wedge issues, not just on the religious front but even, for example, using terrorism as a wedge issue. I wonder if you would be willing to allocate more causal effect to one party rather than the other.

JOHN DANFORTH: Thank you for your invitation. I am a Republican, for all the traditional reasons—I mean all the reasons I used to be a Republican. I regret the identification of my party with a religious point of view. I did not sign on for that.

I was always comfortable with my religion. Hey, I am a believing, practicing, Bible-reading Christian, who was ordained in the Episcopal church, and I was seen as that by my constituents. But they did not see me as their pastor or as their religious spokesman. That would have been ridiculous. The percentage of people in Missouri who are Episcopalians is less than one-half of 1 percent. So that wasn't a very good base on which I could operate. So yeah, I think that it is very possible for people to be obviously believing people and take their faith very seriously, but to do so with a sense of humility.

I think that both parties have their bases now. Neither base is very attractive, in my opinion. I think that the base of the Republican Party today is the Christian Right. That is clearly not the base of the Democratic Party; they've got another base. I think that we've got to get the Republican Party off of this tack that it is on.

Now, people say, "Well, it works. This adds to people who are Republicans because their view of the flow and scope of government, and so on, a whole new group of people. So it works."

Now, what I'm saying is, maybe for now. I don't think it is going to work long because I don't think it will see the light of day. I think it is one thing to sidle up to somebody and say, 'Psst, we're really a religious party. We're for you.'" But I don't think that most Americans would agree with that. So again, I think this

is something that will benefit from a lot of light and a lot of discussion.

But I think I am going to decline your kind invitation to be particularly partisan in my response.

QUESTION: . I have always been concerned with how the voices are heard. If today we have a divine right running these mega-churches and we have Rush Limbaugh and all these other people, how can these voices be heard, these moderate voices that I think you are addressing?

JOHN DANFORTH: I think all kinds of ways. I think whoever you meet with in a day, whoever you want to talk to. There are all kinds of radio call-in programs; that is one way to make your voice heard. Communicating with politicians, sending them emails, showing up at their town hall meetings and expressing yourself. Writing letters to the editor. There are all kinds of ways to express yourself.

People say, "Well, politicians don't listen." Sure they do. Of course they do. They have to. I mean if there's one thing they are focused on, it's winning elections. They are very happy to appeal to one group if that's all they are hearing from. So what I hope is that they will hear from all kinds of people.

You can figure out ways to do it. I mean if you want to enter into this debate—and I hope you do—you will be able to figure out ways to make your voices heard.

I always thought in my state of Missouri I represented somewhere between 5-to-6 million people, all of whom had strong beliefs on everything, most of whom were in disagreement with me—and they never hesitated to tell me. They would show up at town hall meetings, and it was like attending an anti-Danforth riot. People would be practically knocking each other over to get to the microphone to gripe about this or that. I hated those meetings. But it was very important to go to them. And politicians will listen. The objective is to make your voice heard.

Thank you very much.

JOANNE MYERS: Thank you. I think you will find that this is a pro-Danforth rally. We thank you very much for your wise counsel.

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