

## Praying and weeping for America

Some personal thoughts after Washington for Jesus

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



Now that the Washington for Jesus rally is history, I want to tell why I did not go.

To have said anything ahead of time would have been wrong.

The older I grow the more I am aware that (1) I do not have all the answers, (2) a lot of people I think are wrong turn out to be right, (3) of the seven things the Lord finds detestable the worst is "a man who stirs up dissension among brothers" (Prov. 6:19 NIV).

Thus, during the planning period I kept my mouth shut and my pen pointed in another direction. I greatly respect the men who planned the rally, even though I chose not to participate.

Earlier this year I attended—at the invitation of my congressman who is a personal friend—the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C.

The prayer breakfast is simply that—a time to pray. I was deeply touched by President Carter's call for intercession on the part of our enemies; particularly by his personal testimony that he prays daily for the Ayatollah Khomeini.

I find it easy to follow a man who stays on his knees, even if he can't seem to control inflation.

I believe righteous men should be involved in government. I have helped campaign for the election of Christians. I intercede daily for those in high places.

If given the choice, I will invariably vote for a man who stands righteously before God rather than the political huckster who yields to humanistic pressure.

I have great reservations, however, with the legalistic approach of some of our church leaders who judge the spirituality of men in government on the basis of how they vote on any given issue. Let a man vote against mandatory prayer in public schools and some Christians call him a heretic.

I am still reeling from the public statements of a well-known woman speaker who said there was no way to call Sen. Mark Hatfield or former Sen. Harold Hughes "Christians" because of how they voted on certain issues.

Thus, when there was talk, in the early planning stages of the Washington for Jesus rally, of a political manifesto listing the candidates on the basis of their voting records—with threats of a "Christian bloc vote," I backed off. I am glad that idea was canned. However, one of the stated purposes—almost to rally time—was to visit the offices of all congressmen and senators to "discuss specific legislation."

For the most part that was discouraged in the last days before the rally. That was good, for that kind of mentality leads to inquisitions, a holocaust and eventual establishment of a state run by church rules.

Let us proudly proclaim we are a nation "under God." Let us be willing to die for our nation, and that other nations might be free. But to become a crusader, leading a lobby or a demonstration, is foreign to the Spirit of Jesus Christ—and personally repulsive to me.

Recently I sat at dinner in the Fellowship House in Washington with a refugee from Haiti who testified of seeing his mother, father, and baby sister killed by the personal police force of the dictator who rules that island kingdom.

Weeping, he said, "We have no choice in Haiti. You still do."

I do not take that lightly. It is imperative that Christians be involved in politics. But God forbid that we join our corporate voice with the chorus of legalistic pharisees who seem determined to inflict on this nation a government run by religious zealots.

A sad thing has happened to the Church since that time when Jesus called 12 poor men to follow him. The Church has become rich. And powerful. But in the process, it has allowed itself to become just another regiment of society.

I weep when I see political candidates courting the Church as if it were on the level of the Rotary Club and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. I shudder when I see these candidates pictured with prominent preachers. I dread election time when they start making the rounds of the churches.

It stinks.

Washington for Jesus began as a celebration. Later it became a demonstration. There is a vast difference between the two.

I tried, when debating my involvement, to picture Jesus leading a demonstration. I could see Peter wanting to lead one in the garden — with a sword. And it seems we still have many such "sons of thunder" among us. But Jesus never allowed Him-

self to become involved in that kind of movement.

I could see Him, however, outside the city, weeping and saying, "Oh Washington, thou that stonest the prophets. . . ."

What then, is there for those of us who care deeply about our nation but feel the job will not be done with marches, Christian picket lines, or joining such organizations as Christians for Reagan?

One of America's elder Christian statesmen, a member of the steering committee for the Washington for Jesus march, stopped by my house a few days before the April rally.

"It won't do any good," he said sadly in reply to my question. "There are too many big names involved. How can a man humble himself and primp for national TV at the same time?"

He went ahead to say the only thing that would touch the heart of God would be one million people gathering in Washington to simply kneel on the Mall for two hours and PRAY. That's all. No speeches. No lobbying. No press releases. No Jesus T-shirts. Just praying and weeping.

Unfortunately, that was not the purpose of this particular march.

After the rally I talked with one of the leaders. "I have been weepy ever since the rally," he said. "Many good things happened. We had a chance to hear each other's preachers — and much good came from that. But the thing we so desperately need did not happen — national repentance. Instead of wearing sackcloth, we dressed for TV."

What, then, can we do?

Preach a Gospel that will change the lives of men, including politicians.

Impart the Holy Spirit to this generation that Christian leaders may function in His power.

Become personally involved in government, either by running for office or helping elect godly men.

Cast a biblical vote.

After we elect Christians to office we need to release them to be led by the Holy Spirit, backing them up with fasting and prayer.

But most of all, we must begin to live our repentance, not in a public demonstration, but in a changed lifestyle.

We may not get our faces on national TV, and we might not even make much of an impression on voter-conscious politicians. But we just might touch God — and see our land healed. ☞