

Taking inventory: A national 12-step program

From the Editors in the [June 26, 2007](#) issue

President Bush has become what he said he would be, a uniter: both conservatives and liberals are united in thinking that he has taken the country off track. In what seems to be a protracted lame-duck period for the president, pundits are already speculating about the post-Bush era. *Newsweek* published a cover essay titled “After Bush: How to Restore America’s Place in the World.” *Harper’s Magazine* held a symposium called “Undoing Bush: How to Repair Eight Years of Sabotage, Bungling, and Neglect.”

Hovering over all the discussions about the future is Iraq. Most Americans now believe that going to war there was a mistake. But as Fareed Zakaria says in *Newsweek*, “It is time to stop bashing George W. Bush. We must begin to think about life after Bush.” It may have been the president’s war, but it is everyone’s problem.

However the war plays out, the U.S. needs to engage in something like a 12-step program, which would include: admitting that it is not all-powerful in the world; undertaking a searching and fearless moral inventory of its character; acknowledging what it has done wrong in the world; and seeking insofar as it can to make amends. Such a turnaround may not be likely, but then neither was the collapse of communism.

Since 9/11 Americans have been vulnerable to a politics of fear. A number of presidential candidates are only too eager to play on these fears as they try to present themselves as tough on terrorism. Christians should have something to bring to this discussion, since they know that there is no absolute safety or security and that it is dangerous to attempt to establish absolute security; that we cannot put ultimate faith in technology, the military or government leaders; that there are worse fates than death, such as the loss of our souls; that we should regard all peoples, even our enemies, as children of God with whom we should engage; and

that we need to work together with others to try to resolve the problems of poverty, disease, hunger and environmental degradation.

Americans do have real enemies. We may sometimes feel, with reason, like the ancient psalmists who railed against their enemies. Those imprecatory psalms might even be helpful to us these days—not by encouraging us to act out our fears and feelings of aggression, but by encouraging us to turn our fears and our future over to God. And for that reason we need the example of Jesus, who refused to call down the host of heavens against his enemies, but instead entrusted his life to God.