

At the RNC, a benediction that wasn't

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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So what's been the most shocking thing to come out of GOP-presidential-nomination-land in the last couple days?

Was it the presumptive nominee's decision to [announce his running mate with a lengthy speech about himself](#)? [The interview](#) in which, when asked about that running mate's vote for a war that their Democratic opponent also voted for, he said the difference is that that his guy is "entitled to make a mistake every once in a while"? [The fight his campaign picked](#) with the Republican governor of the swing state in which the convention is taking place?

The convention hall itself offers several contenders: two minor celebrities [turning the campaign's ugly subtext into uglier text](#). Rudy Giuliani's [unlikely enthusiasm](#). The would-be first lady's [Rickroll](#), or her speech [cribbing lines from the actual first lady's speech eight years ago](#). A [floor fight right out of Hollywood](#) in which a rebellion among delegates was narrowly beaten back by the campaign.

No, none of the above. The most shocking moment came at the end of the daytime portion of the convention, [when televangelist Mark Burns stepped up to the podium to say this](#):

Hello Republicans! I'm Pastor Mark Burns from the great state of South Carolina! I'm going to pray and I'm going to give the benediction. And you know why? Because we are electing a man in Donald Trump who believes in the name of Jesus Christ. And Republicans, we got to be united because our enemy is not other Republicans, but is Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party.

Let's pray together. Father God, in the name of Jesus, Lord we're so thankful for the life of Donald Trump. We're thankful that you are guiding

him, that you are giving him the words to unite this party, this country, that we together can defeat the liberal Democratic Party, to keep us divided and not united. Because we are the United States of America, and we are the conservative party under God.

To defeat every attack that comes against us, to protect the life of Donald Trump, give him the words, give him the space, give him the power and the authority to be the next president of the United States of America, in Jesus' name—if you believe it, shout Amen!

Let's give Burns the benefit of the doubt and assume he didn't consider the fact that the word *benediction* means *blessing*, which [ought not to come out of the same mouth as cursing people](#)—even Democrats—made in God's likeness. Benediction or not, this guy introduced a prayer by literally calling a political opponent an enemy and then prayed directly against her party and for “the conservative party under God.” Yikes.

“We got to be united because our enemy is not other Republicans, but is Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party.” If Burns had said *we got to be united because our enemy is not Democrats but ISIS, and our nominee is the guy who can beat them*, no one would have blinked. If he'd said *we got to be united because our ultimate enemy is not individual people but the power of sin that plagues our world*, we'd be noting the rare instance of a member of the clergy [using their powers for awesome](#) on a big national stage.

No such luck. It's only the Republicans that the Spirit of God seeks to unite. Against the Democrats.

“If you believe it, shout Amen!” I don't think for a moment that most conservative Christians believe it, that they think calling Democrats enemies is a good example of what it means to follow Jesus. The question is how much they care.

Since the primary fight ended, [the divide between committed and nominal evangelicals](#) has mostly evaporated: [a whopping 78 percent of white evangelicals](#) now say they support the GOP nominee.* Is that because they agree with Burns that [their nominally Presbyterian champion](#) “believes in the name of Jesus Christ” in a way that is diametrically opposed to “our enemy” [the deeply engaged Methodist](#)? I doubt that.

No, it's because they're Republicans in a nation of partisans, and there's a lot they'll tolerate before they break ranks in a leap year. Even a nominee who seems indifferent at best to their values and policy goals. Even a convention where a pastor makes a disgusting mockery of the very notion of prayer.

** As do half of white mainline Protestants and Catholics, according to the same survey linked above.*