

GRAB THE PEWS

The liberals have been beaten by the evangelical vote. It is a sobering fact that religious folks are extremely determined, sharply focused and highly organized. There is a solution: If you can't beat them, join them.

Liberals, get thee to a church — regardless of your religion, lack of religion or even distaste for religion.

Once in the bosom of your new fellowship, pray with Bush supporters. Everyone lace fingers, pray loudly and clearly for an end to oppressing gays and women in the name of Jesus. Pray that your new friends will find the right words to say to God on Judgment Day when He asks about Bush's death toll and your vote that condoned it. Pray for guidance on what to say when God comes reckoning for the damage to the environment. St. Peter is too sharp for rhetoric.

One day, over blessed wine and crackers, the Bush crowd may ask how liberals were able to balance the budget. Liberals can ask for tips on how to mobilize record-breaking vote counts.

Religious movements are constantly evolving and here's a chance to influence the coming gospel makeover. Saturate the ranks. Paint a Jesus before a Jesus paints you. After a while, assimilation will evolve and will no longer administer the oppression of women and gays.

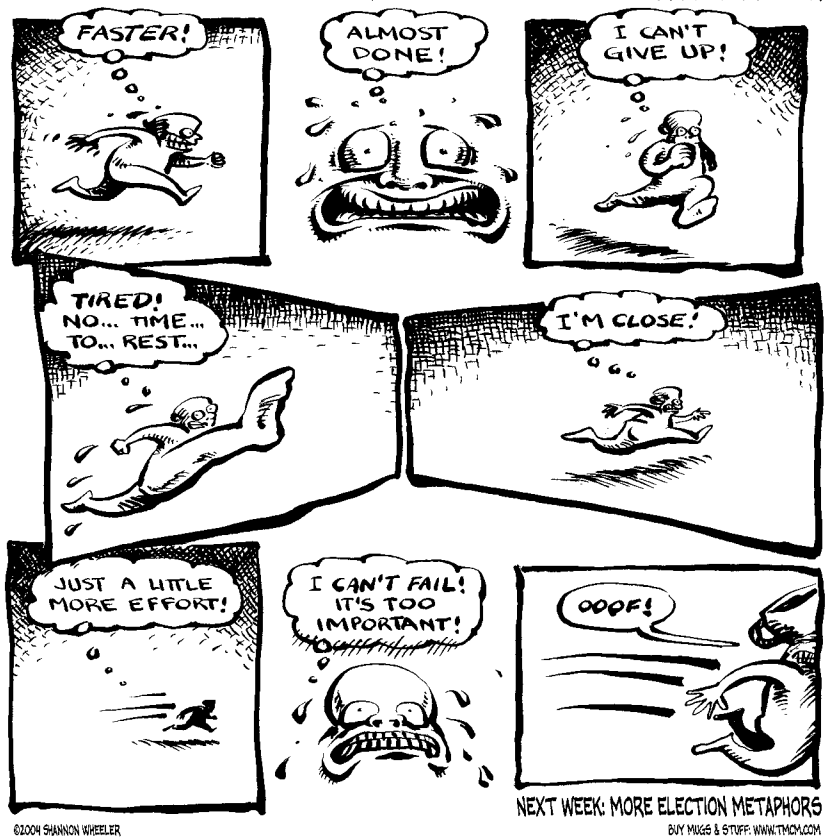
There is another alternative. Dress up like Jesus or the Virgin Mary. Stand outside any busy church. Fan your fingers out to the sky; close your eyes and silently meditate/pray for the end of organized religious oppression of gays and women. When somebody asks what you are doing, politely tell them.

*Michael Grossman
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NO RECONCILIATION

News flash: 51 to 49 percent is not a mandate! It means that on Nov. 2, nearly half the country did not agree with the Bush administration's goals, policies, or actions. And what we did not agree with on that day, and through the four previous years, most of us still do not agree with on Nov. 3.

TOO MUCH COFFEE MAN BY SHANNON WHEELER



Kumbaya Dammit BY DAN CAROL



Nuts

Time to rebuild from the bottom up.

The day that the Democrats run a perfect campaign, with great message and great mechanics, with our values and a compelling, hopeful vision of American community truly on the line, and then we lose to cultural class warfare and gay-baiting, that's the day I'll be depressed and stop fighting and working.

The day that we can't win a living wage campaign in a red state (we won one in Florida with 72 percent of the vote last week and another in Nevada) or reap the rewards of hard work by groups like The Oregon Bus Project and Progressive Majority (hello Democratic state senate take-backs in Oregon and Washington), that's the day I will stop working.

That day is far off.

Right now, I want my country back from the folks who tortured prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and the narcissistic culture that taught the soldiers there to take pictures and then gloat about it. Thumbs down to all that. We used to be the good guys.

Forget about moving to Canada. The Canadians need us to fix the mess down here and stop Bush from literally digging up half of Alberta looking for oil among the old dinosaur bones up there. Look it up — it's next to ANWR drilling in the Cheney energy plan.

Learning from our mistakes? I am up for that. But let's not panic and call 55 million votes and 252 electoral votes a disaster. This was not 1984, although it sure feels like it.

This was also *not* a mandate for radical policy change, but it will be if Democrats lie down and moan in the weeks ahead rather than fight hard for our core beliefs.

The Republicans won the "values" game and played the gay marriage card. Like, duh. But does this mean we must abandon our pro-choice platform — or simply prove the old adage that "you can't fight something with nothing."

I'll argue the latter: that the Kerry campaign failed to articulate a national call to action in the post 9/11 era, and instead offered vague "plans" under the theme of "Not Bush," is not a moral crisis for the Democrats — it's just weak message.

Boy, do I wish they had listened to me about the Apollo energy independence project, or had acted on my mother's well-wishing, ranting e-mails each week about what Kerry should be saying — which were spot on. As were yours, no doubt. Why our candidates don't trust their instincts and run from their hearts is one of the reasons I've drifted away from Washington, D.C., politicians and their poll-tested pablum. It made me nuts.

But I stopped being mad a while ago. Because across the country, from re-energized groups like ACORN to newly-formed groups like the League of Independent Voters to even the salons of Hollywood, I see serious progress and commitment to building a new, serious and sustainable, grassroots network for change. A network that demands both great mechanics — and bold messages.

It won't help, in my view, to get mad at red state voters who found Bush's optimistic, confident style ("we're gonna win") preferable to Kerry, who unfortunately stumbled over some easy

opportunities to explain himself on the war. It also won't help getting mad at the mayor of San Francisco or gay rights activists for maybe pushing too fast on an issue that our puritan-settled nation isn't all ready for, just yet.

For years, the only thing I have been saying that we really need to mimic about the right is not their policies, but their patience. People are starting to get that Pat Robertson and Ralph Reed and company have been WORKING at this for a while. And they don't stop and rest on their laurels just because we point that out in articles, studies and reports. They keep going like Energizer bunnies.

So ... so should we. Because we actually know what to do if we could connect grassroots politics to money, message and sustained effort.

We know how — and we are — winning states from the ground up while building a real farm team of leaders and candidates. We can offer voters hopeful, compelling, strategic initiatives for change (they're out there! they are not a mystery!). We can wage a smart battle for tolerance and true family values to combat Falwell fundamentalism — as long as we are willing to be honest about our own orthodoxies and how to honor them without shooting ourselves in the foot.

Yes, the Democratic Party will go through months if not years of whining and hand-wringing, cowering and compromising — but trust me that this is no different than times before.

If you have the energy, it is critical to demand that our leaders stand tall for our long-standing values (fairness, opportunity, tolerance — the reason folks settled here in the first place!) rather than try and go the me-too, DLC route. For education and fortification, perhaps read that ground-breaking book by Thomas Frank, *What's Wrong With Kansas*, and then start thinking about how you will articulate and stand up for what's right in your heart and your town. We should listen to that Kansas dude: Now is not the time to lay down on economic populism, as we did in 1980, 1984, 1989 and 1994.

If we focus on winning states, rather than crafting one just-add-water, uber-message that will save our bacon overnight, we could avoid another round of dysfunctional path of in-fighting over how liberal or moderate the national party should be.

Because the Democratic agenda in states (living wage, workforce training, public education) keeps us all together — be it the DLC-wing or the Wellstone-wing of the Party.

But I am not going to try and talk you out of being mad or sad or whatever it is that you feel right now. Hell, you may even be mad at me for getting your hopes up in this space that we could win — but I thought we could and would, and we almost did, even with a weak candidate and a sickening gay-baiting, Swift-boating campaign run by the best in the business.

Most importantly for the long view, we did rise up and get six million more voters, and train and energize thousands of new leaders and activists for the first time.

We need them, and you, to get back up again.

If you are sick of the Democratic Party and want to build a third party, at least talk to Dan Cantor of the Working Families Party (www.workingfamiliesparty.org) in New York about how to do it right.

But if you know the challenge in building back our country isn't even really about party-building, but about community-building, I'll see you back here sometime soon.

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