

> PREFACE

As the cliché goes, the two things you don't talk about with people are politics and religion. This cliché runs contrary to my personality and to the spirit of what our country was founded upon, but it has become more and more ubiquitous over the last 15 years or so. Over the umbrella of political rhetoric during that time, a grey cloud of hate and division has moved in and settled firmly.

This grey cloud, once again, has reared its ugly head—possibly in historic proportions—during this, the 2008 presidential election. Lies and misinformation and half-truths and distrust and religious prejudice and racial bias have all been commonplace over the course of this presidential race.

In early 2007, Barack Obama, in the shadow of Lincoln's "House Divided" speech more than a hundred years ago in Springfield, Illinois, set forth on a path to change the course of America and remove that looming, grey cloud. Since that time, we have seen the best and the worst of the United States of America.

On one hand, we have seen an energized and electrified America, mobilized for change and reaching across the aisle to those who don't look like them or think like them or hold the same political values as them. On the other hand, though, we have seen an unprecedented onslaught on Obama's character and moral fiber in the form of hateful email campaigns, fear-driven advertising, biased news reporting and misguided and misinformed "water cooler" conversations. Politics, like religion for many, cut deep to the core and can, when abused, reveal the worst in people.

It has been extremely trying and tiresome as I have witnessed and experienced first-hand the depth of the hate and divisiveness even from people who I love and love me. Both my wife and I will be voting for Barack Obama on November 4 and have been on board with his campaign literally from day one of his candidacy. As that word spread with various friends and family members who, in the name of being a Christian can only see a vote against Obama as a vote for God, that grey cloud settled over us. Through a number of hateful emails full of lies, disgusted and shocked faces during conversations and blatant refusal to speak to us because of our decision to support Obama, like many others, we have seen the dark side of this race.

After receiving yet another insulting and deception-driven email today, I have chosen to write this declaration of sorts. The email's title was "Why I Can't Vote for Obama." In response to that email and countless others over the last year's time, I offer to you, "Why I Can't *Not* Vote for Obama." This isn't intended to convince you to change your vote from McCain to Obama. It isn't intended to denigrate John McCain. It isn't intended to deify Barack Obama or lift him up to a status above the man that he is. Rather, it is intended to put to rest some of the lies and prejudices and blind conviction that are existent. It is intended to shed light on the leader who I believe can create some ripples in our government and nation that are much needed. It is intended to trigger your continued investigation into the truth about both Barack Obama and John McCain and put an end to the dissemination of false and divisive information. It is intended to break through the lingering grey cloud above us all that stifles democracy and discourages intelligent dialogue.

So, I invite you to proceed in the spirit of knowledge and the pursuit of truth.

Why I Can't *Not* Vote for Barack Obama

It was finally my turn. In 2000, I had my first opportunity to participate in a presidential election. It was a historic time to vote. We just crossed into a new millennium. We were coming out of a two-term president that experienced some of the highest presidential highs and the lowest of presidential lows. It was time for change. It was time for a Uniter. It was time for a savior.

In the end, we got a man called *W*.

Please, before I go any further, understand this: I voted for George W. Bush. I applauded him as he stood up to the terrorists in 2001. I defended him when others attacked. I cheered him on as he swung his sword of righteousness. I believed that he was a man of moral integrity. I believed that he was a Uniter.

In the end, we got a war.

In the end, the rich binged on the poor.

In the end, we looked back in regret.

In the end, we helped hang a dark little grey cloud over our country.

February 2007. Enter Barack Obama.

For Mr. Obama, though, in spite of his message of hope and progress and unity and change, that little grey cloud that had formed over the last 15 years or so made every attempt to blot out that much needed message.

In the end, truth is winning.

In the end, people feel empowered.

In the end, many who voted for *W* can't *not*, 8 years later, vote for Barack Obama.

In the following pages, I hope to shed some light on what a vote for Barack Obama is a vote for. Simply put, I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama.

Here is why.

> CHANGE

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because he will bring about fundamental change in a broken Washington political machine and throughout our country.

I know, I know. Change seems to be cliché at this point. Remember, though, clichés spawn from truth. The truth is that from day #1, Obama's mantra has been change. Over time, as other politicians have become desperate and fading politically, they have raised the banner of change, but, in this particular time in our history and following 8 broken years of presidential leadership, Obama is a refreshing candidate who understood from the beginning that a new direction is what people from coast to coast most desire.

As a kid, it was always ever so convenient in a game of kickball or a board game or some other childhood endeavor to yell, "RE-DO!" We could then erase what just happened and change the course of the game or event. As adults, though, and in government leadership, a *re-do* is no longer an option. While Obama can't erase the last 8 years and wipe it from the annals, he can enact a "start-over." This is what real and fundamental change is about.

If you were sailing in a boat to an island that lies directly north of your starting point and your boat begins to veer east, you don't keep the same path and just hope and pray that you somehow make it to the island. You row back toward your original route so that you can achieve your goal by landing at your destination. Barack Obama has a plan to right the ship. If we continue to sail east, we will eventually lose sight of our original destination and land somewhere far from where we intended.

We need a change from government policies that further reward the rich.

We need a change from a fundamentally broken healthcare system that values profit over quality of life.

We need a change from Washington politics that work on favors and political expediency.

We need a change from a senseless war that is covered in the blood of hundreds of thousands of men, women and children from all parts of the world.

We need a change from politics that evoke fear to build political loyalties and garner votes.

We need a change from the false safety of the status quo.

We need a change from leaders who perpetuate the myth of 'us versus them.'

We need a change from leadership that considers diplomacy and peaceful resolution a sign of weakness.

We need a change from political messiahship that crowns a single candidate "in the name of God."

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because he will bring about change that will put our country back on track and headed toward the full realization of the founding fathers dreams.

> INSPIRATION

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because he has inspired people to come together to accomplish a common goal and see past the surface-level differences that stifle unity and hope.

Certainly, there are those who have the idea that a president is simply a legislative or judicial overseer who casts down judgment from on high. Without a doubt, the president casts a vision and sees through various agendas, but I see the role of President of the United States as a much more broad and symbolic role. The President is the face of our nation. He or she is the symbol of American values and policy. The President is the standard in which the world views our nation and sets the tone and attitude within our country.

Barack Obama is a historically unparalleled inspirational leader. This country has *never* had a political leader that has elevated morale and brought political hope like Obama has been able to do. More than ever, millions of people have felt disenfranchised and shut out by the political

atmosphere over the last several years. Obama has welcomed in the disenfranchised and disaffected and lifted them to a place of significance where their voice is heard and considered. He has inspired people to work alongside people who, in any other context, would be a foe or, at best, a stranger. He has spoken words from his soul that have moved people to action and away from political apathy.

Many detractors have tried to downplay Obama's oration and massive rallies as just an affront to the real issues or as a "celebrity" cover-up to his perceived inexperience. What these people have failed to understand is the power of words and the power of inspiration. Undoubtedly, many great leaders with great plans and great motivations have failed because they weren't able to put effectively communicate their ideas and rally people around their ideas. Obama has paired his transformative ideas with powerfully moving words. Millions of people have come from a place of apathy and disenfranchisement to a place of passion and zeal.

When we, as Americans, are inspired and moved to a place of action, we are a greater nation. Nothing kills the spirit of democracy more than apathy and civic withdrawal.

I can't *not* vote for Obama because we have spent the last 8 years in a political depression characterized by suspicion and apathy and hatred and division. Barack Obama is certainly not the savior, but he has the power to ignite passion in people. We need a President who inspires and unifies and offers hope.

> A CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE: THE OVERSIMPLIFICATION ASPECT

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I am pro-life.

Yes, you read that correctly. I am pro-life. And I am passionately for Barack Obama.

Let me be clear: I am opposed to abortion. Every time an abortion is performed, it's a heartbreaking thing. It's sad for the baby. It's sad for the mother. It's sad for the father and it's sad for the family and it's sad for our society.

Much has been made by pro-life proponents—Christians, particularly—about Obama's stance on abortion. It's clear that Obama is pro-choice. He has repeatedly stated that he is in favor of women having control over decisions concerning their own bodies. He is opposed to the government mandating very personal health-related choices. Most importantly, though, he has *repeatedly* stated things that, over and over, have been mythologized by Christians and other conservative voters, who have sent out distasteful emails describing and depicting partial birth abortions and other unimaginable and untrue political positions of Obama.

Barack Obama has definitively stated that he is fully in favor of states having control over restriction of partial birth abortion. If states choose to restrict abortions for the sake of the health of the mother, he is without objection. Further, Obama has been forced to repeatedly reiterate the truth concerning his vote in the Illinois Senate concerning what Christians and other conservatives have distastefully referred to as infanticide (that is, letting babies born in botched abortions lay there and die without medical intervention). He has very clearly stated that he, along with many Republicans, voted against the bill because the terms of the bill *already existed* and were being regulated. Further, it was a bill with clear political agendas that many—including, again, some Republicans—were uncomfortable in supporting because it would just get caught up in legislation and never get enacted. Opponents of Obama have, like

many other issues, chosen to oversimplify the issue to the point that it demonizes the candidate and helps to make their agenda's point.

One final note worth considering is our current laws concerning abortion. Please correct me if I'm wrong, but my understanding is that the following people are pro-life: Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush. What has changed about abortion laws over the last almost 30 years? Absolutely nothing. Even when our President is opposed to abortion, there has been no change. Why would you think that the least conservative Republican candidate in the last 30 or more years is going to come in and suddenly make a change in this matter? It's unrealistic and unlikely. In 8 years, if John McCain is elected, Christians and other conservatives will still be rallying against abortion and abortion laws.

Let's shift the conversation, though, and look at the root of the abortion crisis. Abortion isn't about people wanting to kill babies or, for the vast majority of people, just another form of birth control. Allow me to set a scene for you:

There is a 16-year old girl living in poverty in the projects with a single mother. She is very poorly educated and sees crime and violence every day. She has absolutely no hope for her future and is bound to repeat the cycle of hopelessness that her mother is in. She has absolutely no health insurance and she has no form of income. She makes a bad decision and gets pregnant by a boy who she barely knows and is as poor and uneducated as her. As unimaginable as an abortion is for me as a parent, how can we be surprised when she feels like an abortion is the only option she has?

Hopelessness leads to abortions.

Poverty leads to abortions.

Lack of health insurance leads to abortions.

Poor education leads to abortions.

Not cruelty.

Not the desire to kill.

Not simply a law that allows it.

Barack Obama has a comprehensive plan to reduce abortions. Our country's history shows that making things illegal isn't the sole or most successful way to reduce things. It's certainly one method, but not necessarily the most effective. If you tell me that I can't touch the flame, my curiosity or desire to rebel will, most often, win out. If you educate me about how I will get burned and the consequences therein, I will likely make a decision to avoid the flame. If you tell me about how nice the future is without living with burn scars, I will most likely listen to your sound advice. I may not, but I certainly have a better grasp of the situation. Ignorance isn't bliss. Ignorance leads to unnecessary burns.

If our government spends its energy on reinforcing education that teaches children the risks of premarital sex, abortions (read: unwanted pregnancies) will be reduced. If the government places an emphasis on providing people with affordable healthcare options, fewer women will feel forced to abort their children. If the government addresses our national poverty epidemic, abortions will significantly decrease. If the government focuses on making it easier for good parents to adopt children, people will have a better alternative to abortion. If the government

focuses on helping people afford homes and find jobs, women will have economic hope that they can raise a child in the event of an unplanned pregnancy.

On the other hand, if the government singularly focuses on illegalizing abortion, I am afraid we will “solve the problem” without truly solving the problems.

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I cannot boil abortion down to a tunnel-visioned solution.

> A CONSISTENT ETHIC OF LIFE: THE *REAL* ISSUE

Let me once again state the following: I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I am pro-life.

Abortion is the easy way out of a *real* conversation about being pro-life. Only talking about abortion in a conversation about life is like only talking about baseball when having a conversation about sports. For Christians and other conservatives, abortion is the blinder that guides the fight for “righteousness.”

What does it *really* mean to be pro-life?

Pro-life means believing that life begins at conception, but doesn't end at birth.

Pro-life means having a broken heart for the hundreds of thousands of Iraqi men, women and children who have been killed since the war began.

Pro-life means standing up against the State strapping prisoners to a table and injecting them with poison that leads to death.

Pro-life means relinquishing people from the dehumanizing decision to either pay for the surgery or pay the rent due to outrageous medical bills that our insurance won't pay for because it's a “pre-existing condition.”

Pro-life means withdrawing our troops from a country where we had no business trying to be the global police.

Pro-life means speaking out against the perpetuation of laws that allow people to own automatic assault weapons when we have the most gun-related murders in the entire world each year.

Pro-life means demanding that our government places greater emphasis on our educational system because we know that education has a direct link to violence and crimes.

Pro-life means the Church—of which I am a part—quits harping on a couple pet issues and broaden our message to Jesus' emphasis on peaceful resolution, love for our enemies, hospitality to strangers, a heart for the poor and disenfranchised and grace to those who sin against us.

Barack Obama is pro-life. Not in the sense that many Christians and conservatives would like him to be, but he if my aforementioned suggestions are legitimate, then he is certainly pro-life.

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I live by the mantra that life isn't limited to the issue of abortion.

> HEALTHCARE

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because, for quite a long time, I have been heartbroken by the injustices of our current broken healthcare system.

Obama has set forth a plan that is bold and revolutionary given the low and unjust standard of "healthcare" that we currently have in our country. The beautiful thing about universal healthcare is that it strips away the exclusivity that is currently present. It is inclusive and values *every* human life—not just those who can afford to shell out the cash it takes to receive proper and timely care. The long and the short of it is that almost 50 million people just cannot come up with a way to make ends meet *and* afford astronomical healthcare bills.

I can look no further than my own home. For the first time in many years, I finally have healthcare. While I'm very thankful for a job that offers healthcare (as opposed to jobs I've had in the past), we had to sit down and make an unfortunate healthcare decision when I took the job. For our children and myself, while the premiums are still an extreme financial burden for our family, it is something that we've been able to afford. To add my wife, though, we would literally have to make a decision between her having health insurance and paying our rent or some other bill. There's something *very* fundamentally wrong when a family with two working adults has to cross our fingers and hope for the best because the wife of the family has no health insurance.

There seems to be a fundamental value with Christians, particularly, that says that hard work is the standard for whether or not you deserve health insurance. It's a value that is opposed to "hand-outs" and equality. One problem, though, my fellow Christians: it seems to me one of Jesus' most revolutionary characteristics was that he offered hope and healing and equality to people who certainly didn't "deserve it." Jesus toppled the walls of exclusion and economic distinction. Because we are all created in the image of God, we are all worthy of healthy living and healing. The rich are no more valued than the poor.

Let me pause and say that I'm not presuming that Jesus walked around with an election sign for universal healthcare or stood at the polls shouting cheers for Barack Obama. Jesus didn't rely on government programs and strictly physical healing as the only option. What I am saying, though, is that when we have two healthcare plans and one of them seems to show a certain level of compassion and equality, I feel compelled to choose that plan. I pursue the plan that most closely resembles the value of Christ.

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because he has presented a healthcare plan that is inclusive of all people and places value on *every* human life—not just the rich.

> THE JESUS FACTOR

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I am a follower of Christ.

Please, please read this clearly. Jesus is no more for Barack Obama than he is John McCain. Jesus is not a Republican and he is not a Democrat. Jesus lives within people who are passionately for Barack Obama just as he lives within people who are passionately for John McCain.

What I am saying is that I because I have deep and life-defining convictions based on the life and teachings of Christ, I feel compelled to make a vote for a candidate who represents issues

that coincide with those convictions. On the flipside, though, a voter for McCain could make the very same argument and I would not have an issue as long as they're sincere and have put ample thought into their reasoning.

The problem, though, is the presiding Christian mentality that claims that God is a Republican. That God is anti-Obama. Or, like the email that spawned this whole thing suggested, that if you are voting for Obama, you clearly are not listening to God.

One of my values as a follower of Christ is truth. Certainly, as Jesus said, "the truth will set you free." During this election, we have been held captive by lies that have, by and large, been perpetuated by Christians.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about Obama's stance on abortion.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about the degree to which Obama has "palled" around with terrorists.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about the fact that Obama's church is not a "black supremacy" church.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about the fact that Obama has never supported comprehensive sex education for kindergarteners.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about the fact that Obama has repeatedly said that he does not support gay marriage.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about the fact that Obama *never* attended a Muslim school as a child.

If you are a follower of Christ, please be honest about how Obama has never refused to say the pledge of allegiance or sing the national anthem.

Most importantly, if you are a follower of Christ, I beg you to be honest about the fact that Obama is *not* a Muslim. He has openly spoken about an encounter with Christ that radically changed his life.

I am compelled to be honest with myself and with others. Christ didn't try to reach people with deception and misinformation. Jesus spoke boldly with truth. His truth was unpopular and went against the status quo. It shocked the rich and the righteous and gave hope to the poor and disenfranchised and outcast.

Again, as the email, *Why I Can't Vote for Obama*, stated, some day I will stand in front of Christ. I won't tell him about how I campaigned for some presidential candidate or how I blogged about my political ideologies, but I will tell him how I lived his values and was honest in living out those convictions and values.

I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama because I am deeply convicted and led by Christ to vote for my values and beliefs.

I don't expect you, if you're voting for John McCain, to switch your vote over to Barack Obama. I don't expect you to have some kind of life-changing moment while reading this. And I don't expect you to have some sort of Obama epiphany where you see the light.

What I ask is that if you're a person who has been perpetuating these hateful and deceptive emails, please stop.

If you're someone who has opposed Barack Obama because "he is a Muslim," please see the truth.

If you're someone who has boiled down the complex issue of life into a single issue that neither Democrats nor Republicans have "fixed", please see the bigger picture.

If you are content with the rich getting richer and the poor living in fear of a medical crisis, please consider the case for compassion and equality.

If you "can't" vote for Barack Obama because he is black, please repent.

If you believe that Christians should only vote for the Republican nominee, please release God from your box.

On November 4th, I will step into a voting booth and cast a vote for change. And hope. And progress. And equality. And inspiration. And life. And healthcare. And peace. And an end to war. And the values of Christ.

And to remove that dark little grey cloud that has been hanging over our country for far too long.

Because I can't *not* vote for Barack Obama.