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Pious Democrats, meet your maker

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June 6, 2007 05:53 PM EST

If you publicly pious candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination could look up from your talking points for a moment, I'd like to introduce you to the founder of our party - our earthly father, if you will, Thomas Jefferson. Consider some of President Jefferson's views on religion and politics, which he expressed in an 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence ... a wall of separation between church and state."

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Apparently, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (N.Y.), Sen. Barack Obama (Ill.) and former Sen. John Edwards (N.C.) all decided they did, indeed, owe an accounting of their personal religious beliefs -- a televised recitation, in fact -- to an audience assembled Monday at George Washington University by the left-liberal-worthy Rev. Jim Wallis and channeled through a television anchor aptly (or at least euphoniously) named Soledad O'Brien.

The front-runners' pandering to "people of faith" is the latest expression of Religion Lite advocated by the consultant wing of the Democratic Party.

After several decades of the religious right's attempt to trash the First Amendment and Christianize America via the GOP (God's Own Party?), we are now treated to the religious left and its heavenly claims on behalf of social justice.

The worst offender in the trinity of poll-directed faith hailers was, of course, Edwards, a trial lawyer to the underclass (he represented the middle class in 2004) and now the political servant of his "Lord Jesus Christ."

Yes, he actually used the whole coded-for-evangelicals phrase -- though, for some reason, those three words, which revealed just how much this former-Baptist-turned-Methodist was willing to prostrate himself before the pious, were omitted from news coverage of the affair in both The Washington Post and The New York Times.

Clinton takes second place in the pander-fest, claiming to the Wallis multitudes discomfort with wearing religion on her sleeve, but then she did just that, revealing how her

conversations with the Methodist deity helped get her through that unpleasant Oval Office incident.

Least noxious of the three was Obama, who, with less Methodist in his madness, had the good grace to recall Lincoln's remarks regarding the greater wisdom of the Union's choosing God's side rather than expecting the Heavenly Father (as Edwards would put it) to play political favorites.

Having worked as press spokesman for the Democratic National Committee 20 years ago, when the late Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was in full flower, I am appalled at how little these possible future leaders of the free world have learned from decades of mixing "faith" and politics.

I came to Washington in 1975 with the late Paul Simon, working for five years as his House press secretary and later traveling with him for seven months as spokesman for his 1988 presidential campaign. Never once in the almost four decades I knew the Illinois Democrat did I ever hear him invoke religion or mention God in a speech, or even in private conversation, though I assumed his religious views were probably those you would expect from the son of Christian missionaries to China (where he was conceived in 1928) and the brother of a Lutheran minister.

A man with the moral rectitude of an Eagle Scout, Simon understood why the Founders included not a single reference to a deity in our Constitution. The best way to protect your right to be guided by faith (and mine to be guided by reason) is to keep our understandings of where we come from and how we come to be moral animals on the other side of a very high wall between the state, with its coercive powers, and the temples created by believers.

The willingness of Democratic candidates to breach that barrier reflects a failure of nerve in a political party that ought to be our best hope for secular governance in a world where so much hate and murder is still being unleashed by "people of faith," whose beliefs were never touched by The Age of Reason and The Enlightenment -- the same felicitous era in human history that gave us Jefferson and others averse to the mingling of religion and governance.

To put it in bumper sticker form, Hillary, John and Barack: "I'm a Person of Reason, and I Vote, Too!"

A committed non-theist, Terry Michael writes at his "[Thoughts From a Libertarian Democrat](#)" blog.

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