

# ENDORSEMENT DILEMMAS

BY JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Several years ago after three candidates for sheriff all showed up at the same Sunday morning worship service, I determined I needed to be mighty careful when it came to endorsing folks for public office.

It began so simply. I have strong feelings about the direction the education system of this nation is going, and had encouraged a member of our church to run for the school board. When she got her party's nomination I felt obligated to endorse her from the pulpit—and to ask our folks to vote for her.

No problem. That is, until the word got out that the largest church in the community had endorsed a political candidate. It was the next Sunday morning that all three candidates for sheriff appeared in the service.

Before the service began I was besieged by enthusiastic supporters of all three candidates asking me to recognize "their man" in the service. All three, I was told, were active in their churches. (I kept wondering, if they were active in their

own churches, why weren't they there instead of at our church?) One group of people pulled me aside and told me that one of the candidates even believed in miracles. (I later discovered he was a member of the occult church where his wife was pastor.)

It was a tense time. One of the candidates was the incumbent. He had worn his uniform to church that morning so he could easily be spotted. Another stood out front and passed out handbills. The third candidate (the one who believed in miracles) came to the altar to ask for prayer.

I got out of the situation (well, I really didn't get out of it—I just covered it over with what is known as spiritual diplomacy) by recognizing all three candidates and asking the folks to pray for them that the right man would be elected.

Shortly after the election I announced I would not endorse any candidate unless he was a member of our church. The following year we had two members of our church who ran against each other for the state legislature. Both had large families in the church as well as many friends and supporters. I was in trouble. Twice I almost went to the elders with a "word from God" that it was time for me to take my long overdue sabbatical leave.

I've learned to appreciate the approach of my friend, Congressman Bill Nelson, who is a member of our church in Melbourne, Florida. Nelson has made a point of not accepting church speaking engagements—including interviews on Christian TV—during his campaign. He feels it is wrong to flaunt his relationship with God as a vote-getter. The only exception he makes is to speak occasionally in his home church, but since he does that in the off-election years also it seems natural.

When Nelson first ran for the U.S. Congress six years ago, there was a clearcut choice between himself and his opponent. Given the choice I bearded the political lions and not only publicly endorsed him, but with the confirmation of

the elders, called the church into a three-day fast just prior to his election. Since we have some Spirit-filled believers in our congregation who were members of the "opposing" party, I realized I was risking a danger of alienating myself from an entire segment of the congregation. But since the choice was so clear ahead with the public endorsement.

However, to vote for a candidate simply because he (or she) announces as a Christian is a poor decision. All things being equal I will always choose a godly man over an ungodly one—just as I prefer for a godly surgeon to cut me open rather than an ungodly one. But if the choice is between a highly skilled non-Christian surgeon and a godly incompetent who has already killed 70 percent of his patients, I will probably choose the heathen.

In politics it's not only the man that counts, but the platform he stands for. Walter Mondale, for instance, gives the appearance of being a godly man. He is a professing Christian and the son of a minister. He grew up in a parsonage. But I have severe problems with his platform. I am convinced the runaway, giveaway economics of his party would lead us to financial disaster. Even greater than that, I believe the abortion issue is bringing us to the place where God's wrath will fall on us as quickly as it did on Nazi Germany because of Hitler's action against those he classified as "inferior." (Remember, this included not only Jews, but the mentally retarded, the lame, the blacks, as well as dissident Christians.)

Ronald Reagan is a very private man when it comes to his faith. He does not flaunt it publicly. True, he speaks the right words and carries himself as a man of faith. But the outer evidence is unclear. Yet when it comes to his platform, however, the choice is black and white. And because of that, I agree with this magazine's decision to endorse him as president.

Now, having said that, I only hope Reagan and Mondale don't both show up in my church next Sunday. ☺



Jamie Buckingham is Charisma's editor-at-large and serves in an apostolic ministry at The Tabernacle Church in Melbourne, Florida. He is the author of more than 30 books.