

SCORING BIDEN AND TRUMP ON RELIGION

On August 6, President Trump accused Joe Biden of being “against God.” When Bill Donohue read this on August 7, he released the following tweet: “Trump has no business smearing Biden’s personal faith. What he said is indefensible. He should stick to policy matters, not personal ones.”

In a Politico/Morning Consult survey released in June, only 27% of registered voters said they believed Trump to be religious. That should have given Trump pause when he slammed Biden for being “against God.” The question for voters, however, is not whether a candidate is personally religious; rather, it is whether his policies are religion-friendly. On this score, Trump wins hands down.

The Biden camp knows this to be true, which is why they are rolling out his personal faith credentials. It’s all they have. Biden’s surrogates, such as E.J. Dionne, are praising his devoutness, citing his remark that his faith is the “bedrock foundation of my life.” That may be true. It is also true that Biden’s lust for abortion rights—he is more extreme now than ever before—has led priests to deny him Communion.

“I think his own faith and values narrative allows us to have inroads into these [faith] communities in ways that Democrats might previously not have been able to do,” says John McCarthy of the Biden team. Similarly, John K. White, a Catholic University professor, is impressed that Biden “carries a rosary with him.”

Up to a point, symbolic speech matters, but the race for the White House is not a piety parade. If that were the case, there would be few candidates from either party. The race, for the faithful, is about who has the best record defending

religious liberty. This is where Biden is in deep trouble. What specific legislation has he sponsored that would advance this end?

It won't do, as some have argued, to say that climate change is a pro-life issue (one that is embraced by Biden). This gambit—trying to jam matters unrelated to traditional life issues into the pro-life portfolio—has not worked in the past, and it is not going to work this time, either. Automobile safety is also a life issue, but no one seriously thinks it is a pro-life issue the way abortion, euthanasia and doctor-assisted suicide are.

Still, Trump's critics say that because his personal life is marred with moral failings, people of faith cannot be taken seriously when they say they will vote for him. This common refrain deserves a serious response.

Let's say that in a presidential race, the Republican candidate is very generous in his charitable giving. He gives to organizations that help needy children, hospitals, and the like. He also has a good record hiring minorities. But his voting record on government assistance to the poor and affirmative action is almost non-existent.

Let's say the Democrat is extraordinarily stingy, giving practically nothing to charity. He also sports a lousy hiring record—his employees are almost exclusively white. But his voting record on government assistance to the poor and affirmative action is excellent.

Would it not be rational for Democrats to vote for the Democrat, in spite of the superior personal record of the Republican?

Al Gore is known to the public as a champion of the poor. But in 1997, the vice president and his wife Tipper contributed a whopping total of \$353 to charity. Their salary was \$197,729. To put it differently, their charitable giving was less than

one-tenth the typical contribution for someone with their adjusted gross income.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg is known to the public as a champion of affirmative action. But in 1993, when being considered for a seat on the Supreme Court, she was asked by Sen. Orrin Hatch to explain why, in 13 years as a judge, not one of her 57 law clerks was black. "If you confirm me to this job," she said, "my attractiveness to black candidates is going to improve."

Would it make sense if someone supported government assistance to the poor not to vote for Gore because he is a miser? Would it make sense for someone who supports affirmative action not to support Ginsburg because she is a hypocrite?

Voting involves making tough decisions, weighing all sorts of contrary variables, the conclusion of which is not always neat. But the mature voter will select the candidate who is best for the nation, notwithstanding his own personal shortcomings. It's the policies that should matter, not the persona.