

# Religion and Politics: The Legitimate Role

By Representative Newt Gingrich

**I** believe that we are on the edge of historic victories for this country. I believe that when the conservative movement finishes replacing the welfare state with an opportunity society, that one of the major chapters on how it happened will be this building and the speeches held here and the research done here and the networking done here. And I can't stand here without saying that I am looking forward very, very much to working with The Heritage Foundation and to continuing the development of ideas and solutions. Ed Feulner and his entire team deserve tremendous recognition as one of the real foundations of a successful future in American polity.

I wanted a chance to speak out on school prayer, but to put it into a contextual framework, both politically and culturally, that I think will help people understand why this is emerging as what I think will be one of the seminal fights of the rest of the decade. School prayer is important in itself because it is useful to have the right to pray voluntarily in school and have student-led prayers. But I think it's more important as a way of establishing the battleground about the nature of America's future and what it is that makes America a unique civilization.

Let me put it in this context. Many of you have heard me talk before about the notion that if you're going to have a process that is complicated, you need a planning model. The one that we derived from how George Marshall and Franklin Roosevelt fought World War II was to establish a hierarchy, first of vision, then of strategies, then of projects, and then of tactics. But first you have to establish your vision of where you're going. If you will explain what it is you're trying to get done, whether it is your career or your country or your corporation, that is what your vision is of what you're doing. Which is why, for example, McDonald's has a different vision of itself than would a gourmet restaurant. Not a better or a worse vision, but a different one.

Once you have established your vision, you have to think: What are your strategies for implementing your vision? Then you have to establish projects, which are the building blocks of your strategy. A project in an entrepreneurial model is a definable, delegatable achievement. Then, at the bottom, you have to have tactics.

I would argue that for the last 40 years, or at least certainly since the 1963 school prayer decision, you have a clear struggle under way which we have been unable to talk about in public life with any sense of clarity because it is essentially a vision-level fight. School prayer in this context is either a strategy or a project, depending on how you want to define it, but it is not a vision. I do not have a vision of America which is dramatically better just because people pray, but I do have a vision of an America in which a belief in the Creator is once again at the center of defining being an American. That is a radically different vision of America than the secular, anti-religious view of the left.

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He spoke at The Heritage Foundation on October 5, 1994.

ISSN 0272-1155 © 1994 by The Heritage Foundation.

So first of all, I think you have to have an engagement at the vision level. The engagement is: How do you think America works as a civilization? What do you think its core values are? And what do you think the Constitution means? I would argue that what has happened to us since the mid-sixties is a combination of a Lyndon Johnson Great Society/McGovernite Socialist world view, combined in a sense with the Berkeley/Woodstock counter-culture to argue that government bureaucracies can solve problems, that secular ways of acting are all you need. Any effort to focus on the private sector, on charities and on religious faith, is by definition inappropriate, politically incorrect, and cannot be debated. So we have literally said, in effect, are you for more education or less, by which—in the popular, secular left-wing—we meant more money for unionized bureaucracy (Note, for example, the article on page one of the *Post* this morning describing how the money that went to Washington, D.C., went to hire more staff to pay the highest-paid school board in America while the children were being ruined).

But the only left-wing secular answer is to send more money to the people who are failing. By the way, you can have no serious discussion about what's being taught at a values level or a cultural level, because that would clearly be some sign that you were a right-wing Neanderthal who didn't understand appropriate levels of sensitivity.

Now I want to argue that at the vision level, if you start with the Court's reasoning in 1963 and you see everywhere the modern left's efforts to drive religion out of the public square, there is a very consistent world view. The world view is that religion is O.K. as a tamed hobby on Sunday mornings or Saturday, depending on your faith. It is fine to have religion isolated off on the side here, but it is not the core of being human. That in fact, the core of being human is two things. It is your appetite and your pocket book. So, in a sense, it is economic man and woman and hedonistic man and woman. Those two, of course, have to be dealt with in the secular world. Those are totally appropriate. And since politics is, in the left's view, a secular behavior, any effort to reach over here into this tamed hobby of religion is, by definition, irrelevant, inappropriate, and doesn't relate to either hedonistic human or economic human, which is the core of the political debate.

We have had an experiment for approximately a quarter of a century with that world view. The results have been astonishing. I say that as an historian. I'm looking forward to a chance to go to any campus or any venue in the country to defend the following statement, which I would defend anywhere as a history teacher: It is impossible to maintain civilization with 12-year-olds having babies, 15-year-olds killing each other, 17-year-olds dying of AIDS, or 18-year-olds getting diplomas that they can't read. It's just impossible. So we are really in a crisis of our civilization, because those four things are happening everywhere in America and in every state in the country our civilization is decaying. It is a grand irony, because we managed to contain the Soviet Empire for a half a century, win an enormous victory for freedom, and in the same cycle begin the process of decaying our civilization.

The crisis of secular politics is that you cannot explain a solution which truly changes the lives of 12-year-olds, the 15-year-olds, the 17-year-olds, and the 18-year-olds on a purely secular, bureaucratic, welfare, redistribution model. It's impossible. So what happens is—and I noticed this Sunday debating Tim Russert on "Meet the Press"—the elite press and the elite bureaucrats and the elite politicians and the elite academics have no comprehension of the importance of the spiritual life. They have no comprehension of why the word "Creator" matters. The elites have no comprehension of the notion that if you don't have God at the center of what you're doing, then you can't tell what you're doing. So what you're doing, by definition, can't in the long run be positive. They would, in fact, regard those concepts as signs of an effort to create a theocracy on the Iranian model.

It is virtually impossible for elites to engage in this discussion. It is almost, to use a phrase from the great song by my namesake, as though “they were blind, but now can see.” Well, they’re blind and they’re still blind. So when you try to have a debate with them, since by definition they do not believe in what you’re saying, they reject what you’re saying; and, therefore, they repudiate the debate itself. They can’t engage the debate because they don’t even understand the terms of the debate. So the act of debating ceases to occur, and you simply get smeared or labeled.

Look, for example, at Ralph Reed’s book *Politically Incorrect: The Emerging Faith Factor in American Politics*. It is almost impossible for the elite press to take Ralph Reed seriously. They can’t stand him. If Ralph Reed were a left-winger putting this together in favor of the environment and had as many people actively working with him and listening to him as a left-wing environmentalist, he would be a cult figure. The entire left would be thrilled to see him. They would say, “What a wonderful, innovative young man helping to save America.” Instead, he is, of course, a weird barbarian threatening the city of corruption with the danger of being saved. Therefore, all the forces of elitism rally to smear him.

Now, in that context, let me suggest to you two things. First, that the elites almost are out of the game in being unable to understand the analysis. Only if they are prepared to reopen their biases and their prejudices do they have any hope of understanding. I’ll give you one specific example. A good friend of mine who was part of the elite found that he had a very severe addiction problem. Now an active member of Alcoholics Anonymous, he said to me, “It is stunning to understand that the 12 steps begin with belief in a Supreme Being and being able to take your weaknesses and your problems and give them to the Supreme Being.” My friend said what he’s found is that he is now fascinated with the problem of therapy and addiction, since it affects his life and he’s a baby boomer. Baby boomers always believe that whatever has happened to them is worthy of study. Baby boomers will have an increasing fascination with aging as they age, just as they had a fascination with youth when they were young. It’s the burden of their children to put up with whatever is their parents’ most recent experience. And so now he’s into this, and he said it’s fascinating: you go to secular state hospitals, with very expensive therapists, and what they say to you is that they do 11 of the 12 steps. He says, “What about the one they start with?” They say, “We can’t do it; it’s illegal.” He says that as a result, what they basically say is, “We sure hope as soon as we get this person dried out, they go somewhere and find an AA group so they can get back to the first step, which is belief in a Supreme Being, so the other 11 steps will work, because it turns out if you skip the first step, the other 11 don’t work.”

So you can go to AAs for free because, as all of you know, they are totally non-bureaucratic, have no membership, accept no money, and don’t exist in the welfare state. CBO would score Alcoholics Anonymous as a non-existent investment. And, therefore, somebody has said, “Why don’t we fund Alcoholics Anonymous, it might save lives,” would clearly be a non-contributor to the secular bureaucratic state. And yet, if you were to ask which is more powerful as a method of helping human beings recover their lives, I don’t think any serious student has ever suggested that any other system is as powerful as AA. But it starts with a totally politically incorrect first step.

Now let me carry it a step further. I feel very comfortable doing this as a history teacher, because I find it so astonishingly ignorant. The Supreme Court decision in 1963 was bad law, bad history, and bad culture. It was just wrong. It was one of those occasions when the Court just did the wrong thing. If the Court doesn’t want to reverse itself, then we have an absolute obligation to pass a constitutional amendment to instruct the Court on its error.

Why was the 1963 decision wrong? It was wrong as law because it misread the Constitution. I'm not a lawyer, but I am a historian. As an historian, I will just tell you flatly the meaning of the Constitution was simple. It was not to drive religion out of public life. It was to ensure that there would be no organized religion subsidized directly by the state and imposed on others. To attempt to interpret the language of the Constitution outside of the historical context of the late 18th Century is simply stupid and should not be tolerated. People who try to do it are not engaged in an argument between two equals; they're just wrong, and we ought to say that.

Why am I making this case this firmly? Because unless you read the Constitution in context, you cannot appreciate what the Founding Fathers were trying to accomplish. I want to give particular credit to somebody who may or may not agree with me on school prayer—I'm not trying to get him into the middle of this fight—but whose works, I think, should be read by every sophisticated American. That is Gordon Woods, whose two works on the origins of the American Revolution and the radicals in the American Revolution, I believe, are seminal studies of intellectual history and are brilliant. They were liberating events for me and reattached me intellectually to the roots of Reaganism and why Reagan's instinct was profoundly right about the America we want to be.

Gordon Woods' argument is that the Founding Fathers were reacting as Whig reformers against the Tory use of a large government with a lot of pork barrel. I mean, think of Bob Byrd as an 18th Century figure and you'll understand the model, in that the Founding Fathers were trying to limit government in a world in which, literally, you had to pay a tax to a church you didn't belong to and didn't believe in. When you look at disestablishment in that environment, it's a very specific response to the government use of the power of taxation to force you to believe in the Anglican Church. If you didn't believe in the Anglican Church, you were forced to obey the law as if you did. Remember, this was a period where, if you were Catholic, you couldn't run for public office in Britain. If you were Jewish, you couldn't run for public office. So when you talk about the context of seeking religious freedom, it was to block the state from favoring one religion over another. That has been grotesquely distorted in the Twentieth Century by all of the forces that hate American civilization, by all of the forces that are opposed to bourgeois values, and all the forces that despise the middle class into an elite caricature in which, in fact, they are opposed to religion appearing in public life.

This is peculiarly ironic. I suggest to you, go down to one of our greatest monuments, the Lincoln Memorial. There, carved into the wall, are portions of Lincoln's second inaugural address, which talks about God potentially imposing this Civil War on us as punishment for our sins. I mean, right in the middle of the inaugural, Lincoln talks about God as though it was O.K. Or walk across to what liberals think is the most anti-religious and certainly least religious of the Founding Fathers, the man who may well have been a Deist, Thomas Jefferson, and read what it says in that great statement around the top of the memorial: "I have sworn hostility upon the altar of God Almighty against all forms of tyranny over the mind of man." Now it is very weird that they would choose a quote in which he is saying that he has sworn on God Almighty if he didn't believe God existed. I mean, you have to assume that he was as reviled as some of our modern politicians. Clinton could have said it because it wouldn't have mattered. Jefferson, I bet, believed in God if he said he would swear on God's altar. In that context, even Jefferson brings God directly into it; and in our monument to him, we bring God directly into it. It's only in the last 30 years that this became bizarre.

Let me carry you a couple of stages further. I particularly want to thank David Barton, who did a wonderful paper called "The Myth of Separation," which I commend to all of you. It's quite useful. I just want to give you three examples he cites, because they are so revealing. He says, and I'm quoting mostly from David's paper: "Former President James Madison, who kept fastidious personal records of the Constitutional Convention's events and debates, described the turning point in the convention, a stinging rebuke delivered by the 81 year old Benjamin Franklin on Thursday, June 28, 1787. At the time of Franklin's address, the delegates were embroiled in a heated debate over how each state would be represented in the new government. The dispute had caused great animosity, pitting the larger states against the smaller ones, and creating bitter and hostile feelings between the state delegations. Addressing George Washington, President of the Convention, Franklin declared, 'Mr. President, the small progress we have made after four or five weeks' close attendance and continued reasonings with each other, our different sentiments in almost every question, several of the last producing as many no's as aye's is, me thinks, a melancholy proof of the imperfection of the human understanding. We indeed seem to feel our own want of political wisdom, since we have been running about in search of it. We have gone back to ancient history for models of government and examined the different forms of those Republics which, having been formed with the seeds of their own dissolution now no longer exist. And we have viewed modern states all around Europe, but find none of their constitutions suitable for our circumstances. In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it would present it to us, how has it happened, sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of Lights to illuminate our understanding. In the beginning of the contest with Great Britain when we were sensible of danger we had daily prayer in this room for the divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending providence in our favor. To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace in the means of establishing our future national validity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance?'"

On another date, Ben Franklin addressing George Washington, President of the Convention, June 28, 1787: "I have lived, sir, a long time. And the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writing, that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that builds it." I firmly believe this. And I also believe that without his concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel. We shall be divided by our partial local interests, our projects will be confounded, and we ourselves shall become a reproach and byword down to the future ages. And what is worse, mankind may hereafter from this unfortunate instance despair of establishing governments by human wisdom and leave it to chance war and conquest. I therefore beg leave to move that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessings on our deliberations be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business, and that one or more of the clergy of this city be requested to officiate in that service."

This was not Jerry Falwell. It was not Pat Robertson. This is the man often described by liberals in college classes as a wicked man who wrote *Poor Richard's Almanac*, who wrote his autobiography, and who did a variety of strange things. You almost never hear him described in any college classroom as a man who was, in fact, remarkably religious, embedded in the very core fabric of this culture and who understood the importance of God.

Now, the Convention couldn't pay the clergy. Notwithstanding, some clergy in the city, in response to the delegates' desire to convene with prayer and having no desire for monetary remuneration, responded affirmatively to their request. These measures had a profound effect on the Convention. Notice Jonathan Dayton's records for July 2nd, after they had turned their attention toward God: "We assembled again, and every unfriendly feeling had been expelled and a spirit of conciliation had been cultivated."

I will give you one more example out of this period: John Hancock, proclamation. Boston, Massachusetts, November 8, 1783. And again, Hancock, as you remember, signed the Declaration of Independence with the largest signature. You now see it on TV commercials for the insurance company, which for all too many American students is the only time they see it. They wonder why an insurance company was signing the Declaration of Independence, if in fact they've been taught there is a Declaration of Independence. He said the following:

Impress therefore with an all-exalted sense of the blessings by which we are surrounded, and of our entire dependence on that Almighty Being from which goodness and bounty they are derived. I do by and with the advice of the Council appoint Thursday, the 11th day of December next, the day recommended by the Congress to all of the states, to be religiously observed as a day of thanksgiving and prayer, that all of the people may then assemble to celebrate, that he that hath been pleased to continue to us the light of the blessed Gospel, may we also offer up fervent supplications to cause pure religion and virtue to flourish and to fill the world with His glory.

I was really struck with how baroque and bizarre the modern secular academic world has become, and as a result the reporters' understanding of reality. I had a talk with Ross Perot, who has a copy of the Bible printed by the Congress after 1776—the only officially printed Bible in American history, which they printed for the benefit of children since the British blockade had stopped Bibles arriving from Britain. The Continental Congress thought that it was important enough to have Bibles available that they printed them with public money.

Perot has a copy outside of his office, and he sent me an article and a book that had been written about it. He didn't offer to send me the Bible, unfortunately. There are only three copies left in current form.

But some of you may say, "Well, that was the Founding Fathers. That was the 18th Century. They were archaic people; how do they relate to the modern world?" This is, of course, the argument for ensuring the children can get through high school without learning anything about history. Frankly, history is an ongoing rebuke to secular left-wing values. They can't afford to teach history because it would destroy the core vision of a hedonistic, existentialist America in which there is no past and there is no future, so you might as well let the bureaucrats decide.

Let me give you a more recent example: the greatest President of the 20th Century—Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Inside the Bibles which were printed for distribution to the troops in World War II—and I was given a copy of this by a man who kept it from World War II—we read:

As Commander in Chief, I take pleasure in commending the reading of the Bible to all who serve in the armed forces of the United States. Throughout the centuries men of many faiths and diverse origins have found in the sacred book words of wisdom, counsel, and inspiration. It is a fountain of strength, and now as always, an aid in obtaining the highest aspiration to the human soul.  
— Franklin Delano Roosevelt, The White House.

To my Democratic friends who believe that religious faith is archaic, I would suggest to them that Franklin Roosevelt understood the modern world very, very well indeed and that, just as he opposed permanent welfare, he also opposed anti-religious, secular behaviors as being just plain stupid, because they are destructive to human beings. They weaken and cripple people. If you eliminate the soul, you probably also eliminate the person's capacity to live a decent life.

So, from the standpoint of all of American history, if you want to understand us as a civilization, you have to begin with an understanding of the framework in which we were founded as a country. If you want to understand the Founding Fathers, I believe it is literally impossible to suggest that the Founding Fathers were engaged in a process by which they intended to have people live in a secular world. I think that you cannot historically prove that.

There is another example which I want to put in context: de Tocqueville, the leading student of America and author of *Democracy in America*, a book which remains probably the best capturing of American civilization. He says the following: "Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions." Let me repeat that, because it is so astonishingly the opposite of modern left-wing secularism. "Religion... must be regarded as the first of their political institutions. How is it possible that society should escape destruction if the moral tie is not strengthened in proportion as the political tie is relaxed? And what can be done with a people who are their own masters, if they are not submissive to the deity?" This is a French aristocrat writing about America in 1840. Again, it's not Ralph Reed; it's not Pat Robertson; it's not Jerry Falwell; it's not even a man who as far as I know ever preached. It is a French observer of the American scene which occurred one generation after the Founding Fathers.

I teach a course called "Renewing American Civilization" that I try to get everybody to take a look at and which I will mention in passing is available. It's 20 hours long and available in audio and video tape. And you can actually get it by calling an 800 number—the other thing I borrowed from Perot. You can call 1-800-TO RENEW. I teach the course, frankly and largely, to teach me, because it gives me an environment that isn't a nine-second soundbite or 40 seconds on a Sunday morning talk show or even a speech at Heritage. It gives me a chance to actually lay out in 20 hours what it takes to replace this collapsing secular welfare state that has failed. I was very surprised the first time I taught it. We got into Q&A, and a student asked me if I really, really believed voluntary school prayer mattered that much. I found myself in the answer passionately going into the point that is at the end of the de Tocqueville quote. It was just a process of letting my own thoughts sort of unfold in the classroom setting where you can be so much more open than in most political environments.

This is what he said: "What can be done with a people who are their own masters, if they are not submissive to the deity." Let me tell you what that meant to me. We state in our Declaration of Independence that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights. That is the most radical single affirmation for humans in the history of the human race. We don't get it by contract. We don't get it because the king gave it to us. We don't get it even because we formed a compact. We are endowed by our Creator.

Now in the modern age, written by modern liberals, it would have been "being randomly gathered protoplasm, we have rationally concluded that for the moment the following things seem O.K." This goes to the core of our problems.

Let me take just a second here to introduce a caveat. I believe the quote I saw by President Clinton, who now, apparently, is reading religious books. I believe all humans sin. I believe every reporter sins, every politician sins, every preacher sins, every citizen sins. So I just want to set that out, because otherwise you will rapidly find out, for example, that I am divorced and remarried. You will have some left-wing reporter write a column about how can this hypocrite Gingrich talk about being religious, or whatever. I'm saying this because what's happened is the left has established a standard of destroying people by discovering they're human. Anybody who speaks out then becomes a hunting ground for destruction. That's not the point of this. The point of this is to say that since all of us sin, and since all of us fall short of the glory of God, all of us need to go to God in our own way and seek God's help, which is also the essence in the beginning of Alcoholics Anonymous's 12 steps.

The purpose and power of opening the day with school prayer, just like the purpose and power of opening the day with the Pledge of Allegiance, is to establish a contextual framework. I believe you establish three contexts when you open the day with school prayer. All three matter.

The first context is you remind everyone in the room that there is a spiritual life larger than yourself and that you are, in fact, not just dealing with secular things.

This is why sex education, condoms, and the entire Surgeon General's approach are insanity, because, while it's useful to know how to get pregnant or not get pregnant, how to get AIDS or not get AIDS, it is even more useful to know that engaging in intimate relations between humans is more than a mechanical relationship. Sex is a subset of a larger thing called romance, and giving to each other and with each other is more than 18 minutes in a singles' bar. I realize that this is very politically incorrect. But it is very true. So you have to understand who should share with your child the most intimate concepts about life, the most intimate concepts about relationships. How can you ensure that the person who shares these is, in fact, a caring human being who shares your values, as distinct from somebody who can teach you how to put a condom on a banana?

The very fact is that on the left, they don't get it, so they say, "Well, what do you object to about these things?" What we object to is "those things." It is not the tactics or the projects or the strategies. We repudiate their vision of how to be human. We repudiate their model of how life works. We repudiate their very understanding of the essence of dealing with the process of being alive. So it is a vision-level fight between two ways of seeing reality and two visions of how humans behave.

So the first point is to re-establish in school and everywhere else, just as we do in the Capitol by having a prayer every day, that there is a spiritual dimension to our existence. The decision, for instance, to risk American lives in Desert Storm was a vote of spiritual dimensions. It was not just a practical "Well, how many casualties do we take? After all we are paying them, so I guess they're mercenaries. So what?" These were our children we were risking. We owed it to them, as the fathers and mothers of the country gathered together symbolically in the Capitol, to vote on risking the lives of our children—which is why the current callous use of our military in Haiti and in Somalia is so abhorrent to anyone who has a spiritual sense of the families and the human beings who are at stake.

Second, it is important to begin the day with voluntary school prayer to remind everyone of the word "Creator." Let me tell you why. It's not so I can remind you about me. It's so I can get you to think about yourself. When you waste a life, it's not just the line that "a life is a terrible thing to waste" or "a mind is a terrible thing to waste." When you waste your life, you are wasting God's gift. You are not just betraying me or betraying America or betraying



yourself; you are walking out on God. That is an immensely more powerful tie and changes the equation in most people's minds. It goes to the core of why Alcoholics Anonymous starts with the belief in a Supreme Being.

It is important at two levels. One, I'm a lot more precious if I'm God's child. It also means you want to end racism, you want to end hatred, and you want to end rape. You're not just raping another organism who happens to be male or female. You are, in fact, raping one of God's creatures whom God has endowed. You are assaulting God. The act of murder isn't just an act of eliminating a temporary organism created by biotechnology. It is killing one of God's creatures who has a soul given them by God, and it is an attack on God. It is a very different model of life.

This is the second reason. Historically there is, I believe, a great chain of being. The teacher is part of an authority structure that in the Middle Ages was described as going from God to King to Duke, and so on. Well, teachers are not just bureaucrats paid randomly to watch students misbehave. Teachers are people selected by this society to embody and model the correct behaviors and to inculcate those behaviors in the next generation.

Every generation has two waves of immigrants. One is geographic: foreigners. The second wave is temporal: our children. Just as much as you have to educate foreigners into American civilization so they learn what it is to be American, you have to educate children into American civilization to learn what it is to be American. The teacher is fully as much an authority symbol in this framework as is a military person or a policeman. An attack on a teacher should be dealt with as an attack on the entire structure of authority. The reason you insist on discipline is because we pay the teacher to teach you something you should learn. They can't teach you that if you're not listening to them. When discipline, the sense of understanding, and the sense of hierarchy all break down, then it turns out people who randomly wander around and say, "Why should I listen to a teacher who makes \$35,000 a year when I can listen to the pimp and drug dealer who made \$200,000 last year?" The reason is because the pimp and the drug dealer are outside any relationship with the Creator and are illegitimate authorities. Sheer money doesn't compensate for moral authority in a healthy culture. This is why very few women become prostitutes and very few men become armed robbers. Even if the money is good, the cultural consequences of trying to lead that kind of life are so devastating that for healthy people it is an unacceptable alternative. Most people will go through great deprivation to avoid doing things that are that harmful.

So part of the purpose of the prayer is to re-assert, to remind, and to re-establish the authentic legitimacy of this kind of engagement. Now, this is a totally different vision of America. Let me give you just two examples of where I think we conservatives failed in the 1980s. And I said "we." I'm not blaming anybody. The 1980s were, in fact, in many ways a remarkable decade. Ronald Reagan re-established American morale after the Democrats' malaise. He re-asserted the right to economic opportunity and to entrepreneurship by cutting marginal tax rates, leading to the longest period of economic growth in peacetime history. He built up the military to contain and defeat the Soviet empire, brought down the Berlin Wall, and rid some 20 countries of dictatorships. By most standards, it was impressive. In this city, among the left, it was just a bad waste of a decade. But I want you to understand that I'm not complaining. I'm just suggesting that we made some mistakes.

Let me give you two examples. I believe that in 1981, when the press decided that exploiting the homeless was the way to undermine Reaganism, the President should have said, "Of course we don't want to have people on the streets. Of course these are problems. And therefore I am asking every church in America and every synagogue in America to agree to adopt one homeless person." Two things would have happened overnight. First,

you would have had far more resources than you needed. There are more churches and synagogues than there are homeless people. The other is, within weeks, people in their local community would have figured out this is largely a drug addiction and alcoholism problem. They would have said to themselves, "We had better find a solution that is much more profound than building shelters." We would have saved about \$12 billion to \$15 billion in secular state spending. We would have taken the whole issue from the left. We would have eliminated a whole set of bureaucracies we have now created, and we would have moved toward rethinking the whole problem of what to do with people who are genuinely addicted, genuinely mentally ill, and how do we handle it? Of course, it would have been illegitimate for the President of the United States to suggest a religious-based solution to a social problem. But it would have been right. And it would have worked. It would have been American in the best sense.

Here is the second example. It is the concept to which Ray Shamie of Massachusetts first turned me on. Michael Huffington is now using it. I think it will spread everywhere. We should seriously look at systematically replacing the secular bureaucracies of the welfare state with a tax credit for giving money to private secular activities that you believe help the poor. If you were to say, "For \$1,000, who is more likely to help the poor? A New York or Georgia state-run institution or the Salvation Army?" There is no question that per \$1,000 you get dramatically more impact out of the Salvation Army. Who is more likely to do a good job with midnight basketball? The YMCA or the City of New York, with its bureaucracy and its patronage? There's no question in my mind. If you want midnight basketball, which I think is not an illegitimate thing to want—it was one of the 1,000 Points of Light under George Bush, meaning it was private, not a government program—then there is a place to have midnight basketball. It's the private sector. We should re-establish that legitimacy. By the way, you could give your tax credit to religious or non-religious groups, depending on which one you thought did a better job, had more impact on creating the good life and was best for training people and remodeling.

That is a very different image of America. It was described to me by Gordon Woods in a model he and I developed one night. Imagine, if I can just paint a word picture, a chart, a square, divided into four pieces. Piece number one is culture and civilization. You have got to constantly, constantly, constantly speak and hammer away at the values, the direction, and the focus of your culture and civilization. When you have a political elite who no longer believe in that focus and no longer believe in those values, you are not educating yourself and reminding yourself about those values. That is the most important.

Section number two is civic responsibility. To compete in the world market, everybody has to demand that their children do at least two hours of homework each night or they're being permanently cheated in their ability to compete with the Germans, Japanese, and Chinese. The difference between Bill Clinton and me is, I do not say, "Therefore, we need a Department of Homework Checkers at the federal level." I suggest, instead, that we insist that parents re-establish being parents and that we find ways to make that happen. One of the ways to do that, again going back to the first piece, is just preaching it, asserting it over and over again. The parents should say to the teacher, "Give them two hours of homework." If they don't, they ought to find a new teacher, and during the interim they should assign the homework themselves. By the way, we'd have a lot less worry about violence on television if every child in America had two hours of homework a night, because they wouldn't be watching TV.

I'm trying to give you a model of thought here. Number one is culture and civilization. Number two is civic responsibility: What are you going to do in your community to do the right things? Number three is the private sector, the right to pursue happiness. This is what Jefferson originally called the right to pursue property, the whole notion of markets, which are the best way of allocating resources, creating the future rapidly and encouraging people to become prosperous.

Number four in these boxes is limited, effective government. Now, Woods' point to me was that Jefferson is the person to study because Jefferson understood that if the secular state expands beyond its box, it crowds the other three zones. Suddenly you say, "I don't have to worry about my children; I hired a teacher through my tax money. I don't have to worry about my neighborhood being safe; I hired a policeman through my tax money. I don't have to worry about charity for the poor; I hired a welfare worker through my tax money. I don't have to re-establish my culture and civilization; I don't have to have civic responsibility." In the process, the government has trapped those people so they can't get jobs, they can't create jobs, and they can't open small businesses. That's just a tough break. All you have done, of course, by expanding the secular government is you have crowded out the three zones that are frankly more important—that's why it's listed fourth.

So what you've got to do is re-establish a politics and government which begins with American civilization. Then it establishes again what it means to be responsible. Then it creates the maximum opportunity for a refereed marketplace.

Let me be very clear. I believe in a strong government, limited but effective. I want water to be pure when I drink it. I want to know that if I go to a hamburger place it's hamburger. I don't buy the pure libertarian argument that as long as they posted a bond, my descendants can be sure of all that. I do want the government to be a referee. There are things I want the government to be very good at, but I want it to be as limited as possible to get power back into the other three zones to maximize their activity.

Let me close with a suggestion that we are going to undertake if I am Speaker. There will be two major tracks on voluntary school prayer. I think they are very, very important. One, we are going to try to pass a bill that would withdraw the issue of school prayer from court jurisdiction. It is totally legal. It is done routinely. It's a fair thing to do. That bill might well be thrown out by the Supreme Court, but I think we'd have a pretty fair chance of passing it and having it at least get attention.

Two, we will introduce a voluntary school prayer constitutional amendment. I've asked Congressman Ernest Istook to head up a project by which we would ask the Judiciary Committee to hold hearings in all 50 states in the first six months of next year. They would be fair hearings. We'd ask opponents and advocates in every state to show up and spend a day explaining their concerns. At the end of that time, having had a thorough national debate on re-establishing spiritual life and re-establishing our Creator at the center of the American polity, we would, before the July 4th recess, have an up or down vote in the House on such an amendment. With proper debate across the country, with proper explanation, with a genuine forced re-entry into the public debate, and with an insistence that the left has to come to grips with the alternative to a secular lifestyle, I believe we would win this debate and then we would pass the amendment in the House and send it to the Senate. We need the full debate. We need the debate over secularism versus the right of a spiritual debate. We need a debate over freedom of religion versus freedom against religion.

**This is not just setting up a new gimmick where you go in and mindlessly have a prayer that has no meaning, but is in fact our effort to say once again that the life of the spirit and the life of the soul matter and that to be an American is to be aware of the fact that our power comes from a Creator.**

