

This book review published on page 2 and 3 of the “St. Louis MetroVoice,” December, 2006 issue.

Faith and Politics: How the “moral values” debate divides America and how to move forward together

Author: Rev. John Danforth, former Republican senator from Missouri
Viking Press, 238 pages, \$24.95

Reviewer: Rev. Stephen Apostolos Cakouros

The poet John Milton wrote, “. . . who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye.”

The author of *Paradise Lost* makes the killing of a good book a capital offense. We are not in danger of committing such an offense since *Faith and Politics* by Senator John Danforth came to us dead from the printer. It is not by any imagining what Milton would call a good book. Laymen will soon discover that the senator glosses over those passages of the Bible that do not meet with his approval. Scholars will look in vain for something significant. At the same time a comment is made near the beginning of the book that does get our attention. Danforth says that "Jesus said almost nothing about government." Apart from this being a wobbly sentence, it is misleading.

The gospels are replete with political references. Just one example will suffice to prove this. Every time Jesus came into conflict with the Pharisees, politics and religion were both in play. Thorough research would have shown the senator that John Hyrcanus [c.104 B.C.] opened the way for the Pharisees to enter politics. By the time Jesus began His preaching ministry the Pharisees were a political/religious party. The Pharisee Nicodemus is called by the apostle John a “ruler of the Jews.” [John 3:1] The political intrigues of the Pharisees indicate that the gospels were written during the period accorded them by conservative scholars.

The book jacket displays what appears to be a revelation. A photograph of the senator takes up the entire front cover. What happened to the old days in England when clerics signed their books with only their initials? The reader should not be surprised to learn that this book suffers from pedantry. The senator wants us to follow him through the political jungle, but as we turn the pages we discover that even an experienced politician can lose his way. The senator has fallen in with secular progressives who have been known to be guided by a flawed compass. This explains why their paths have taken them south of Christianity. Danforth, though a Republican, a member of the so-called party of “family values,” has by following them left the straight and narrow. For one thing he is now on the same page with the homosexual community. He has gone so far to the left of Christ that he now calls on religious groups to develop ways in which they can officially sanction same sex relationships.

Just as one might suspect, the senator takes other liberties. Without compunction he tells us that if we so desire we can harvest human embryonic stem cells, even though this will cost the

unnamed donor/victim his or her life. Those involved in that research have no appreciation for Psalm 139 and the value it places on embryonic life. Is that psalm not in Danforth's Bible?

Danforth fully backs research which allows for embryonic stem cell harvesting. This involves what the average man or woman would call “cloning,” however it has been labeled by another less objectionable scientific term: somatic cellular nucleus transfer. Since cloning has a negative connotation for about 87% of Missourians, the advertising savants behind the recent Amendment 2 campaign set out to confuse voters. There should be no doubt whatsoever that Senator Danforth was a major player in this promotion which columnist Robert Novak said was nothing short of a “scam.” The misinformation campaign used redefinition in the same way that revisionists reshape history.

Senator Danforth and his associates are very conscious of the fact that embryonic stem cell harvesting is viewed with suspicion by most of the Christian community. This explains why the senator, who is also a reverend, has been using his ordination as a marketing ploy to support research-grade cloning.

We were supposed to be persuaded not only because Danforth was a senator, but also a reverend. Day and night, he appeared on our television screens. Uninvited he came into our living rooms and there in the presence of the family Bible [containing the 9th commandment, “you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”] he audaciously called his opponents liars because they exposed the fraudulent nature of the proposed Amendment 2.

Pesky Evangelicals

While telling us how we should do things Danforth seems incapable of either stretching the mind or touching the heart. In respect of the latter, he is not able to conceal his contempt for Evangelical Christians that have of late become involved in the culture wars. The topic of love comes up, but it is in very short supply when it comes to Evangelicals. The thesis of the book is that America [in particular the Republican party] is being divided at this time between outspoken Evangelicals and conservatives and those who wish to include everyone in the Republican Party. The fault, if there is a fault [by the way, Jesus was accused of dividing Israel] lies with Christian conservatives who are “getting all the attention.” One can easily detect that Danforth is fearful that he will be pushed out of his own political party. He seems to think of his political party as if it were a family from which no member should be disowned. Faith, as it applies to politics, is nothing more than a synonym for tolerance.

With this definition of faith prompting him the author places in the crosshairs almost all outspoken Christian/Evangelical conservatives. They are far too narrow and “divisive.” One has to wonder what Rev. Danforth would have said about John Calvin of Geneva or Savonarola of Florence who were deeply involved in politics and could not tolerate anyone who separated their lives into two parts, the political and the ethical. True to form Danforth takes exception to Catholic bishops who desire to fence off the communion table from Roman Catholic politicians who vote in favor of abortion-on-demand in order to procure favor with voters. The senator seems to think that we are wrong when we tell politicians that they must first reckon with God before considering the wishes of their constituents.

The Deity

Danforth even tells us that he can make known the nature of the Deity. Truly! As a matter of fact he says that his desire to include everyone in his political party is based on his enlightened understanding of the nature of God. Rev. Danforth tells the reader that he believes in “a large God.” This God we discover “cannot be shrunken by political activists and stuffed into their own agendas.” We detect in this remark a sleight of hand. When conservative Christians demand that politicians act in accordance with their values, that is politics. But when progressives call for the lowering of moral standards, that is faith expressing itself in the political arena. Running like a fault line throughout this book is this glaring inconsistency.

Quite naturally this kind of a written work will be filled with autobiographical references. The most disturbing biographical note records how Danforth changed his position over time when it comes to decency itself. He rejects the words of Moses, “You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.” [Lev. 18:22] *The author has strayed so far to the left of traditional Christianity that he even provides homosexuals with a set of governing rules.* He thinks that sodomy is acceptable if homosexuals prove faithful to one another. In other words faithfulness rids the sin from sodomy.

Danforth recounts how he was reproved by his fellow Episcopalians for not being sensitive enough to homosexuals. Apparently his opinion began to change about that time. Now the senator is right in step with his denomination [The Episcopal Church in America] which in the last few years has ordained an active homosexual to the high office of bishop. This is largely due to the way that church interprets truth. Danforth speaks in a way that is representative of his church. “God's truth is expansive enough to embrace conflicting opinions, even on hot button issues, even if with people with whom we vehemently disagree.” *Here is the flaw in his thinking. He does not understand the nature of truth. Truth is not inclusive; it is exclusive.* Truth says this is; the other is not. But this is not how liberal America thinks about truth when it comes to moral issues, and the senator is clearly a liberal when it comes to what homosexuals may do when they disrobe, or what technocrats may do when they don lab coats.

Inferences

Danforth by writing this book may be inferring that Evangelicals cannot be trusted, and that they may be in favor of a particular kind of government, one less democratic with no room for his large God. Inferences of that kind are malicious and common among those who feign that they are more democratic than those sitting to the right of them. The senator must know that Evangelicals have generally avoided politics, and that most of them voted as Democrats [when they did vote] before Roe v. Wade and Gay activist movement. Politicians know that Evangelicals became vocal when they saw that America was sliding in the direction of Europe, the new Dark Continent. What some of these politicians [Danforth among them] do not seem to know is that if the Evangelicals do not vote in favor of the Republican Party it will once more become a minority party in America. This means that if the Republican Party is wise and if it wants to retain power, it will have to place considerable distance between itself and books like this one.

At the same time a book like this can be read. It will provide the reader with an insight as to how *theological liberals* think. Just like Evangelicals they know that they must base their opinions on what God is like. Liberals have created God in their own image. He is popular chiefly because he is flexible. This God has the capacity to move along with the times. Something proscribed and vehemently condemned by the apostles can now be reversed. Consequently this large God cannot make room for those whose old-fashioned values force them to speak up because they know if they did not speak, the rocks would cry out. All of a sudden the liberal God becomes intolerant.

I must say that if the senator is as loving as he wishes us to believe he is, he will take pity on these Christian conservatives who do not meet with his approval. A handful may be opportunists, others may be zany, but most are like the reformer Martin Luther who was held *captive* to something called conscience, a conscience that had been instructed in the Word of God. Could Luther have kept silent? Never! That being the case the senator should know that it will take more than his sparsely-worded offering to silence those of us who according to him are getting too much attention.

Christians reason from the Scriptures when it comes to matters of conscience. If Danforth wants to change our thinking about the Word of God, he will need to show us how to cut-and-paste as he does. If he could do that, faith would be what it is to him - tolerance. Of course his chances at succeeding in this are slim indeed, especially if *Faith and Politics* is any indication of his skill in influencing us who are familiar with the Good Book. The Good Book knows nothing of the large and liberal God which the senator preaches. The God of the Good Book "is the same yesterday and today and forever." [Heb. 13:8] Secular progressives must face it; the God of the Bible will never allow Himself to be updated. Those who recognize this are the real savants, and they prefer to be thought of as the servants of the most high God.