

Bush Memoir Points to Faith-Based Decisions

He never would have made it to the White House in 2001 as the country's 43rd president without the faith-based decision he made in 1986.

"I could not have quit drinking without faith," former President George W. Bush writes in his memoir, *Decision Points*, which released Tuesday. "I also don't think my faith would be as strong if I hadn't quit drinking."

It was the first significant decision among several that ultimately solidified Bush's resolve to act on his belief that God was calling him to lead the nation as president, the memoir shows, according to a report published Wednesday by Religion News Service (RNS).

That his politics were influenced by his faith in God after Bush took office in Jan. 2001 is no revelation. But now he recounts in his own words, across the 497 pages, the ways his religious belief shaped his life and his politics, and thus his administration, RNS reported. His reliance on God, though not the central thrust of the book, remains a theme throughout, the report stated.

Bush's decision to quit drinking came a year after evangelist Billy Graham visited the Bush family vacation home in Maine in 1985. Bush writes in his memoir that at the time he occasionally read the Bible but viewed it as "a kind of self-improvement course," RNS reported. Graham showed him that the point of the Scriptures was to follow Christ. After later joining a weekly Bible study, Bush started reading the Bible every morning, and it became a practice he continued during his presidency.

While Graham helped Bush reach his pivotal decision about

alcohol, Bush credits Texas pastor Mark Craig of First United Methodist Church in Austin as inspiring him to pursue the presidency, RNS stated. The moment came during a sermon when Craig recounted that Moses was at first hesitant to follow God's directive to lead the Israelites into their promised land.

"We have the opportunity, each and every one of us, to do the right thing, and for the right reason," Bush recalled Craig preaching, according to RNS. At the other end of the pew, Barbara Bush mouthed to her son, "He is talking to you."

Details of how Bush became a Christian and the ways his spiritual journey shaped his then-first term in office is also recounted in *The Faith of George W. Bush*, published by Charisma House in November 2003.

RNS highlighted examples from the memoir of times when Bush noted his faith and moral values playing a role in both his chief-executive and personal decisions and revealed that:

- His push for global AIDS relief was fueled by his visit to a Ugandan clinic, where he left feeling challenged by the biblical admonition: "To whom much is given, much is required." When he knelt at the casket of Pope John Paul II in 2005, he prayed for ailing ABC anchorman Peter Jennings.
- His moral views contributed to his decision to ban federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. He revealed that as a teenager, he drove his mother to the hospital after a miscarriage as she held the fetus in a jar. "I remember thinking: 'There was a human life, a little brother or sister,'" he writes.
- In a meeting with John Paul, he told the pontiff that his church's "steadfast support of life provided a firm moral foundation on which pro-life politicians like me could take a stand."

- When he decided in 2001 to ban the use of federal funds “to support the destruction of life for medical gain,” he was struck by the personal nature of the criticism. “They mocked my appearance, my accent and my religious beliefs,” he wrote. “I was labeled a Nazi, a war criminal, and Satan himself,” but he says the “shrill debate” never prompted him to second-guess his decision.
- He defends his Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives, which he said helped more than 5,000 charities receive federal grants.

His reliance on faith continued through his last day in the White House: “I began Tuesday, January 20, 2009, the same way I had started every day for the past eight years: I read the Bible.”