

DEMS GET RELIGION – BELIEVERS NOT IMPRESSED

By Don Feder

A funny thing happened to the Democrats on their way to the 2004 presidential election – They got religion. But their conversion -- conveniently timed, politically motivated -- is unlikely to impress evangelical Christians.

Like a death-row inmate finding Jesus while petitioning for a stay of execution, the Democrats have discovered the power of faith – faith that they can convince Southerners that voting Democratic is compatible with that old-time religion.

In an interview with the editors of The Boston Globe (not coincidentally, published on Christmas day), former Vermont Governor Howard Dean said he expects to invoke Jesus often and early, as he campaigns in the South.

But the way the Democratic frontrunner describes him makes Jesus sound like a 1st. century Eleanor Roosevelt.

“Christ was someone who sought out people who were disenfranchised, people who were left behind,” the silver-spoon socialist told the Globe editorial board. “He fought against self-righteousness of people who had everything...He was a *person* who set an extraordinary example that has lasted 2000 years, which is pretty inspiring when you think about it.”

Jesus set “an extraordinary example”? “Pretty inspiring when you think about it”? For a man revered by Christians as God incarnate, this is faint praise indeed.

The homily to the Globe is from the same doctrinaire liberal who just a few months ago told Southerners to get over their obsession with “guns, God, gays and school prayer.” Apparently, Mr. Civil Unions changed his tune when he had a revelation concerning the voting strength of born-again Christians.

The governor isn't the only Democratic candidate who's now singing in the church choir. U.S. Rep. Richard Gephardt tells audiences that his son's recovery from cancer was a gift from God.

Connecticut Senator Joe Lieberman gets all pious when explaining why he won't campaign on the Jewish Sabbath. Too bad the Senate didn't vote on the partial-birth abortion ban on a Saturday. (The senator, who attends services at Temple Beth Hillary, voted against it.) Lieberman's diet may be kosher. His politics aren't.

The San Francisco Democrats want desperately to be accepted in the Bible Belt. The reasons aren't difficult to discern.

While it's true that not all born-again Christians are dyed-in-the-wool Republicans, a recent poll by the Pew Research Center showed that those who attend religious services more than once a week vote GOP over Democrat by 63 percent to 37 percent. Among voters who seldom or never set foot in a house of worship, the percentages are almost exactly the reverse, with 62 percent voting Democratic and 38 percent favoring Republicans.

Evangelical Christians are an increasingly important constituency. In the last presidential election, one out of every four voters called themselves born-again Christians.

It's getting harder to hoodwink this voting bloc. Whereas Bill Clinton (who latter came to *know* Monica Lewinsky – in the biblical sense) got 54 percent of the vote of weekly churchgoers in 1996 (to 31 percent for Bob Dole), in 2000, Methodist George W. Bush beat the pants off Southern Baptist Al Gore among evangelicals.

Religion is particularly potent in Dixie. In an ABC News/Washington Post survey released in late December, 46 percent of Southerners said a president should rely on his religious convictions to make policy choices -- compared to 40 percent nationally and 28 percent in the East.

With a Vermont Yankee who would be the most liberal major-party nominee since George McGovern as the likely standard-bearer, Democratic

prospects in the South are starting to look as bleak as Sean Penn's chances of being elected mayor of Baghdad.

And without taking at least a few Southern states, the Democratic ticket is doomed. Thus, liberal pundits are formulating strategies for making inroads in the born-again vote.

Writing in *The New York Times* on December 28th, Jim Wallis (editor of the religious-left *Sojourners* magazine) tells Democrats that they can compete among evangelicals with their own "religious" agenda.

"How a candidate deals with poverty is a religious issue, and the Bush administration's failure to support poor working families should be named as a religious failure," Wallis intones.

"Neglect of the environment is a religious issue," Wallis continues. "Fighting pre-emptive wars based on false claims is a religious issue (a fact not changed by the capture of Saddam Hussein)."

But this Christianity For Idiots. Like the Torah before him, Jesus said *you* help the poor. He didn't tell his disciples to enlist government to pick pockets to succor the widow and orphan. Moreover, it's neigh impossible to reconcile a welfare system that's resulted in over 80 percent illegitimacy in the inner-cities with Christian compassion.

The Bible is full of examples of sanctioned "pre-emptive wars." (Did the Canaanites attack the Israelites?) The Talmud admonishes: "If one comes to kill you, kill him first." Saddam and his terrorist allies were coming to kill us (The Baathist regime had well-documented ties to al-Qaeda). From a Talmudic perspective – Praise the Lord and drop the bunker-busters.

As good stewards, Christians and Jews are admonished to conserve natural resources. Unlike tree-huggers, they do not worship Mother Nature. (During one of the 2000 presidential debates, Al Gore – author of "The Earth Uber Alles" -- said his religion taught him to "revere" nature. "What is he, a Druid?" my wife asked.)

The Judeo-Christian worldview sees nature as subordinate to man.

(Genesis, Chapter I, Verse 26 – “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and *subdue* it; and have *dominion* over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”)

Environmentalists envision nature as co-equal with -- if not superior to -- man. You might move a few Episcopal bishops with a green agenda. Southern Baptists will not be impressed.

The Democrats may say nice things about Jesus (“Great guy, swell role model, in business for over two millennia”), but when it comes to issues the faithful actually care about, the left is preaching to empty pews.

In his Globe interview, Dean confessed that he opposes public display of The Ten Commandments (under the judicially fashionable misreading of the First Amendment), is “uncomfortable” with the practice of opening sessions of Congress with a prayer (which has only been in vogue for over 200 years), but is not troubled with “under God” in the pledge of Allegiance. What a concession to religious America, not to mention almost 400 years of Judeo-Christian tradition on these shores!

The former Planned Parenthood physician is also proud to have signed the first civil union law in the United States.

For evangelical Christians, especially the Southern variety, the big three political issues are abortion, gay rights and so-called church-state issues.

For decades, Democrats have done their best to drive expressions of faith from the public square. They turned “church/state separation” (words which appear nowhere in the Constitution) into a litmus test for judicial nominees.

On abortion, there is a gapping divide between the parties. Of course there are prominent pro-choice Republicans (several Eastern governors come immediately to mind). But since 1980, every Republican presidential candidate has been staunchly pro-life, as have all of the party’s national platforms.

Since 1976, every Democratic nominee has pledged devotion to abortion rights, as have the party's national platforms, without exception. The last prominent pro-life Democrat was the late Bob Casey. And his party barred him from speaking at its 1992 nominating convention, even though he was governor of Pennsylvania at the time.

Senate Democrats have established a de facto religious test for judicial office – pro-lifers need not apply. By automatically disqualifying Bush nominees who oppose abortion, Ted Kennedy and other filibustering Democrats are excluding committed Catholics (not to mention serious Evangelicals and Torah Jews) from the federal bench. Here are actions that speak far louder than the Dems' God-is-good rhetoric.

Then there's gay marriage. While all but the fringe candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination (Sharpton, Kucinich and Moseley Braun) technically oppose same-sex marriage, all support civil unions – which bestow 100 percent of the benefits of marriage, withholding only the name.

Civil unions must inevitably lead to gay marriage, which in turn must inevitably lead to denominations that still believe in the Bible being forced to perform religious ceremonies for homosexual couples. Your little religion will be tolerated, Democrats seem to be saying to evangelicals, as long as it doesn't interfere with our secularist agenda.

Just as the Democrats' policies on race are run by the civil rights establishment, their social agenda is controlled liberal interest groups. There is the gospel of Planned Parenthood, the ACLU and People for the American Way. Their presidential candidates will be lining up to speak at the convention of the National Organization for Women. They will not be clamoring to address the National Right to Life Committee or Concerned Women for America.

Though not every Democratic voter is a social liberal, you would search in vain for a leading Democrat who's out of step with Barney Frank. Former Georgia Senator Zell Miller was the last boll-weevil in the Senate. And he just published a book excoriating his party's drift to the left, ("A National Party No More: The Conscience of a Conservative Democrat") and announced that he's voting for Bush this year.

Democrats can assume pious postures. They can invoke Jesus more often than a Baptist preacher in a Sunday sermon. They can argue that Scriptures endorse the welfare state, the Sierra Club's legislative program and an isolationist foreign policy. But none of these subterfuges will obscure the unholy war they've been fighting against evangelical Christians since at least the mid-1970s.

Making a copy of Hustler look like a Gideon Bible is actually much easier than making Dean and company look like the College of Cardinals.