

## Commentary

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# In his election victory, Bush sees a divine right to soldier on

The post-election news coverage and opinion columns have been filled with assertions that President Bush's re-election by 51 percent of the voters has given him a clear mandate to proceed with his agenda.

Some pundits are hoping Bush will get rid of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, because of their mishandling of the war in Iraq, as well as Attorney General John



Ashcroft because of his disregard for civil liberties.

But this is a president who believes he is on a mission, has repeatedly vowed to stay the course in Iraq, prays daily for divine guidance, and, in the second presidential debate, could not think of one mistake he — or by extension his heavenly or earthly advisers — had ever made.

Let's say Ashcroft does step down.

Would a new attorney general have values any different than those the president and his strongest base clearly share with Ashcroft? Conservative columnist George Will gets it right: the president will "feel vindicated in his foreign policy and empowered in his well-advertised domestic agenda."

The New York Times reports that Bush tapped into America's moral center, and Knight Ridder lists what Bush intends to do with the backing of his coalition of the morally willing: set Iraq on the road to democracy, defeat global terrorism, spread freedom throughout the Middle East and bring free-market capitalism to Social Security. These goals are as unrealistic — and the ways to achieve them as unexplained — as they were when they were recited as a holy litany throughout the campaign.

In presidential politics, ends don't justify means. They make means irrelevant.

New York Times columnist Nicholas D. Kristof sums up the Republican core campaign values as "God, guns, gays

and grizzlies." The first two are issues Bush's Christian conservative base supports; the last two they oppose.

In regard to gays, Washington Post columnist David Broder stresses that the Massachusetts Supreme Court's decision to allow gay marriages galvanized the one-third of Americans who are evangelical Christians to come out in key states to vote for both anti-gay-marriage initiatives and Bush. While this identifies the initial cause, it overlooks the hand of Bush's Republican strategist, Karl Rove, in having U.S. Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, whose election campaign Rove ran, red-flag this divisive issue nationally by proposing a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages.

All this would be well and good, if we could be sure that voters really knew what they were voting for, beyond denying gay men and women the right to share fully in a mainstream institution that is tied to all sorts of powerful human needs — for social acceptance, for medical and retirement and inheritance benefits, for the joy of openly

loving another human being among supportive fellow worshipers of God and for the comfort of having one more major stigma removed.

At least my New Testament reads that the second great commandment is, "Love your neighbor as yourself." I love my duly wedded wife and our son born and nurtured in wedlock. I find it sad that some fellow Americans want to deny the benefits of holy or civil matrimony to men and women who deeply love each other and long to have church and state bless and legitimize that love. To me, it is an uncharitable form of ignorance and deserves the graceful contempt that Gregory Peck afforded such forms of narrow-minded bigotry in "To Kill a Mockingbird." But I am no Gregory Peck and no Harper Lee.

But what else did voters think they were voting for? The Center on Policy Attitudes and the Center for International Studies of the University of Maryland published a study just before the election of what Bush and Kerry supporters thought about key issues. Only three out of 10 Bush supporters

understood the extent of world opposition to America's use of preemptive military force in Iraq, and a majority of them consistently got wrong the president's positions on major foreign policy issues.

For example, 62 percent wrongly believed Bush favors our participation in the International Criminal Court and would lead by setting the example that no nation, no matter how powerful, is above universal standards of justice. Eighty percent thought he supported the international land mines treaty, signed by 130 countries of the world and ratified by 50 more. He does not, despite Pope John Paul's prayerful urging years ago that "God give all nations the courage to make peace, so that the countries that have not yet signed this important instrument of international humanitarian law do so without delay."

It would seem then that when religion and politics mix, belief triumphs over reason — and even over love.

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