

**THE MEANDERING MAVERICK:  
NO STRAIGHT TALK FROM MCCAIN ON RELIGION**

By Nick Gier

A recent wire story entitled "McCain's Pastor Stark Contrast to Obama's" praises McCain for attending services at a church led by a moderate Baptist minister. McCain's pastor Dan Yeary condemns homosexuals as sinners, but is quick to add that he is also a sinner, and that Jesus would have loved gays and lesbians.

There are, however, some serious questions about McCain's religious identity. He was raised an Episcopalian and freely admits that he is not nearly as devout as his father who prayed twice daily on his knees.

Congressional directories still list him as an Episcopalian and as recent as June 2007 he called himself one. But then in the midst of the 2008 South Carolina primary, he declared: "By the way, I'm not Episcopalian. I'm Baptist." How convenient for the state's Baptist voters.

McCain's wife and children have been baptized by the Rev. Yeary, but McCain has yet to take sacred immersion, a necessary requirement for being a Christian, Episcopalian as well as Baptist. McCain has said that he "didn't find it necessary . . . for my spiritual needs."

Now, presumably under pressure from his advisors, he says that he will be baptized, but not during the campaign, lest voters would think him insincere. Candidate McCain, your religious duplicity has already been demonstrated!

In an interview with beliefnet.com McCain stated that being a Christian was "an important part of our qualifications to lead." He added: "I just have to say in all candor that since this nation was founded primarily on Christian principles ... personally, I prefer someone who I know who has a solid grounding in my faith." He later wrote to Beliefnet and admitted that he would accept a well qualified Muslim as president.

In the same interview he agreed with 55 percent of the American people who incorrectly believe that the Constitution (which contains no mention of God or Christ) establishes Christianity as the national religion. Jewish and Muslims groups requested that McCain correct this fundamental mistake, but he refused to do so, reiterating his idea that the country's secular and transcultural values are still Judeo-Christian values.

During the 2000 presidential campaign McCain criticized George Bush for speaking at ultra-fundamentalist Bob Jones University. Bob Jones, Jr. was infamous for saying that the Catholic Church is a "satanic counterfeit" and that all the popes were "demon possessed." McCain said that he would have told Bob Jones' students to "get out of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. What you are doing is racist and cruel."

In a speech in Virginia Beach on February 28, 2000, McCain accused George Bush of being a "Pat Robertson Republican," and warned his audience that politicians should not pander to "the agents of intolerance," such as Louis Farrakhan, Pat Robertson, and Jerry Falwell.

Barack Obama, who openly professes a deep Christian faith, has condemned Louis Farrakhan and has refused his endorsement. In stark contrast, McCain made up to Falwell and gave the 2006 commencement speech at his Liberty University.

McCain also actively sought out the endorsement of the Rev. John Hagee, whose writings (which McCain admits he has not read) are filled with anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish rhetoric. Hagee calls the Catholic Church "the great whore" and the anti-Christ, and he insists that the Jews as the killers of Christ have brought all their suffering upon themselves.

As a leading Christian Zionist, Hagee urges all Jews to return to Israel, because they are required to fulfill the biblical prophecy of a great spiritual war in the Middle East. Hagee believes that the Nazi Holocaust was part of God's plan to bring the surviving Jews back to Israel. Jews are obviously not very happy with

this talk, because Hagee tells them, as only arrogant preachers such as he can, that only one quarter of them will be saved in this holocaust. Hagee sometimes graciously increases that portion to one third.

Even when pressed by the Rabbinical Council of America, the Catholic League, and Catholics United to renounce Hagee, McCain said that he is proud of the endorsement, because Hagee "supports what I stand for and believe in," although he did add that he does not agree with all that Hagee teaches.

Aside from Hagee's hateful religious views, I wonder what McCain would think of his views on Iraq. With former GOP leader Tom Delay in attendance at a 2002 sermon, Hagee predicted that "the war between America and Iraq is the gateway to the Apocalypse. It will destabilize the Middle East and produce an Islamic army of millions who will fight to the death." On second thought, I suppose that might take a hundred years.

Obama's minister Jeremiah Wright has been rightly criticized for his radical views, the most reprehensible being that our government released the AIDS virus. When the Rev. Wright declared "God damn America" for its racial sins, he was following Old Testament prophets who condemned the sins of Israel. Hagee and others use the same biblical model for damning America.

At a February campaign rally in Cincinnati McCain shared the stage with the Rev. Rod Parsley, whom McCain called his "spiritual guide." Parsley condemns Islam as a "false religion" because "Allah was a demon spirit."

Incredibly enough, Parsley believes that America was founded "with the intention of seeing this false religion destroyed," and that even Columbus sailed to America hoping to "defeat the armies of Islam," which were apparently hiding out deep in some Amazonian jungle.

Obama has taken a real bruising by the press because of his association with Rev. Wright, but one wonders when McCain will get tough questions about his real

religious identity, about his misreading of the Constitution, and about why far right preachers he once condemned are now his friends.

As a postscript, I offer a comparison between John McCain and George Washington. Like McCain, Washington refused to take a sacrament signifying adherence to Christianity. In the case of Washington it was communion rather than baptism.

In contrast to McCain, however, Washington never made any pretense to religious belief other than a general belief in divine providence. When asked if he were a Christian, Washington always politely refused to answer.