

## **Gospel Tears Down Idols and Shrines of Politics and Race**

By: Larry Greenfield

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Analyzing election results is a tricky business, even for the experts, and I'm no expert. But it's hard, at least for me, not to try to get a feeling for what is happening and finding patterns that reveal where the electorate is heading, even if the sampling is a single state like Pennsylvania.

Those feeling and findings often depend on the particular interests of the expert or non-expert analyst. So if gender considerations are paramount, Pennsylvania would seem to tell us that women, understandably I suppose, are more sensitive to that matter than men: 49 percent of voting male Democrats (42 percent of the total vote) chose Hilary Rodham Clinton and 51 percent chose Barack Obama, while 59 percent of female Democrats (58 percent of the total vote) chose Clinton and 41 percent chose Obama.

If race is an additional factor, white men favored Clinton 57 percent to 43 percent, while white women supported Clinton by a margin of 68 percent to 32 percent. Ninety percent of African Americans (constituting 15 percent of the total vote) chose Obama, which might suggest that both African American males and females strongly supported Obama; but whites (80 percent of the total vote) split their choices, with 63 percent supporting Clinton and 37 percent opting for Obama.

If age is a primary interest of the analyst, there's a significant difference based on whether the voter is under 45 (31 percent of the total vote) or 45 and older (69 percent of the total vote). The "under" crowd favored Obama 55 percent to 45 percent, while those at 45 years of age and older went for Clinton 59 percent to 41 percent.

Because I have a special interest in religion as well as race, I took particular note of a striking difference between those who self-identify themselves as persons of a specific faith and those who self-identify as having no religion.

The pro-religion folks consistently went for Clinton: white Protestants (26 percent of the total vote) by a margin of 59 percent to 41 percent; Catholics (36 percent of the total vote) by a margin of 70 percent to 30 percent, and Jewish (8 percent of the total vote) by a margin of 62 percent to 38 percent. (No data were available for Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or other religions.)

But it was just the reverse for those claiming no religion (10 percent of the total vote): 62 percent for Obama and 38 percent for Clinton.

If the criterion turns to religious practice, as measured by attendance at worship services, the results mirror affiliation: those attending worship services weekly (35 percent of the total vote) favored Clinton 59 percent to Obama's 41 percent; those attending occasionally (46 percent of the total vote) favored Clinton by a 56 percent to

44 percent margin. But those "never" attending worship services (17 percent of the total vote) favored Obama by a 55 percent to 45 percent margin.

In my admittedly non-expert analysis, there would appear to be a pattern here with regard to religious affiliation and religious practice. Could it be that religious faith and practice contributes to making electoral choices on the basis of race in at least some noticeable way?

If one is a Christian this is cause for concern, whether one is a Republican or Democrat, whether one is a Clinton or Obama supporter.

The Apostle Paul, in the 17th chapter of the Book of Acts, tells the crowd in Athens that the one God "who made the world and everything in it" can't be confined in shrines and altars and idols that are constructed by human beings, nor does God's survival depend on what human beings do.

It is just the opposite: this God revealed in Jesus gives of God's self to all human beings--their "life and breath and everything." This is the God, Paul argues, who made every nation and people. And it is this divine reality that human beings, more than anything else, should seek "in the hope that they might feel after him and find him."

Race, especially when it gets mixed up with the altars and shrines and idols of our human-made religions, is a limitation not just on our human enterprises but also a limitation on our feeling after and finding God.

Insofar as that mixture operates in each one of us--not just in a segment of the Pennsylvania population--it needs to be exposed, and rejected and repented for.

In our feeling after and finding the God who gives all of us "life and breath and everything" we will also feel after and find what it means to be "we the people" in a vibrant and vital--that is, life giving way.

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