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Misplaced Priorities

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. --1Tim 6:18, 19

Scott Rasmussen and other leading pollsters continue to show “the economy” to be upper most in the minds of American voters as presidential aspirants jockey into position for a Labor Day launch of the 2012 Presidential Elections. At the moment, the U.S. economy is in very deep trouble, placing President Obama’s re-election odds next year in question.

For the minority who are less concerned with pocketbook issues but who believe America’s moral freefall is the cause rather than the result of the nation’s financial troubles—for them—the polls suggest an electorate with sadly misplaced priorities.

If, as James Carville insisted during Bill Clinton’s first run for the White House, “*It’s the economy, Stupid,*” then ultimately, President Obama will not be excised from office for his radical and arbitrary family policies that profoundly affect marriage, the pre-born, and the elderly. And, he may even get a pass for social tinkering that affects the good order of our Armed Forces, his threat to states’ rights by joining the government of Mexico in a lawsuit against the State of Arizona, and his indifference, if not callous disregard, for certain long-cherished Christian observances.

But, according to polls, Mr. Obama will surely be held accountable for an exponential growth in federal spending and corresponding debt, lost jobs, a worsening mortgage-lending market, vanishing home equities, and a sharp spike in the consumer price index. In other words, if Barack Obama is turned out of office in November, 2012—it will not be for moral malfeasance but rather for failing to keep two chickens in every pot.

After racking up 365 electoral votes to John McCain’s 173 in the 2008 General Elections, it seems difficult to comprehend just how far Mr. Obama’s star has fallen. Most leading polls show Mr. Obama’s job performance approval hovering at 45.5%—very deep in the danger zone for an otherwise likeable incumbent president. For comparison, former President Jimmy Carter enjoyed a 54% approval rating at the same point in his first and only term.

Although Mr. Obama leads all specifically identified Republican challengers at this point, he falls 3.7% behind when matched against an unnamed “generic” Republican. This indicates that while voters haven’t found the product they are ready to purchase, they are indeed shopping.

Still, with 15 months to go, many political pundits are persuaded that Election 2012 is Barack Obama’s to lose. They believe this because Mr. Obama is so very likeable, he is a born campaigner, and because he enjoys the inscrutable power of incumbency.

What is not considered is that historically, presidential elections, in fact, favor the challenger!

During the 20th Century, 16 presidents were elected to office but only five were re-elected to a second term. Considering all U.S. presidents from George Washington to George W. Bush, just 16-of-38 were elected to serve their own full second terms and five more died during their first term.

Certainly, the early retirements of some former presidents were a result of “bad economies.” Martin Van Buren (1837-41) was dubbed “Martin Van Ruin” by his political rivals when the panic of 1837 escalated into a full-blown depression. And, Herbert Hoover (1929-33), of course, is intractably linked to the stock market crash of 1929, eight months into his first and only term as President.

And, while Jimmy Carter was perceived to be a weak Commander-in-Chief for failing after 444 days to bring 52 U.S. hostages home from Tehran, it was probably “stagflation” (stagnant wages and rising prices) that helped to bring an end to his administration.

But, until recent times, a widely fluctuating economy was generally accepted as a fact of life. For example, the U.S. economy experienced no fewer than 11 severe downturns (about one-per decade) from 1797 to 1922. These downturns, on average, lasted about three years. The name applied to these regular downward adjustments was “depression”—an acceptable term until The Great Depression that lasted from 1929 to 1941 and spread to the rest of the world. Since 1948, the U.S. has experienced 11 more downturns, except that they are now called “recessions.”

While Herbert Hoover took the fall for the stock market crash of 1929, the economy was actually in recovery mode by 1933 and had posted two successive quarters of growth when Franklin Roosevelt took office. Similar to the Bush-Obama “Stimulus Plan,” Roosevelt devised a host of government projects calling for unprecedented borrowing and spending that actually plunged the economy back to the cellar where it remained for another eight years.

So where do the interests of the Church and State blend and where do they collide these days? We suspect where they always have. When the prophets of old met with kings, it always concerned moral issues. Even David and Solomon were lavish spenders, but their heaven-sent rebukes concerned besetting personal sins. If not dealt with, sin inevitably spills into public performance and eventually defiles a nation. In other words, when a king or president defies “natural law” (we know as God’s law), even his subjects or constituents are placed in harm’s way.

But, our concern here, is the worry and fretting—even in the Church—regarding investments, retirements, and social security. Although the Church today regards a believer’s accumulation of wealth as a sign of God’s blessing, it should be noted it is the LEAST of His blessings (Luke 16:11)—the bottom of the barrel. Jesus even called mammon (money) *unrighteous* and asked, if we have not been faithful in its use, who will commit to our trust true riches? Timothy urges us to use our goods in a way that will ensure a welcome when we get home (our future estate). (1Tim 6:17-19).

One further sidebar on capitalism and the state of the U.S. economy:

Both Zechariah and John the revelator saw four horsemen (of the apocalypse) appearing in the last days. More than a few Bible expositors think the black horse and rider could possibly represent *capitalism*. Scales in the hand of the rider suggests some type of worldwide commerce or common economic system is in place immediately before Messiah returns. And spreading “democratic” capitalism has certainly been the hallmark foreign policy of the past few administrations, if not the legacy of the Bush 43 presidency.

That said, while the state of our national economy should not be our leading concern, it is an indicator of serious troubles warranting much prayer. But praying is never a fallback. It is always the remedy.

Rick Forcier