

DEMOCRATS HAVE A RELIGION PROBLEM

Catholic League president Bill Donohue explains why the Democrats have a religion problem:

By a large margin, most Americans believe in God, and most are Christians. It would seem logical that both Republicans and Democrats would try hard not to alienate them, yet time and again the Democrats have managed to do so.

The latest example is New Jersey Senator Cory Booker. He blasted the president for mentioning religion in his State of the Union Address. "Here's a guy that used religion tonight to divide," Booker said.

Booker did not say whether it was Trump's pledge to protect people of every creed and religion that bothered him the most. Perhaps it was Trump's reference to "In God We Trust." Maybe it was Trump's remark about the need to have "confidence in our values, faith in our citizens, and trust in our God." No matter, Booker certainly made a name for himself: God-talk is taboo, at least if invoked by President Trump.

Do Democrats take religion seriously? They say they do. How about Burns Strider? He was Hillary Clinton's faith adviser when she ran for president in 2008. When Hillary learned that he was sexually harassing her female staff, she refused to fire him. She even overruled her campaign manager, Patti Solis Doyle, who wanted him canned.

The story about Strider broke on January 26, and over the last few days only the *Washington Post* has shown any interest in discussing his role as a religious advisor. It is a sure bet that had an evangelical leader advising presidential candidate George W. Bush in 2008 been caught harassing female staff members—and allowed to continue—he, and not just Bush, would

be raked over the coals when the news broke. Strider, however, is being treated as if he were a deputy campaign manager. Is that because few take religious advisors to the Democratic Party seriously?

There's a related issue here. It says a lot about the Democrats that someone with such a bare bones religious resume could ascend to the post of Hillary's senior religious advisor. Strider spent three years in Hong Kong as a youth minister, and that's about it. He never entered the ministry, and indeed spent more time in policy positions and as a lobbyist than he did in any religious capacity.

Interestingly, Strider's thin religious credentials did not stop him from being named by Religion News Service as one of the 12 most influential religious leaders in the Democratic Party in 2006. The bar was not set very high: Illinois Senator Barack Obama made the cut.

About the time Strider assumed the role as Hillary's senior religious advisor, journalist and Democratic operative Amy Sullivan vouched for his credentials; she hailed him for his religious outreach efforts. Sullivan was a vocal critic of the Democrats for allowing the Republicans to capture the hearts and minds of the faithful, and was delighted to see Strider on board. She herself is worth a closer look.

By 2009, Sullivan emerged as a religious advisor to the Democrats. She showcased her chops by hammering the Catholic Church for opposing a bill, the Freedom of Choice Act, that was designed to force Catholic hospitals to perform abortions. Is this what she meant by religious outreach?

The *Washington Post* article also mentions that Strider worked with Mara Vanderslice in 2004 trying to woo religious voters. After I outed her for her support for an urban terrorist group, ACT-UP (its members invaded St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1989 during Mass, spitting the Eucharist on the floor),

presidential candidate John Kerry silenced her. That didn't matter to Democrats, however. Two years later she was named one of the most important religious voices in the Democratic Party.

Just after Kerry muzzled Vanderslice, I outed Rev. Brenda Bartella Peterson, the Senior Advisor for Religious Outreach to the Democratic National Committee. She signed an amicus brief on behalf of atheist Michael Newdow attempting to excise the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance. After I broke the news, she quit, blaming me.

Matters continued to go south in 2007 when presidential candidate John Edwards hired Amanda Marcotte and Melissa McEwan to work on his campaign. After I outed them for their anti-Catholic writings, they quit.

In 2012, the Democrats deleted the word "God" from their Platform; they later reversed their decision.

And let's not forget about the last election. Hillary's communications director, Jennifer Palmieri, was outed for her Catholic-bashing remarks, and her campaign chairman, John Podesta, said he wanted to foment a "revolution" in the Catholic Church.

If the Democrats want the public to take them seriously in addressing religious issues, they will have to do better than serve up the likes of Cory Booker. They will also have to show greater scrutiny for "religious leaders" like Burns Strider.