

Evangelicals break with Bush on North Korea: Importance of preaching and humanitarian aid stressed

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When evangelical pastor and best-selling author Rick Warren announced that he would make a preaching mission to North Korea next year, it raised eyebrows in the conservative religious community.

North Korea, after all, is a keystone in President Bush's "axis of evil" and is called by the State Department and human rights groups a gross violator of religious freedom.

Warren, author of the Purpose-Driven book series, was forced to cancel a preliminary July 17 trip to Pyongyang following heightened tensions between the reclusive regime and the West over North Korea's July 5 test of seven missiles. Nevertheless, he insisted that his preaching visit would go on next year despite criticism from other evangelicals and the Bush administration's efforts to totally isolate the country. "Regardless of politics, I will go anywhere I am invited to preach the gospel," Warren said.

Warren's stance is one of several indications that, at least on foreign-policy issues, the president cannot automatically count on the support—or at least quiet acquiescence—of conservative and moderate evangelicals as he did in the run-up to the war in Iraq.

For example, evangelist Franklin Graham, head of the relief agency Samaritan's Purse and one minister who has visited North Korea, recently told the PBS program *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly* that he objects to U.S. policy. "We need to talk to the North Koreans face to face, period," Graham said. "Eyeball to eyeball. And there is a lot that can be accomplished if we simply do that."

Separately, a leading conservative evangelical—Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention—signed on to an 18-point plan last month pressing for a joint humanitarian and human rights approach to North Korea rather than the administration’s single-minded focus on arms control. The coalition includes such liberal groups as Americans for Democratic Action, the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism and the American Humanist Association. -*Religion News Service*