

Gingrich's Departure Creates Catch-22 for Christian Conservatives

With **Rick Santorum** and **Newt Gingrich** out of the Republican presidential primaries, Christian Republicans are in a very interesting position—one that might even be considered compromising.

After the announcement that Gingrich would drop out, I exchanged emails with a politically and religious-minded friend, asking if he would now be supporting **Ron Paul**, since his other choice is a **Mormon**, a religion he considers false. His reply was predictable, and underscores a paradox that this two-man Republican primary is set to expose. My friend said he would probably support Romney because he is “electable,” indicating that the higher imperative here is to beat Obama.

For the religious right, it may seem like the lesser of two evils to back a Mormon over a liberal, mainstream Christian (Obama's mother attended Baptist and Methodist churches and he was a member of United Church of Christ). The continued efforts of Ron Paul, however, make this a three-choice scenario.

Conservative Christians are at a crossroads—especially those in southern states that have yet to hold primaries. Both GOP candidates have acceptable politics, but only one candidate professes Christian faith as recognized by **mainstream Christianity**. Problematically, it's not the one they believe can beat Obama. Whereas Ron Paul supporters have a candidate whose politics and religion they agree with, mainstream Christian supporters of Romney will only agree with his politics.

So in order for conservative Christians to support the

“electable” Romney, must they put their religious convictions in a box and tape them up until November 7? What becomes of all the allegations that Obama is unfit to lead the nation because of his sympathy for Islam and policy positions that seem contradictory to biblical teaching?

In effect, conservative Christians would be admitting their fickleness at best; and at worst, exposing themselves as hypocrites who can dismiss Romney’s “false religion” as immaterial, after having been critical and suspicious of **Obama’s Christian faith.**

Despite this paradoxical treatment, there are many conservative Christians who will profess that politics and religion can be compartmentalized, apparently quite arbitrarily or when convenient, and will call this phenomenon **separation of church and state**. The concept that James Madison, among other founding fathers, fought so hard to include in our Bill of Rights is so different from today’s application of that phrase, that conservative Christians can glibly cry “separation of church and state” and fool most of the people most of the time.

God is not so easily convinced. First of all, it might be hard to explain to Him why He might not be our first priority in choosing which political candidate to support. Secondly, God might not understand why we think someone is not “electable” when He once made a shepherd boy king. But most of all, it might be near impossible to get Him voluntarily into that box which isolates His sovereignty and supremacy over matters of state.

For the follower of Christ, liberal or conservative, church cannot be separated from anything. **Separating church and state** to keep the government out of regulating religion and keep religion from forcing itself on citizens is appropriate. But when we invoke the concept in an effort to reconcile incongruities in our politics and faith, it is dangerously

misapplied.

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