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Articles

CHANGE BEYOND VALUES

By Tom Gilson
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'God Is the Issue'

Next week's election outcome is still up for grabs. This much is certain, though: Regardless of who wins, social issues like same-sex "marriage" and abortion are not going to go away. Though they may be able to improve or worsen conditions to some extent, no President, Congress, or even Supreme Court could put an end to these controversies.

Christians are right to be concerned about these matters, both before and after elections. But is it possible that as we focus on these things we're missing the real issue, and our best strategies for addressing it? Brad Bright, son of Campus Crusade for Christ founders Bill and Vonette Bright, says we are. In a just-released book titled [God Is the Issue: Becoming An Agent of Real Change](#) (which can be downloaded for free), he lays out a more biblical view of these culture wars and a more Christlike and effective way to fight them.

Homosexuality, hooking up, corporate greed, misplaced understandings of tolerance and diversity—all of these are just symptoms, says Bright. The fundamental, core problem has to do with our society's understanding of God. "The primary remedy is not simply to restore 'traditional values,'" he writes. "Although it is helpful, it is no longer enough. . . . Values, while very important, are merely symptoms, or effects."

Later in the book he puts it this way: "Believing in morality while denying God's existence is no different than believing in the tooth fairy," for morality apart from God is ungrounded. It's open for anybody's personal interpretation, with no "right" answer. Therefore, he says, "we must begin focusing more of our efforts on curing the disease instead of just trying to suppress the cultural symptoms."

It's a compelling approach, one that Jesus Himself practiced. When asked about paying taxes, about following valued traditions, about forms of worship, about a woman caught in sin—in all these and many more encounters, he consistently redirected the topic toward God, and his questioners' hearts toward God.

Values, traditional or otherwise, can come from anywhere. Everyone can choose his or her own preferred flavor and change it on a whim. For that reason, debating simply on the level of values is unlikely to change minds. Only *transcendently grounded* values can claim authority over a culture. Such transcendence exists in the God of the Bible, but too often He is but an aside or an afterthought in the conversation. We who believe in Him need to keep Him at the center.

But how do we do this? On a practical level, how do we bring God into our discussions? On this, Bright takes a most refreshingly creative approach. It's a matter of *reframing* the issues, he says. He even speaks of "hijacking" the others' agendas.

He illustrates this from his experience ministering on campus at the University of Washington. When a homosexual rights group accused Campus Crusade for Christ of intolerance and discrimination, CCC answered by passing out flyers noting that a "small, vocal minority" was seeking to censor them, and asking, "What are they afraid you might hear?"

This, of course, opened the door to discussions on that very question, and to conversations about Jesus Christ. The gay rights group continued to hammer on their issue for months. Bright saw an opportunity to frame it differently, though:

“For the entire fall semester the militant homosexuals gave us a platform, which we gratefully accepted . . . the opportunity to talk about our issue—Jesus Christ.”

By this approach, we can focus the agenda on the right questions, the questions of God and of our relationship to Him. Jesus demonstrated this often. Once when asked to justify his authority ([Matthew 21:23-27](#)), He refused to ask the question that was put to Him. Instead He returned a different question, one which went straight to questioners’ heart attitudes, revealing (in this case) their manipulative intent.

Here are further contemporary ideas from Bright on ways we can do this:

“When homosexuals hold sensitivity training in Corporation XYZ, we graciously demand equal opportunity to talk about how to be sensitive to the feelings of *people of faith*.”

“When homosexuals hold a Day of Silence in your school, avoid reacting. Instead, think of how you can shrewdly hijack it. For instance, make up T-shirts that say, ‘*Silent no more. Stop the genocide in Darfur!*’ Of course, the genocide in Darfur is against Christians. This allows you to stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ . . . while simultaneously co-opting the intent of the Day of Silence for the cause of those suffering for the name of Christ.”

But to make God the issue we must really know who God is, and on that note of emphasis Bright closes the book. *God Is the Issue* is far more than a theoretical treatise on God and culture. It is a call for each one of us to think clearly about God, and to engage the culture on that basis, not letting others take us off track of what matters most. It’s a call to do this in community: to work it through in small groups (there are review questions at the end of each chapter), to plan together for becoming agents of real change.

Culture controversies will be with us for a long time to come. We can talk about “values” forever and never win the day—it will neither penetrate many hearts nor win many arguments. Making God the issue won’t win everybody, but it will establish a clear, solid, and true foundation for the way we engage with culture. And it will open the door to the hearts of many who for the first time may understand what it means to put God at the center.

Tom Gilson is director of strategic processes in the Operational Advisory Services team for Campus Crusade for Christ and has worked with Brad Bright and his team. He maintains a blog at www.thinkingchristian.net.

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