NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

Palin, at center of political stage, keeps mum on faith

Adelle M. Banks Religion News Service | Oct. 22, 2010

Former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin speaks at the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minn., Sept. 3, 2010. (CNS photo/Damir Sagolj, Reuters)

Sarah Palin once pursued politics out of a religious sense of calling, and considered her choice as vice presidential candidate by 2008 GOP nominee John McCain part of ?God?s plan.?

But now, as the midterm elections loom and Palin positions herself as the heroine of the Tea Party, Palin has become less vocal about the faith that propelled her onto the political scene.

?She?s not even talking much about her Christian faith as a whole, much less as a Pentecostal Christian,? says author Stephen Mansfield, who charts Palin?s journey through religion and politics in a new book.

As she stirs the Tea-Party pot at rallies across the country ahead of the midterm elections, the former Alaska governor occasionally refers to freedom as a ?God-given right? or people with special needs and the elderly as ?God?s gifts.? But her speeches tend to focus more on the economy and small-government populism than faith or social issues.

Mansfield, who has also parsed the faith of George W. Bush, President Obama, Winston Churchill and others, says Palin?s faith was nonetheless key to her swift political ascent.

He credits Wasilla Assembly of God, the Alaska church she attended after her family left Roman Catholicism when she was about 10, with giving Palin a sense of mission and politics, and the corps of volunteers who helped with her first mayoral campaign.

?I think her entire political worldview comes out of her faith,? said Mansfield, who co-wrote ?The Faith and Values of Sarah Palin? with David A. Holland.

Mansfield says Theron Horne, a youth minister at the Pentecostal church, inspired Palin and others in the church to view their vocation not necessarily in missions or pastoral work but as a machinist, an oil field worker or a politician.

?We need good people with servants? hearts in the world of politics too,? Horne told them, Mansfield wrote.

Hours before Palin?s national debut at the 2008 Republican National Convention, Mansfield said, her mother picked up the phone and called Horne. ?We know who had the biggest role in launching Sarah toward this moment,? Sally Heath told Horne.

Before gaining national attention, Palin routinely visited Alaskan churches as governor, spoke freely about her Christian beliefs and mentioned God without hesitation in official appearances.

?When she was in Alaska, her faith was a welcome thing and it was shared by a lot of people, or at least appreciated by people if they didn?t share it,? Mansfield said. ?The McCain staff made it very clear they wanted her to downplay her faith.?

During the 2008 campaign, video clips surfaced of a tongues-speaking African pastor praying for Palin at Wasilla Assembly, including a request for God?s rebuke of witchcraft. Even today, one of the videos still available on YouTube is spliced together with the opening credits of the TV series ?Bewitched.?

?These were humiliating to her,? Mansfield said. ?I think all of that has caused her to tone it down.?

After the campaign ended, Palin described her conversion experience in her 2009 memoir. ?I made the conscious decision that summer to put my life in my Creator?s hands and trust him as I sought my life?s path,? Palin wrote in ?Going Rogue.?

Mansfield judges the description rather harshly: ?vapid.?

?Pentecostals, charismatics, evangelicals?they can tell you the exact moment when there was a change,? Mansfield said. ?Is that the calculated risk, the calculated step you have to take to be heard on MSNBC? Perhaps, but I don?t think there?s any question she?s downplaying it a bit.?

Mansfield didn?t speak with Palin for the book, but did talk with her parents and former ministers.

Palin continues to attend Wasilla Bible Church, an evangelical congregation she found as an adult, and relies on devotional readings and e-mail contact with a prayer group as she travels, he said.

But does she, like other Pentecostals, pray in tongues? Mansfield?s not sure.

?The most we can say with certainty is she?s definitely comfortable with it ... and definitely family members do,? he said. ?You don?t attend a Pentecostal church all these years without accepting it as at least something that some Christian believers can practice.?

Whether she?s distanced herself from Pentecostalism or not, Mansfield argues that Palin runs a risk in running away from her faith, and says there are advantages to talking openly and authentically about faith.

?It?s good politics,? he said. ?She?s going to be attacked for being a Bible bumpkin. Why not take that stick out of her opponents? hands by being expressive and open about it??

Source URL (retrieved on *04/23/2017 - 07:22*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/palin-center-political-stage-keeps-mum-faith