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February 22, 2008: Amy Sullivan--The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap

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Title: Amy Sullivan--The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap

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2/22/2008--Amy Sullivan's new book--The Party Faithful--is getting her coverage all over the place. While I have not read the book, I have looked at her excerpts in Time and on beliefnet. Sullivan is a senior editor at Time magazine and an evangelical. She traces the history of the Democratic Party's increasing hostility to religious people and its devastating political consequences, particularly in the Presidential election of 2004. Some of this is ground I also covered in American Religious Democracy. The problem with Sullivan's argument is one she should recognize, because she adverts to it at various points. Clinton appealed to religious people in the 1990's because of his own comfort level with religion. But his personal appeal did not change the fundamental dynamics of the Democratic Party not welcoming religious people. Sullivan suggests that the Party has finally learned the lesson that you don't win elections in American by throwing away the white Christian vote. Well, yes and no. The Democratic Party has certainly learned that you cannot win without religious voters. But, by Sullivan's own argument, if this is just political calculation, religious voters will see through it. The three leading Democratic candidates for President—Obama, Clinton and Edwards—were and are not just using religion. They themselves are at home in a religious context. But what about the wall of separation between Church and State? The Party is still committed to that. And part of that commitment is based on a negative view of religion in the public square. In Governor Romney's speech about religion, he made an important point. Religion is not just private. The attitude of many secularists in the Democratic Party is that we are stuck with religion in the public square for purely political reasons, for now. As soon as we can, we will put religion back into the closet. A lasting political change will come when secularists come to see themselves as in a sense religious. Then there will not any longer be hostility to religion per se.