

**Religion and Presidential Campaigns: Kennedy, Romney,
and Cuomo on the**

**Relation Between Religious Belief and Public
Policy**

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Religion and Presidential Campaigns: Religious Belief,

Public Morality, and Public Policy

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Frequent controversies about religion and politics have marked the 2008 presidential campaign---from high-pitched sermonizing by Senator Barack Obama's former pastor, the Rev. Jeremiah Wright, to Governor Mike Huckabee's appeal as "the Christian candidate" in early Republican primaries, to Catholic bishops' challenge to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani for his positions on abortion and same-sex marriage, to Governor Mitt Romney's attempt to defuse criticism of his Mormon faith. Almost lost in the headline controversies over faith and politics was the more important question of whether the religious belief of any candidate for the White House is relevant to voting decisions, electoral campaigns, and good governance.

Legally, of course, Article VI of the United States Constitution states that there should be no religious qualification for public office. Yet many presidential candidates in the last 30 years have spoken openly about their religious identity in an effort to appeal to evangelicals and other religious voters. While historians analyze how and why this emphasis on religion in presidential campaigns has occurred, political scientists and many ordinary citizens question the wisdom of such religion-based appeals in election campaigns and in actual governance.

This paper poses the problem in this way: In a pluralistic democracy with a constitutional commitment to religious freedom and church-state separation, how, if at all, should a presidential candidate's religious beliefs influence his or her campaigning and governing? Should he use TV advertizing to make openly (frankly) religious appeals to believing voters? Should she use the bully pulpit of the presidency or the appointive and coercive powers of the executive branch to translate her religious convictions and church teachings into public law and public policy? If so, how, when, and on what issues?

While scholars and academics have analyzed this problem, political practitioners have also discussed these issues.¹ Fortunately, we have the

¹ There is a rich literature on the proper relation between a lawmaker's religious convictions and public policy making in a constitutional democracy. See Kent Greenawalt, Religious Convictions and Political Choice (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1988); also his Private Consciences and Public Reasons (New York: Oxford Univ.Press, 1995); Michael J. Perry,

reflections of three political leaders whose religious identities and practical campaign experiences forced them to confront the relevance of religious conviction to political leadership. The paper examines this problem through an analysis of three major speeches given by these public officials in the last two generations: the Houston speech of President John F. Kennedy in 1960, the Notre Dame address of Governor Mario M. Cuomo in 1984, and the Texas address of Governor Mitt Romney in 2007. The complex, nuanced answers of these three politicians can tell us much about political strategy, voter expectations, electoral campaigns, and, in general, the influence of religion in American politics.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part One discusses President Kennedy's address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in 1960, focusing both on the context of the speech and the important arguments Kennedy made for "absolute separation of church and state." Part Two examines Governor Romney's 2007 speech defending his Mormon religious tradition, focusing again on the context of his address and the arguments he made for a close relation between religion and politics in the United States. Finally, Part Three analyzes, briefly, Governor Cuomo's 1984 address on the relation between religion, morality and public policy.

Whereas both Kennedy and Romney were addressing problems of anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon discrimination, Cuomo dealt with the deeper issue of a lawmaker using executive power to translate his religious convictions into public policy binding upon all citizens, believers and non-believers. As we shall see, this issue continues to concern thoughtful observers of American presidential politics.

As political scientists, we are interested in how practicing politicians used the debate about their religious identity in their election campaigns, and in whether their electoral fortunes were enhanced or undermined by their use or avoidance of God-talk. As political theorists, however, we are especially interested in normative questions about religion and politics within an American constitutional context: Is religion relevant as a criterion for public office? Should a candidate use frankly religious appeals to win voters' support? How, if at all, should a lawmaker's religious beliefs influence his or her policymaking?

I. JFK: A Strategic Separationist Argument

Under God: Religious Faith and Liberal Democracy (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003); s Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., Obligations of Citizenship and Demands of Faith (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000); Christopher J. Eberle, Religious Conviction in Liberal Politics (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002); and Mary Segers, "Moral Consistency and Public Policy: Cuomo and Califano on Abortion," in Mary Segers, ed., Church Polity and American Politics: Issues in Contemporary American Catholicism (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), pp. 157-173.

In the 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy, the Democratic nominee for president, regretted that he had to take time away from debating more critical issues (e.g, foreign policy, or poverty and hunger in America) to discuss what his campaign dubbed “the so-called religious issue.” In key primaries in West Virginia and Wisconsin, the press focused on Kennedy’s Catholicism in ways that the candidate thought magnified the importance of the issue or oversimplified it. In a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in April, 1960, Kennedy took the media to task for its emphasis upon his religion. “My religion” he said, “is hardly, in this critical year of 1960, the dominant issue of our time. It is hardly the most important criterion---or even a relevant criterion---on which the American people should make their choice for Chief Executive.”²

Noting that he had for years answered inquiries from the press about the religious issue, Kennedy said it was time for him to turn the tables and ask some questions of journalists: “First: Is the religious issue a legitimate issue in this campaign?” Without wasting any time, Kennedy answered this question.

“There is only one legitimate question underlying all the rest: Would you, as President of the United States, be responsive in any way to ecclesiastical pressures or obligations of any kind that might in any fashion influence or interfere with your conduct of that office in the national interest? I have answered that question many times. My answer was---and is---*no*.”

Kennedy flatly rejected the notion that, as a Catholic, he would be beholden to the dictates of his church hierarchy. At the same time, he acknowledged that there were legitimate policy questions of concern to religious groups “which no one should feel bigoted about raising, and to which I do not object to answering.” He mentioned a few examples: federal aid to parochial schools (he opposed it), an ambassador to the Vatican (opposed), foreign aid funds for birth control, censorship, divorce (he would decide such issues only on the basis of what he thought was the public interest, “without regard to my private religious views”). At the same time, he argued for equal treatment and fairness, saying that these inquiries should be directed equally to all the candidates.

Finally, Kennedy supplied not only concrete examples of his policy positions; he also cited his record as Senator and Congressman, pointing out that no one objected to Catholics in those positions, so why object to a Catholic president? He insisted he was not “the Catholic candidate for president.” He elaborated: “I do not speak for the Catholic Church on issues

² John F. Kennedy, “The Responsibility of the Press: Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, Washington, D.C., April 21, 1960,” in “Let the Word Go Forth”: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, ed. Theodore Sorensen (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 125, 126, 128.

of public policy---and no one in that Church speaks for me. My record on aid to education, aid to Tito, the Conant nomination, and other issues has displeased some prominent Catholic clergymen and organizations; and it has been approved by others. The fact is that the Catholic Church is not a monolith---it is committed in this country to the principles of individual liberty---and it has no claim over my conduct as a public officer sworn to do the public interest.” In this way, Kennedy made clear his “complete independence and his complete dedication to separation of church and state.”

As it became clear that Kennedy was going to win the Democratic nomination for president in 1960, worries about his Catholicism were more widely voiced. Recalling the defeat of New York Governor Al Smith in the 1928 presidential election, Democratic Party leaders feared that a Catholic could not win the White House. In August, 1960, about thirty Protestant evangelical church leaders met in Montreux, Switzerland, to strategize how to defeat “the Catholic candidate.” A month later, on September 7, 1960, these prominent Protestants, led by Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham, held a press conference at the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., to announce the formation of a National Conference of Citizens for Religious Freedom. The Peale group declared Kennedy’s Catholicism was a major issue in the campaign and that a Catholic president would face extreme pressure from the hierarchy of his church. It was this meeting that provoked the Kennedy campaign to respond by scheduling the candidate’s now-celebrated address on religion and politics to the Greater Ministerial Association of Houston on September 12, 1960.

Objections to a Catholic in the White House

It is important to understand the objections of Protestant leaders and other Americans to a Catholic president. Basically, they may be grouped into three categories. The first major objection was that the Roman Catholic Church does not accept the principle that church-state separation is fundamental to American society. Moreover, Catholics don’t accept the First Amendment religion clauses because they don’t believe in religious freedom. Recall that this was 1960, five years before the Second Vatican Council (an ecumenical gathering of the world’s Catholic bishops) issued its Declaration on Religious Freedom.

A second major objection was that a Roman Catholic president “would place the instructions of his church above public duty.”³ He would not be able to resist the dictates of his church’s hierarchy. The pope and cardinals would have undue influence on Catholic officeholders, and priests would tell

³ Editorial, Oelwein (Iowa) Register, January 8, 1960, “Catholic Issue” folder, Pre-Presidential Papers, 1960 Campaign, Box 1044, John F. Kennedy Library, quoted in Randall Balmer, God in the White House: A History (New York: Harper One, 2008), p. 17.

their parishioners how to vote. In 1928, nativist groups had charged that Al Smith “would be a tool of the Vatican.” In 1960, not much had changed. This widespread belief helps to explain why Kennedy, in his speeches on the religion question, insisted strongly and repeatedly that “My church does not speak for me, and I do not speak for my church.”

Finally, in this era of the Communist threat and the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Russia, some anti-Catholic tracts equated Catholicism with Fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism. On July 3, 1960, for example, W. A. Criswell, a prominent Southern Baptist leader and pastor of the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, warned his congregation that “Roman Catholicism is not only a religion, it is a political tyranny.”⁴ According to Shaun Casey, a professor of Christian Ethics at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., Kennedy faced a “Pan-Protestant” argument that the Roman Catholic Church is both a state and a church, which is why Catholics can’t accept church-state separation.⁵ Even after Kennedy won the election, some evangelicals equated Romanism with Communism. One author drew a distinction between Christianity and Roman Catholicism and stated that “American freedoms are being threatened today by two totalitarian systems, Communism and Roman Catholicism.”⁶

While this last objection seems rather extreme, the first two objections---that Catholics don’t accept church-state separation, and that Catholic lawmakers would be unable to resist the policy dictates of their bishops---seem plausible and understandable. Given the historic experience of Protestants in Catholic countries of Europe, and given the traditional Baptist concern for religious freedom and church-state separation, these comments about Roman Catholicism were not surprising. In April, 1980, Archibald Cox wrote a letter to Kennedy noting that

“There is a sizable group of thoughtful people who are seriously troubled about the prospect of having a President whose religion is what they regard as authoritarian. Their doubts are far more serious than such silly questions as the weight of the Vatican upon our domestic or foreign policies for they deal with such philosophical questions as

⁴ Quoted in Randall Balmer, God in the White House: A History, p. 23.

⁵ Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, “The Kennedy Moment: Religion and the Race for the Presidency,” Headline Forum, 16 January 2008, Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, New York City.

⁶ Loraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1962), pp. 2-3, quoted in Balmer, God in the White House: A History, p. 45.

intellectual freedom.”⁷

Cox urged Kennedy to address the issue directly with a speech about the relationship between church and state. Five months later, prodded by the Mayflower Hotel meeting and the identification of anti-Catholic mobilizing with the Nixon campaign, Kennedy faced the issue squarely in his Houston address.

Kennedy’s Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association

JFK’s address to some 600 people (300 ministers and an equal number of observers) at the Rice Hotel in Houston on September 12, 1960, has been justly celebrated as a powerful, eloquent speech on religion and politics in the United States. Kennedy gave a clear, firm defense of church-state separation and emphasized the irrelevancy of a candidate’s religion to his qualifications for public office. The speech lasted 11 minutes; Kennedy then spent another 45 minutes fielding questions from the audience (unlike Governor Mitt Romney in December 2007, who simply gave his speech on “Faith in America” and then left the stage without further ado).

Kennedy appealed to the Constitution (both the First Amendment and Article VI) to defend his position. He also appealed to principles of fairness and equality in opposing discrimination against presidential candidates on the basis of religion.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute---where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote---where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference---and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.”⁸

Acknowledging America’s religious diversity, he appealed to a quid-pro-quo argument for tolerance: “I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish...where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials---and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one is treated as an act against all. For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has

⁷ Letter, Archibald Cox to John F. Kennedy, April 8, 1960, “Religious Issue: Campaign Material” folder 2, Theodore C. Sorensen Papers, Campaign Files, 1959-60, Box 25, John F. Kennedy Library; quoted in Balmer, *God in the White House: A History*, p. 18.

⁸ Kennedy’s speech has been widely reproduced. See John F. Kennedy, “Remarks on Church and State,” Delivered to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, September 12, 1960, in Mary Segers and Ted G. Jelen, *A Wall of Separation? Debating the Public Role of Religion* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), pp. 140-143.

been and may someday be again, a Jew---or a Quaker---or a Unitarian---or a Baptist.” Kennedy added, “Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you.”

Citing his service in the Second World War and that of his brother (killed in battle), Kennedy said there was no religious test for military service then and there should be no such test for public service now. He cited specific policy positions and asked to be judged on the basis of fourteen years in the Congress---“on my declared stands against an ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools (which I myself attended)...” He insisted that, as a Catholic president, he would not be beholden to the dictates of his church’s hierarchy” “I believe in an America...where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source... I do not speak for my church on public matters---and the church does not speak for me.”

Kennedy appealed to utilitarian arguments, saying that the exclusion of Catholics from the White House was detrimental (injurious) to American society. “If this election is decided on the basis that 40,000,000 Americans lost their chance of being President on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.”

Finally, Kennedy held out the prospect of leaving office in the event of any irreconcilable conflict between conscience and public duty. His remarks here were reminiscent of a noted book by Albert O. Hirschman about the ethical duties of public servants, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty.⁹ As Kennedy stated, “...If the time should ever come---and I do not concede any conflict to be remotely possible---when my office would require me to either violate my conscience, or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office, and I hope any other conscientious public servant would do likewise.”

Kennedy’s Houston address was widely disseminated by his campaign. The speech was televised live on 22 stations throughout Texas. Campaign organizers also published transcripts of the address and produced a 30-minute film for wider distribution. Their target audience was the undecided voters. As of Labor Day, 1960, 23 percent of the electorate was undecided.¹⁰

Theodore Sorensen, in his biography of Kennedy, noted that although the Houston address did not end the religious controversy or silence

⁹ Albert O. Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

¹⁰ Shaun Casey, Speaking at the Forum, “The Kennedy Moment: Religion and the Race for the Presidency,” Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, 16 January 2008, Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, New York City.

Kennedy's critics, it was nonetheless widely and enthusiastically applauded in Texas and in the nation. "It made unnecessary any further full-scale answer from the candidate, and Kennedy, while continuing to answer questions, never raised the subject again. It offered in one document all the answers to all the questions any reasonable man could ask. It helped divide the citizens legitimately concerned about Kennedy's views from the fanatics who had condemned him from birth."¹¹

But, Sorensen noted, the issue did not die. "Many who approved of the Houston speech demanded a statement by the Pope as well. Others said Kennedy was lying. Some said Kennedy was fine, but his election would pave the way for future Catholic Presidents who might not share his views." In Part III of this paper, we shall examine how this controversy about a Catholic in the White House has reappeared in American politics---with the candidacies, for example, of Geraldine Ferraro for Vice President in 1984 and of John Kerry for President in 2004. Forty-five years later, the issue is still raised in presidential and other major elections. Perhaps some of the Protestant criticisms of Kennedy's Catholicism in 1960 are still pertinent.

Criticism of the Houston Address

Sorensen called Kennedy's address one of the two greatest speeches of JFK's life (surpassed only by his 1961 Inaugural Address). Sam Rayburn, speaker of the House of Representatives, was equally emphatic in his assessment of Kennedy's address. "As we say in my part of Texas," he said, "he ate 'em blood raw."¹²

But some were not altogether happy with Kennedy's Houston address. According to Mark Massa, Episcopal Bishop James Pike called Kennedy "the most thoroughgoing secularist ever to run for the nation's highest office. *The Nation* described him as "close to being a spiritually rootless man." *America*, the Jesuit-edited magazine, observed that "we were somewhat taken aback by [Kennedy's] unvarnished statement that 'nothing takes [precedence over one's oath.] Mr. Kennedy doesn't really believe that. No religious man, be he Catholic, Protestant, or Jew, holds such an opinion."¹³

The Kennedy speech had been thoroughly vetted by several Catholic advisers to the Kennedy campaign. John Cogley, former editor of *Commonweal* and later religion editor for *The New York Times*, coached

¹¹ Theodore Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 193. While Kennedy never raised the subject again, the Republicans, according to Sorensen, handled the religion issue very shrewdly. "They continually mentioned the issue by deploring it." *Ibid*.

¹² Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p.193.

¹³ Mark S. Massa, S.J., *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2003), p. 84.

Kennedy on possible questions for the Q-and-A session immediately following Kennedy's formal address. Sorensen, principal writer of the speech, read the speech over the telephone to the Rev. John Courtney Murray, S.J., "a leading and liberal exponent of the Catholic position on church and state." Earlier, at Kennedy's request, Sorensen had consulted with Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh, a Kennedy friend, on the position of the Catholic Church. It was Wright who suggested the resignation passage in which Kennedy said that he would resign his office in the event---extremely unlikely---of any irremediable conflict between his conscience and the national interest. Kennedy had long deliberated over this passage and rightly predicted that it would be criticized. Sorensen said this single sentence "was designed to still those Protestant critics who were certain he would succumb to pressure and those Catholic critics who were certain he would stifle his faith."¹⁴

Given the anti-Catholic prejudice Kennedy encountered continuously through the 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy had little choice but to reiterate his commitment to a nearly impenetrable wall of separation between church and state. Nevertheless, Mark Massa argues that Kennedy privatized religion and divorced religious from political concerns. According to Massa, this has had unfortunate consequences. "Kennedy's very success in winning the presidential office on secular terms has helped to categorize Catholic politicians as either hypocritical opportunists---professing a very public faith while denying the obvious social implications of that faith for public/political policy---or as unthinking slaves of the hierarchy on sexual and reproductive issues."¹⁵

In defense of Kennedy, it should be noted that he faced a situation rather different from what candidates face today. Kennedy was not necessarily talking about religion generically or defending the role of religion in public life. Religion, to Kennedy, meant religions, particular creeds or churches. A religious issue for him was a **sectarian** issue---as in controversies between Christian sects such as Catholic, Calvinist, or Lutheran. Sectarianism could be divisive. Moreover, he thought he should not be penalized for his Catholicism, nor should 40 million fellow American Catholics be penalized for their faith.

Secondly, in articulating such a strict separationist position, Kennedy was not denigrating religion; he often spoke with great respect for the role of religion in American history and society. It is clear from remarks he made to the American Society of Newspaper Editors and from the 45-minute question-and-answer session that followed his Houston address that Kennedy thought it perfectly legitimate for religious advocates to ask him about religion-related policy issues of great importance to them:

¹⁴ Sorensen, Kennedy, pp. 175 and 190-191. See also John Cogley, A Canterbury Tale: Experiences and Reflections: 1916-1976 (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

¹⁵ Massa, Anti-Catholicism in America, p. 85.

I don't want anyone to think, because they interrogate me on this very important question, that I regard that as unfair questioning or unreasonable, or that somebody who is concerned about the matter is prejudiced or bigoted. I think this fight for religious freedom is basic in the establishment of the American system, and therefore any candidate for the office should submit himself to the questions of any reasonable man.¹⁶

According to J. Bryan Hehir, Kennedy confronted a formidable problem in 1960; his Catholicism was the major obstacle he faced in the country as a whole. In his Houston address, he tried to build two firewalls. First, he insisted upon absolute church-state separation at the institutional level. No church official could tell a Catholic president how to govern or what policies to enact. Similarly, no public official could decide properly ecclesiastical issues.

Secondly, Kennedy held that a president's religious belief should be a private matter. "I believe in a president whose views on religion are his own private affair...[not] imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office." On another occasion, Kennedy insisted that "the Presidency is not, after all, the British Crown, serving a dual capacity in both church and state. The President is not elected to be protector of the faith or guardian of the public morals. His attendance at church on Sunday should be his business alone, not a showcase for the nation."¹⁷

Noting the ambiguity of this view that a president's religious belief should be a private matter, Hehir suggests that there may be two meanings to the term "privatizing religion". Privatization could mean that the president has a right to make a private faith choice. Or privatization could mean that religion is considered inherently private. The first meaning is understandable and defensible in the American context with its emphasis on freedom of religion. However, the latter statement---religion is inherently private---seems to be more problematic, especially for communal traditions (e.g., Roman Catholicism) that regard their teachings as relevant /applicable to society as well as to the individual¹⁸.

Kennedy urged voters to bracket a candidate's religion out of their considerations when they entered the voting booth. "I believe the American

¹⁶ John F. Kennedy, Address to Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Question-and-Answer Session, Houston, Texas, September 12, 1960, in Theodore Sorensen, ed., "Let the Word Go Forth": The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), p. 136.

¹⁷ The first quotation is from Kennedy's Houston Address. The second is from his April 1960 Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors.

¹⁸ Remarks of J. Bryan Hehir, Forum on "The Kennedy Moment: Religion and the Race for the Presidency," Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, January 16, 2008, Fordham University, Lincoln Center Campus, New York City.

people are more concerned with a man's views and abilities than with the church to which he belongs." For the sake of social peace and political order, sectarian religion had to be confined to the private sphere of life. As Massa has written, "It is precisely because Kennedy was a Roman Catholic that he had to secularize the presidency in order to win it."¹⁹

II. Governor Mitt Romney: Separation and Accommodation

Massachusetts Governor Willard (Mitt) Romney frequently quoted President Kennedy's Houston address in the course of his political career and his campaign for the 2008 Republican presidential nomination. Faced with voters' wariness of his Mormon faith, he adopted a rhetorical strategy of avoiding all God-talk and uttering standard separationist disclaimers about the constitutional irrelevance of religion as a qualification for public office.

Ironically, there were two separate occasions when the names Kennedy and Romney were linked before the 2008 race for the presidency. The first occasion had to do with Mitt Romney's father, George Romney, president of American Motors and later Governor of Michigan (from 1963 to 1969). In March, 1960, liberals friendly to the Kennedy campaign sought to avert the problematic issue of Kennedy's Catholicism by forming a Fair Campaign Practices Committee and issuing a declaration of principles regarding the conduct of a responsible presidential campaign. The group included Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish leaders, as well as Carl F.H. Henry, editor of *Christianity Today*, a leading evangelical publication, and George Romney, a Mormon. They issued a "Special Statement on Religion in the 1960 Campaign," which listed simple principles that American voters should consider in the 1960 presidential race. "It is proper and desirable that every public official should attempt to govern his conduct by a personal conscience informed by his religious faith," the statement began. "No candidate for public office should be opposed or supported because of his particular religious affiliation," it continued. The statement cautioned against "stirring up, fostering, or tolerating religious animosity," and recommended intelligent discussion of the relation of religious faith to public issues.²⁰

Eight years later, when George Romney himself sought the Republican presidential nomination in 1968, his membership in the LDS Church was not an issue. As Governor of Michigan and a leading representative of the liberal wing of the Republican party, he was a major contender for the GOP nomination. But his Mormon religion was not a factor in 1968. According to Balmer, this was because Kennedy's case for indifference toward a

¹⁹ Mark S. Massa, S.J., *Anti-Catholicism in America: The Last Acceptable Prejudice* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), p. 83.

²⁰ Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: A History* (New York: Harper One, 2008), pp. 14-15, citing the Bulletin of the Fair Campaign Practices Committee, Inc. from the Papers of the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

candidate's faith, made in Houston in 1960, set the standard for the next three presidential elections: 1964, 1968, and 1972.

On a second occasion, the names of a Romney and a Kennedy were linked, but this time the issue of Mormonism did come up. In 1994, George Romney's son, Mitt Romney, was the Massachusetts GOP candidate challenging incumbent Senator Edward Kennedy, JFK's brother, for U.S. Senate. At the outset of the race, Romney's membership in the LDS Church was raised by his Republican primary opponents. Ted Kennedy came to Romney's defense, saying that his religion "is not an issue and it shouldn't be. President Kennedy and the American people settled that question in the 1960 campaign. It was a proud moment for the country, and this issue should never be raised again."²¹

However, once Romney won the Republican nomination and faced Kennedy in an increasingly tight general election, the Kennedy campaign backtracked and began to cite Romney's Mormonism as a factor in the race. Then-Congressman Joseph P. Kennedy, Senator Kennedy's nephew, said in a newspaper article that Romney was "part of the white boys' club" and that the LDS church treats black and women as "second-class citizens." This characterization of Mormonism "stemmed from the church's opposition to abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, not allowing women to hold the priesthood, and not giving blacks the authority to hold the priesthood until 1978. Most voters in Massachusetts disagreed with the church's position on these issues so Romney's opponents tried to attack him by criticizing his church."²²

Romney responded by trying to distinguish between the church's beliefs and his beliefs, by stating that he did not answer to church leaders, and by demanding that Senator Kennedy and his campaign apologize for playing the religion card in the election campaign. Romney charged Kennedy with violating his brother's stand on the separation of church and state in public life. "In my view the victory that John Kennedy won was not for just 40 million Americans who were born Catholic, it was for Americans of all faiths."

In short order, Congressman Joseph Kennedy called Romney to apologize for the remarks he had made about the Mormon church and publicly apologized in a letter to the *Boston Globe*. Senator Kennedy also reversed himself on the issue of religion in the campaign once he realized that editorials, public opinion polls, and his brother's own words from the Houston address condemned his criticism of Romney's religion. In the end,

²¹ Reed L. Welch and Ric Jensen, "When a Candidate's Religion is an Issue: Mitt Romney's Campaigns in Massachusetts," Unpublished Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, April 12-15, 2007, p. 6.

²² Welch and Jensen, pp. 7-8, and 11.

Kennedy won the election with 58 percent of the vote to Romney's 41 percent---the smallest margin of any of Kennedy's elections. According to Welch and Jensen, few people believe that religion cost Romney the election. Rather, "Kennedy was most successful attacking Romney's much ballyhooed business career and portraying him as a cold-hearted capitalist who had little regard for the working man."

The political strategy that worked for Romney was to take the high ground and, like JFK, insist that his religion was his private affair and that a separationist position was fitting and appropriate. He took the same approach in his 2002 race for Massachusetts governor. He consistently drew a line between his religious beliefs and what policies he would support, and frequently cited JFK's Houston speech on the separation of religion and politics. This political and rhetorical strategy worked well in Massachusetts, but was inadequate in the 2008 national race for the Republican Party's presidential nomination. In trying to appeal to evangelicals, a fundamental constituency of the GOP, Romney realized that he had to talk about the importance of religion in public life and that he had to address the relevance of his Mormonism to his candidacy. His speech at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library in December 2007 was an effort to clarify these issues. Given the history of Mormonism in the United States, Romney arguably faced a more difficult challenge than did JFK in 1960.

Who are the Mormons, What is Mormonism?

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was founded by Joseph Smith in upstate New York on April 6, 1830. The LDS church claims to be a restoration of authentic Christianity after an 1,800-year "apostasy" that began with the death of the original twelve apostles. Mormons believe that their church is the only true church of Jesus Christ. According to the Book of Mormon, revealed to Joseph Smith by the Angel Moroni, Jesus visited the New World after his resurrection in Jerusalem, and planted the seeds of gospel rebirth many centuries later by Smith himself. Smith placed the United States, both geographically and politically at the central point of salvation history (for example, the Garden of Eden, Smith claimed, was located in Jackson County, Missouri).

The Mormon church spread rapidly (and is, today, the fastest-growing religious group in the world, numbering some 11 million followers, half of whom live in the United States).²³ Given its doctrines, however, it was

²³ In 2008, Mormons number 5,599,000 or roughly 1.7 percent of the U.S. population. There are 16 Mormon representatives in the 110th Congress, including Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NEV), and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT). In 2000, Hatch ran for the GOP nomination for president, and encountered prejudice. He said his own candidacy was to "knock down prejudice against my faith. There's a lot of prejudice out there. We've come a long way, but there are still many people around the country who consider the Mormon faith a cult." Adam Nagourney and Laurie Goodstein, "Romney, a Mormon, Tries to Find a Way around Issue of Religion," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2007

subjected to severe persecution during the first 20 years of its existence. Settlements in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois were short-lived, and Joseph Smith himself was murdered by a mob in Illinois in 1844. Part of the antipathy to Mormons was due to their tendency to engage in bloc voting in new settlements, which was viewed as a threat to existing political power relations by their neighbors. LDS leaders also stressed self-sufficiency and economic communitarianism, which threatened non-Mormon economic fortunes. LDS leaders befriended native Americans and also opposed slavery, which did not endear them to their neighbors in Missouri in the 1830s; Missouri was a border proslavery state. Indeed, hostility there was so great that, in 1838, the governor of Missouri issued an executive order calling for the extermination of Mormons. This led to the expulsion of 10,000 church members from Missouri.²⁴

After Smith was killed in 1844, the Saints, led by Brigham Young, set out on the “Great Trek” across the prairie states and the Rocky Mountains to settle in the territory of Utah, then part of Mexico. In 1853, the church revealed that it allowed some of its members to engage in “plural marriages”. The practice of polygamy led to decades of intense conflict between the church and the federal government, which came to an end only after the church ended its toleration of polygamy in 1890. (The LDS church distances itself from splinter groups in Arizona, Texas, and Colorado which still practice polygamy).

Mormons in the 20th and 21st centuries have not been subject to the overt persecution of the 19th century, but they are still objects of lesser forms of derision. Numerous public opinion surveys in 2006 and 2007 indicated that 30-to-40 percent of those polled would not vote for a Mormon for president.²⁵ Public perceptions of LDS members range from descriptive adjectives such as “weird” or “peculiar” to feelings of vague unease about Mormons. Much of this may be attributable to sheer ignorance about Mormon theology, beliefs, and history.

(online). For statistics, see Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey, 2008* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2008).

²⁴ Jeffrey C. Fox, “Latter-day Saints (LDS), Church of Jesus Christ of (Mormons),” in Paul Djupe and Laura Olson, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (New York: Facts on File, 2003), pp. 249-251. See also Anson Shupe, “Latter-day Saints, Church of Jesus Christ of,” in Robert Wuthnow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Politics and Religion*, Vol. II (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1998), pp. 460-463.

²⁵ Welch and Jensen, “When a Candidate’s Religion is an Issue: Mitt Romney’s Campaigns in Massachusetts, p. 10. See also Michael Luo, “God ’08: Whose, and How Much, Will Voters Accept?” *The New York Times*, July 22, 2007, Section 4, p. 4 (reporting data from the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press).

But one group of Americans, conservative evangelicals, has had serious doctrinal differences with the LDS church. Since evangelicals are a substantial part of the base constituency of the Republican Party, any Mormon running for the GOP presidential nomination would have to take evangelical concerns seriously if he were to be successful in 2008.

Objections to a Mormon in the White House

The most serious criticism of the LDS church comes from evangelicals. Their objections concern fundamental theology or doctrine. Sullivan describes these differences as follows:

Mormons believe that they are the fully realized strain of Christianity---hence the “latter-day saints.” They acknowledge extra-biblical works of scripture (such as the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants), follow a series of prophets who claim to have received divine revelations, and teach that God inhabits an actual physical body. This is all blasphemy to evangelicals; they argue that “the Bible explicitly warns against adding to or detracting from its teaching” and they refer to the revelations as “realistic deceptions by the Devil himself.”²⁶

Mormons consider themselves to be Christians, but some beliefs central to Mormons are regarded by other churches as heretical. LDS church members hold a conception of the Trinity, for example, that is different from mainstream Christian denominations. Evangelicals base their objections “on very specific theological disputes that can’t be overcome by personality or charm or even shared positions on social issues... To evangelicals, Mormonism isn’t just another religion. It is a false religion and therefore a threat to true religion.”²⁷ The Southern Baptist Convention lists the LDS church under Sects and Cults, along with Scientology, Jehovah Witnesses, New Age cults, and the Unification Church (the “Moonies”).²⁸

A second set of objections is widely held by non-evangelicals as well as evangelicals. Many believe that Mormons are beholden to their church’s leaders on matters of public policy.²⁹ This concern of non-Mormons stems

²⁶ Sullivan, “Mitt Romney’s Evangelical Problem,” *Washington Monthly*, September, 2005, p. 4.

²⁷ Sullivan, pp. 3-4.

²⁸ Mike Allen, “A Mormon as President?” *TIME Magazine*, November 26, 2006.

²⁹ The LDS Church does not endorse candidates for office (if it did, it would lose its tax-exempt status). But it does spur political participation among its membership. Mormons were instrumental in the defeat of the Equal Rights Constitutional Amendment in some key states near the end of its ratification period. LDS leaders have also urged members to become actively engaged in the campaign against same-sex marriage in California, Hawaii, Nevada, Alaska and Nebraska. See David Campbell and J. Quin Monson, “Dry Kindling: A

from their awareness of the hierarchical structure of the Mormon church and from the expansive view of prophecy Mormons share. Indeed, Linker notes that “Mormonism is unique in the emphasis it places on prophetic utterances. Not only was the religion founded by a self-proclaimed prophet who brought forth new works of scripture...but the man who holds the office of president of the LDS Church is also considered to be a prophet---“the mouthpiece of God on earth” whose statements override scripture and tradition.”³⁰ If this is the case, then a Mormon president in the Oval Office would be duty-bound to serve two masters, the American people and the prophetic leader of the Mormon church. Like Catholics in 1960, Mormons are perceived as creatures of “divided loyalties.”

A third criticism of Mormons comes from skeptics, agnostics, and secularists who, quite frankly, wonder how Mormons/LDS members come to believe the fantastic narratives of the Book of Mormon and other extra-biblical revelations. What kind of historical evidence or scholarship has been adduced in support of these narratives? Jacob Weisberg wrote in the online journal *Slate* that he could never vote for someone whose religion “is based on such a transparent and recent fraud.”³¹ Michael Kinsley expanded on this theme: If the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, was an “obvious con man,” should someone like Mitt Romney, who apparently believes in “con men,” be running our country? “A skeptic,” according to Kinsley, “may not want someone so credulous in the nation’s top job.”³²

A fourth criticism of Mormon belief concerns the central place the LDS church assigns to the United States as the focal point of sacred history. Mormonism is a restoration movement in which the United States, providentially, has a key role to play. As Linker states, the American Founders were “raised up” by God in order to establish a free government that would allow the restoration to occur and the LDS church to spread the restored gospel throughout the nation and the world. The centrality of the United States figures even in LDS eschatology. As millennialists who think

Political Profile of American Mormons,” in J. Wilson, ed., [title] (Washington, D.C.:Georgetown University Press , 2007), pp. 105-129.

³⁰ Damon Linker, “Taking Mormonism Seriously: the Big Test,” *The New Republic*, Vol. 236, January 1-15, 2007, pp. 18-21.

³¹ Quoted in Mathew Schmalz, “Meet the Mormons: From the Margin to the Mainstream,” *Commonweal*, November 9, 2007, p. 16. Jacob Weisberg, editor of *Slate.com*, wrote, “Romney has every right to believe in con men, but I want to know if he does, and if so, I don’t want him running the country.”

³² Michael Kinsley, “God as Their Running Mate” *TIME Magazine*, September 21, 2007, quoted in Richard McBrien, Faith and Politics: Should Religion Bar a Candidate from Public Office?” *National Catholic Reporter*, Vol. 43, No. 41 (October 12, 2007), p. 14. Needless to say, Kinsley’s attack on the non-rationality of faith traditions might disqualify most religious believers from the presidency.

they are living in the end times before the second coming of Christ, Mormons believe that when Christ returns, his personal reign on earth will be directed from two locations---one in Jerusalem, and the other in "Zion" (the United States). As Linker writes, "This belief has caused Mormons to view U.S. politics as a stage on which the ultimate divine drama is likely to play itself out, with a Mormon in the leading role."³³

If Mormons hold that the United States has such a providential role to play in world history, it would be appropriate for voters to question a Mormon presidential candidate whether he shares this view of American exceptionalism. "Romney could be asked how Mormon beliefs in the salvific significance of America have shaped his understanding of the U.S. mission in the world. Or one could ask him how the Book of Mormon's narrative of a conflict of civilizations has shaped his own understanding of our present moment in history."³⁴ In this way, voters would be raising appropriate questions about the political implications of a Mormon candidate's religious beliefs---in much the same way that voters could ask a Catholic presidential candidate how his public policy making might be influenced by his church's beliefs in the humanity and personhood of the fetus from the moment of conception.

Romney's Mormon Background

Romney's Mormon roots run deep. Six generations of Romneys have been associated with the Mormons, almost from the start in the 1830s. His family made the Great Trek across the prairie states to Utah territory in the mid-1840s (fleeing persecution after the murder of Joseph Smith in Illinois in 1844). The polygamous branch of Romney's family includes a great-grandfather with five wives and a great-great-grandfather who had a dozen. His great-grandfather did jail time for plural marriages, then went to Mexico to get out from under U.S. federal laws against polygamy.³⁵ Mitt Romney's grandparents were members of an expatriate American Mormon colony in northern Mexico; his father, George Romney, was born in Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1907. Eventually, the family returned to Salt Lake City.

³³ Damon Linker, "Taking Mormonism Seriously: the Big Test," *The New Republic*, Vol. 236, January 1-15, 2007, pp. 18-19.

³⁴ Schmalz, "Meet the Mormons: From the Margin to the Mainstream," *Commonweal*, November 9, 2007, p. 17.

³⁵ Jan Shipps, "Romney and the Mormon Moment," *Religion in the News*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1 and 2 (Summer/Fall, 2007), pp. 5-7 and 20.

After serving a two-year Mormon mission in France, Romney married, graduated summa cum laude from Brigham Young University, and then went to Harvard Law School and also to Harvard Business School. Romney has had a very successful career in management consulting with Bain and Company, and was tapped to co-found a private equity investment firm called Bain Capital. In 1994 he ran for U.S. Senate from Massachusetts. In 1999 he became CEO of the Salt Lake Winter Olympics and, through adroit management, ran a successful and profitable Olympics. In 2002 he ran for governor of Massachusetts and won. As governor, he instituted a new health plan in Massachusetts; on his watch, the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court legalized same-sex marriage, a decision which set off a protracted controversy between the state legislature and the courts over constitutional amendments. For a while, Massachusetts was a hotbed of political-religious controversy over same-sex marriage (which Romney opposed) and over the clerical sex abuse problem in the Catholic Church.

Paralleling his career as a venture capitalist, Romney has held high positions in the LDS Church. As Shipps notes, "Romney is not just any temple-going Mormon." From 1981 to 1986, he served as bishop---the chief clergyman of a congregation or ward---of his church in Belmont, and from 1986 to 1994, he was president of the Boston-area "stake," or diocese (comprised of 14 wards). As part of the LDS church hierarchy in Massachusetts, Romney had to explain the Mormon stance on various controversial issues such as abortion, blacks, women, and gays. Some of these issues relating to internal Mormon governance were raised during Romney's 1994 Senate race against Ted Kennedy.

After one term as governor, Romney did not seek reelection in 2006 and instead prepared to run for the presidency. On paper, Romney appeared to be an ideal candidate for the Republican nomination. He is a devoted family man, successful businessman, astute fund-raiser, governor of a populous and prosperous state, very wealthy, good-looking, well-spoken, and intelligent. Although he withdrew from the GOP presidential nomination contest in February, 2008, he is actively campaigning for the Republican nominee, Senator John McCain, and is frequently mentioned as a vice-presidential possibility [as of this writing].

Romney's Political and Rhetorical Strategy in the 2007-2008 Presidential Campaign.

From the beginning of his campaign for the Republican nomination, Romney's religion was mentioned as a problem. His strategy---to pull a JFK, declaring personal faith irrelevant to his qualifications for office---had worked in his Massachusetts races for Senator and Governor. But by December, 2007, it was clear that this strategy would not work in a national campaign. As Amy Sullivan noted, "We live in a political era in which, thanks largely to Republicans, candidates are virtually required to talk openly about their

religious views. There is no way a Republican, especially in a GOP primary, can avoid the issue---if for no other reason than the press won't let them."³⁶ Moreover, large numbers of potential caucus voters in Iowa were evangelicals and were questioning Romney about his faith on the campaign trail.

Saying that he shared their concern for moral values on a variety of issues, Romney tried to persuade evangelicals that he was their strongest candidate (more supportive than John McCain, Rudy Giuliani, Sam Brownback, or Fred Thompson). He insisted that he was pro-life on abortion and opposed to same-sex marriage (despite policy positions he had taken earlier in his 1994 and 2002 Massachusetts senatorial and gubernatorial campaigns). He met with evangelical leaders and tried to cultivate evangelical elites. Evangelical leaders such as Charles Colson, Jay Sekulow, Franklin Graham and Richard Land were impressed with Romney. However, his campaign staff missed the significance of an elite/grassroots split among evangelicals---a division that enabled Mike Huckabee (with his populist appeal and folksiness) to win the Iowa caucuses with the strong support of ordinary evangelical voters. To be sure, Huckabee also played the religion card in his ads saying he was "the Christian candidate" for president, the only Christian leader.³⁷

After spending 37 million dollars of his own money on his campaign and winning primaries or caucuses in eight states, Romney saw the handwriting on the wall and suspended his campaign on February 7, 2008. One obvious question about Romney's race for the GOP presidential nomination is whether his Mormonism hurt his candidacy. We may never know the answer to this question, partly because voters and survey respondents are reluctant to admit bias in surveys. However, political analysts have tended to discount possible negative effects of anti-Mormon bias on Romney's candidacy. Instead they cite several non-religious factors to account for the failure of Romney's presidential bid.

According to David Brooks, for example, Romney's biggest drawback was that he seemed oddly inauthentic. His inconsistency (or "flip-flopping") on issues such as abortion or same-sex marriage left voters wondering who the real Mitt Romney was. Instead of focusing on competence and policy execution (his strong points), he tried mightily to appeal to conservatives and evangelicals wary of his ideological credentials.³⁸ Others thought Romney's problem was that he did not connect well with voters; he appeared to be the epitome of corporate America, smooth and professional, yet oddly

³⁶ Amy Sullivan, p. 5.

³⁷ Michael Luo, "In Iowa, Mormon Issue Is Benefiting Huckabee," *The New York Times*, November 28, 2007, p. A26.

³⁸ David Brooks, The Lehrer News House, PBS Television, February 8, 2008.

out of sync with ordinary Americans. Finally, he was blind-sided by a Southern Baptist preacher who ran ads claiming to be “the Christian leader” in the first-in-the-nation Iowa caucuses. Huckabee won the GOP race in Iowa; two-thirds of his supporters were evangelical voters.

Romney’s “Faith in America” Address.

In January 2007, Damon Linker predicted that, once he announced his candidacy for president, Romney would almost certainly need to deliver a major speech about his Mormon faith, much as JFK had to reassure voters in 1960 that they had no reason to fear his Catholicism. Linker suggested that Romney’s task would be much more complicated.

“Whereas Kennedy set voters’ minds at ease by declaring in unambiguous terms that he considered the separation of church and state to be “absolute,” Romney intends to run for president as the candidate of the religious right, which believes in blurring the distinction between politics and religion. Romney thus needs to convince voters that they have nothing to fear from his Mormonism while simultaneously placing that faith at the core of his identity and his quest for the White House. This is a task that may very well prove impossible.”

Romney’s “Faith in America” address was delivered on December 6, 2007 at the George H.W.Bush Presidential Library at Texas A & M University in College Station, Texas (just 90 miles away from Houston, the site of President Kennedy’s 1960 address). Of course, the context of Romney’s speech was different. Because Romney’s speech was given on the eve of the 2008 Republican primaries, his target audience was the Republican Party rather than the nation. Moreover, his was a speech to a religious evangelical constituency within the GOP, not to moderate Republicans, Log Cabin Republicans, or Republicans for Choice.

Indeed, the immediate reason for Romney’s speech was the fact that Romney’s once-dominant lead in the Iowa caucuses had eroded. Recent polls showed him trailing former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, an ordained Baptist minister, in the first-in-the-nation caucus. Social conservatives in Iowa, influential in the caucuses, appeared to be coalescing around Huckabee [who had run ads depicting him as “the Christian leader” in the Republican field]. Romney’s decision to address his faith directly appeared to be an attempt to calm the fears of evangelicals about his Mormonism and to persuade them that his religious beliefs and moral values were the same as theirs.

Romney alerted reporters ahead of time that he would be discussing generic religion, religion-in-the-abstract, not the particulars of his Mormon beliefs. He said he would talk about religious liberty, religious tolerance,

America's religious heritage, and the role religion should generally play in American society. But he also indicated that he would share his views on how his own faith would inform his presidency.

Romney's address was a civil religion speech of sorts, in which he tried to position (situate) the American constitutional experiment in religious freedom and church-state separation as a middle ground between the extremes of "radical violent Islam" (theocratic tyranny) and the counter-religion of "secularism" which divorces religion from politics and regards religion as a private affair with no place in public life. He seems to have subscribed to neoconservative views that the United States is declining under the weight of secular godlessness (and that there is no room for religion in the "naked public square"). He cited the Framers of the Constitution, saying they prohibited the establishment of a state religion but did not countenance the elimination of religion from public life. He contrasted the empty cathedrals of established state churches in European countries with the vibrancy of religion in the United States which has a tradition of religious liberty and church-state separation.³⁹

To be sure, Romney reiterated the JFK non-discrimination principle, that "a person should not be elected because of his faith nor should he be rejected because of his faith." At the level of specific religious belief or creed, he insisted that religion is irrelevant in electing a president.

He also insisted that no hierarchical church institution---"no authorities of my church, or of any other church for that matter, will ever exert influence on presidential decisions. Their authority is theirs, within the province of church affairs, and it ends where the affairs of the nation begin."

Romney appealed to his record as Massachusetts Governor, saying he served the law and answered to the Constitution. "I did not confuse the particular teachings of my church with the obligations of the office and of the Constitution---and of course, I would not do so as President." [Elsewhere, Romney pointed out that in Massachusetts, he had signed laws allowing stores to sell alcohol on Sundays even though he is prohibited by his faith from drinking and to expand the state lottery, though Mormons are forbidden from gambling.]⁴⁰

Romney insisted that "When I place my hand on the Bible and take the oath of office, that oath becomes my highest promise to God." But there was no acknowledgment that there might be a higher duty to God than to the people of the United States; there was no resignation paragraph, as in

³⁹ Gov, Mitt Romney, "Faith in America," *The New York Times*, Dec. 6, 2007, www.nytimes.com/2007/12/06/us/politics/06text-romney.html?

⁴⁰ Adam Nagourney and Laurie Goodstein, "Romney, a Mormon, Tries to Find a Way around Issue of Religion," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2007.

Kennedy's speech, where in case of conflict between higher duty to conscience and duty to the office, Kennedy had said he would resign.

In an overt appeal to evangelicals, Romney at one point raised the issue of beliefs about Jesus Christ. "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind." He acknowledged that his church's beliefs about Christ "may not all be the same as those of other faiths." But he saw doctrinal differences as "a test of our tolerance. Religious tolerance would be a shallow principle indeed if it were reserved only for faiths with which we agree."

But then, in the very next paragraph, Romney rejected the notion that a presidential candidate should describe and explain his church's distinctive doctrines. "To do so would enable the very religious test the founders prohibited in the Constitution. No candidate should become the spokesman for his faith. For if he becomes President he will need the prayers of the people of all faiths." So much for the notion that a presidential candidate might explain to voters the political implications of his religious beliefs! Romney ducked here---because he seemed to recognize the contradiction between his discussion of his Mormon belief in Jesus Christ and the Constitutional assertion that there is to be no religious test for public office.

In the remainder of Romney's address, he insisted that despite theological differences, Americans share a common creed of moral convictions. He derived these common moral values from "our religious heritage." Such values include human equality, the duty to serve one another, and a steadfast commitment to liberty. Quoting the Bible, Romney cited the corporal works of mercy (feeding the hungry, taking in the stranger, hospitality), and he pledged that "these convictions will indeed inform my presidency."

Finally, Romney emphasized the importance of religious freedom, stating that "liberty is a gift of God, not an indulgence of government." But in a somewhat puzzling assertion, he defended religion-in-general (abstract) by appealing to the nation's founders who "discovered the essential connection between the survival of a free land and the protection of religious freedom." This sounded a rather jarring note, because Romney went on to insist that "Freedom requires religion just as religion requires freedom... Freedom and religion endure together, or perish alone." Left out of this equation were all the agnostics, secularists, atheists, humanists, and non-believers who are deeply committed to the preservation of freedom and to moral values of human dignity, equality, human welfare, and the preservation of the common good. In his anxiety to appeal to believers and evangelicals, Romney appeared to overreach and to ignore many non-religious but ethical citizens who are deeply committed to human freedom and social justice in American society.

In the end, Romney said little about his Mormon faith. He uttered the word “Mormon” only once in the entire speech. He acknowledged Jesus Christ as his personal savior; but apart from this one confessional statement, he shifted over to “values talk”. As Shipps wrote, “To listen to him, Mormonism seems only tangential to his identity.”⁴¹ Romney spoke of religion generically and argued for accommodation of religion-in-the-abstract. Yet he insisted, as a separationist, that his particular Mormon beliefs should not be used to bar him from the presidency.

Reactions to Romney’s Address

Initial reactions to Romney’s address were positive. The speech was well-crafted, artfully argued and eloquent in places. Romney was said to look convincingly “presidential” in his delivery. He spoke eloquently about the hunger for religious freedom that is characteristically American. He said several times that, although his faith informs his life, he would not impose it upon the Oval Office. He praised the diversity of American religion and spoke of the need for religious tolerance in such a pluralistic society.

Then there were the criticisms, the negatives. The editorial page of *The New York Times* described the political context of the speech as “a distressing moment and just what the nation’s founders wanted to head off with the immortal words of the First Amendment: A presidential candidate cowed into defending his way of worshiping God by a powerful minority determined to impose its religious tenets as a test for holding public office.”⁴²

Other critics were upset by Romney’s comment that “Freedom requires religion just as religion requires freedom.” In his anxiety to placate conservative evangelicals, Romney’s remarks alienated atheists, agnostics, deists, secular humanists, and other non-believers---some 16 percent of the population. One critic wrote, “Give me a candidate who is actually moral and ethical while keeping his religion private. In the end, we are what we do, not what we say. Enough with the hypocrisy from the holier than thou.”⁴³

Others were disappointed at Romney’s reticence about explaining his Mormon faith. They thought he missed a grand educational opportunity to dispel misconceptions about Mormonism. Romney deferred to church officials to explain specific Mormon beliefs. He said he is not a spokesman

⁴¹ Jan Shipps, p. 7.

⁴² Editorial, *The New York Times*, December 7, 2008 (online) www.nytimes.com/2007/12/07/opinion/07fri1.html?

⁴³ Letter to the Editor, Charlie Hagel, *The Star-Ledger*, December 19, 2007, p. 18. The *Star-Ledger* is the leading newspaper, covering state-wide politics, in New Jersey.

for his church and that theological matters have no bearing on what he would do as president. He preferred to emphasize that the values of his faith were founded on Judaeo-Christian moral principles that he shared with other Americans.⁴⁴

Finally, many commentators focused on Romney's dilemma of separationism-yet-accommodationism. They recognized that he had to present himself as a person of faith who, at the same time, was not controlled by or subservient to the authorities of his religion. They realized that while Romney had to allay concerns about the influence of his church leaders over his decision making, he could not argue---as Kennedy did---that his religion was a private affair. Too many conservative Christians reject the idea that religion should be confined to private life; they want to see public officials drawing on their faith. If evangelicals were his target audience, there was no point in his alienating them or rejecting their public notion of religion. So Romney had to appear to be sympathetic to religion-in-the-abstract, while not preferring any one particular religion, including his own. This led some to charge that "Romney didn't quite make a case for the separation of church and state as Kennedy did. Rather, he offered something for every side in the church-state separation debate."⁴⁵ In effect, he tried to have his cake and eat it too.

III. Governor Cuomo on the Relevance of Religious Convictions to Political Leadership

Whereas both Kennedy in 1960 and Romney in 2007 confronted arguments that their particular church affiliations constituted an insuperable barrier to the presidency, New York Governor Mario Cuomo in 1984 confronted the deeper issue of a lawmaker using political power to translate his religious convictions into public policy binding upon all citizens, believers and non-believers. This issue became a major challenge in 1984 because of statements of Catholic bishops concerned about the historic candidacy of Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro, a Catholic, pro-choice Democrat, for vice-president of the United States. Twenty years later, the presidential candidacy in 2004 of John Kerry, another Catholic Democrat who supported legalized abortion, triggered similar comments from church leaders, who insisted that Catholic public officials have a duty to translate Catholic church teaching into public law.

⁴⁴ In defense of Romney, Jan Shipps, a prominent non-Mormon historian of the church, pointed out that Mormonism is very complicated. "Mormonism is a really complex theological system. All its parts fit together beautifully. But if you just know a little bit about one of them or part of them, it seems weird." Quoted in Michael Luo, "Crucial Test for Romney in Speech on His Religion," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2007, p. A36.

⁴⁵ John Farmer, "Romney Preaches to Several Choirs," *The Star-Ledger*, December 11, 2007, p. 17.

What had happened to the arms-length posture and respectful distance between candidate and clergy characteristic of the Kennedy race in 1960?

In the intervening years, the rise of the Religious Right had occurred and the Catholic bishops' conference had been engaged in an unprecedented effort to reverse the Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion. Political observers had grown accustomed to hearing preachers and clergymen advising citizens, voters, and politicians. In June, 1984, New York Archbishop John J. O'Connor told reporters, "I don't understand how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion."⁴⁶ In a message read at Sunday Masses in all parishes of his archdiocese on October 7, 1984, Philadelphia Cardinal John Krol stated, "Every Catholic is obliged in conscience to oppose abortion both as a personal decision and *as a policy in society*."⁴⁷

While Geraldine Ferraro accepted her church's teaching that abortion was wrong, she did not believe that she had a moral duty as a lawmaker to translate the church's teaching into civil law. She defended the right and duty of church leaders to address the moral dimensions of public issues; at the same time, she insisted:

I also have my duty as a public official. When I take my oath of office, I accept the charge of serving all the people of every faith, not just some of the people of my own faith. I also swear to uphold the Constitution of the United States, which guarantees freedom of religion. These are my public duties. And in carrying them out, I cannot, and I will not, seek to impose my own religious views on others. If ever my conscience or my religious views prevented me from carrying out those duties to the best of my ability, then I would resign my office before I'd betray the public trust.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ As reported in *The New York Times*, June 25, 1984. Earlier, the bishops of New York State had issued an election-year statement, "Abortion: The Role of Public Officials," on April 6, 1984, calling on "all in public office and positions of authority to oppose legalized abortion by support of a constitutional amendment." *Origins*, 13:46 (April 26, 1984), pp. 759-760.

⁴⁷ John Cardinal Krol, "Protecting God's Precious Gift," A Message to be Read at All Parishes of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, on Respect Life Sunday, October 7, 1984; reprinted in Daughters of St. Paul, ed., *Life, a Gift of God: U.S. Catholic Leaders Speak Out on Life Issues* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, St. Paul Editions, 1985), p. 53.

⁴⁸ Geraldine A. Ferraro, *Ferraro: My Story* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), p. 227. See also Mary Segers, "Ferraro, the Bishops, and the 1984 Election," in *Shaping New Vision: Gender and Values in American Culture*, ed. by C.W. Atkinson, C. Buchanan, and M.R. Miles, The Harvard Women's Studies in Religion Series, Vol. II (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1987), pp. 143-167.

⁴⁸ Geraldine A. Ferraro, *Ferraro: My Story*, pp. 211-212.

Ironically, Ferraro in 1984 took a position on the relation between a lawmaker's religious beliefs and her duties as a public official that was, arguably, more conservative than Kennedy's in 1960. Yet in 1960, making allowance for Protestant fears and hostilities, Catholic leaders did not object when Kennedy declared that in public life he would follow his conscience rather than his church. With Ferraro in 1984, however, many individual bishops were unrelenting in condemning her stance on abortion law. Comparisons between the bishops' conduct in 1960 and 1984 were not lost on Ferraro. As she wrote, "The fear in Kennedy's time was that his Catholic beliefs would influence his public policy....In 1984, the fears of a very vocal minority were that my Catholic faith would not play a part in public policy."⁴⁹

For his part, Governor Cuomo reacted strongly to Archbishop O'Connor's statements and to his threat that the church could take disciplinary measures against Catholic lawmakers who did not use their power to translate the church's moral teaching against abortion into a public law banning all abortions. In his 1984 Notre Dame University address, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective," Cuomo responded to O'Connor's challenge and made a compelling case for a Catholic lawmaker's personal moral opposition to, yet public support of, legalized abortion.

Cuomo 's 1984 address focuses on this problem: to what extent should the religious views of a candidate for high public office influence his political views and his policy views. Should such an officeholder use the powers of his office to try to impose his religious/moral view upon the citizenry? Cuomo says the answer to this question is a matter of prudential political judgment.

To the bishops' assertion that Catholic officials have a moral obligation to challenge the legal status of abortion, he responded that there was nothing in church doctrine that required him to accept the political judgment of the bishops that the best way to combat abortion is to seek to outlaw it. Insisting that Catholics are not required to seek to have every church teaching enacted into law, Cuomo outlined a complex argument involving, first, a commitment to religious freedom, tolerance, and civic peace in a pluralist society; second, a recognition that religious belief probably cannot be translated into public policy in the absence of a broad consensus; third, a consequentialist assessment of the probable failure of antiabortion laws in reducing the incidence of abortion (it would be "Prohibition revisited," according to Cuomo); fourth, a suggestion that Catholics, who support the right to abortion in equal proportion to the rest of the population, should not use the law to compel non-Catholics to practice what Catholics themselves do not observe; and, fifth, a recommendation that pro-life and pro-choice

forces should united behind policy measures that would give women greater support and genuine choice in situations of involuntary pregnancy.

In making these arguments, Cuomo appealed to Catholic political thought, which has always acknowledged that the translation of religious values into public policy is a matter not of doctrine but of prudential judgment. The church's traditional thinking about the state, law, and politics recognizes that not every sin need be made a crime and that prudence and calculation of the consequences of public policies are essential in a well-ordered society, particularly one of divided religious allegiance.⁵⁰

Despite Cuomo's eloquent defense of Catholic politicians in 1984, the dispute over abortion and the willingness of church leaders to issue policy directives to political leaders has continued through subsequent presidential, congressional and statewide elections. In 2004, Democratic nominee John Kerry was taken to task for his support of legalized abortion. Some bishops declared that it was sinful to vote for Kerry because he was "pro-abortion."⁵¹ Other bishops announced that Kerry would be denied Holy Communion if he set foot in their dioceses, implying that he was not really Catholic because of his pro-choice stance on abortion law. The ensuing debate about the use of religious sanctions against political candidates came to be known as "the Communion Wars."⁵²

⁵⁰ It is worth noting that Cuomo's position is not one of political quietism on abortion policy. While he does not think that church teaching requires him as a Catholic lawmaker to reinstate restrictive abortion laws---"There is neither an encyclical nor a catechism that spells out a political strategy for achieving legislative goals"---he does believe that abortion is morally wrong and he is willing to use political power to right the wrong by pressing for passage of laws and policies designed to enhance women's and children's lives and create genuine choice. He is not willing to use the coercive sanction of criminal law to right the wrong of abortion because, in his political judgment, such laws would not work and would have negative consequences. Moreover, in the absence of consensus, imposition of such laws risks violating constitutional freedoms.

⁵¹ In May 2004, Bishop Michael Sheridan of Colorado Springs wrote in a pastoral letter that Catholic politicians who support abortion rights, stem-cell research, homosexual marriage and/or euthanasia---as well as the voters who back them---could not receive Communion until they have "confessed in the sacrament of Penance." In other words, voting for John Kerry was sinful. "Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Faithful of the Diocese of Colorado Springs on the Duties of Catholic Politicians and Voters," EWTN News Feature, 14 May 2004 www.EWTN.com. See also Associated Press, "Group Asks IRS to revoke Catholic Diocese's Tax Exemption," 28 May 2004.

⁵² In February 2004, St. Louis Archbishop Raymond Burke admonished Senator Kerry not to take Communion if he attended Mass in Burke's archdiocese. Other bishops followed suit. By late spring of 2004, the public statements of a minority---some 15 bishops out of 300 American prelates---made it appear that the Catholic Church in the United States backed the Republican candidate for president. Public opinion polls showed widespread disapproval of the bishops' actions among Catholics. The bishops themselves were deeply divided over the wisdom of sanctioning Catholic politicians. Prelates in New Orleans, St. Louis, Newark, Camden, and Denver favored sanctions while the archbishops of Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington opposed communion bans. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick of

In the United States, churches are tax-exempt organizations; this benefit is conferred by the IRS on condition that churches do not endorse or oppose political candidates or otherwise intervene in any political campaign activity. There are, indeed, many issue-advocacy and voter-education activities churches can conduct legally during an election season. However, they cannot endorse candidates directly or indirectly, and they cannot participate in any political campaign by, for example, issuing voting instructions from the pulpit, distributing one-sided voter guides, or by inviting political candidates to take the pulpit.

Clergy engage in indirect political endorsement when they criticize the religious orthodoxy of candidates who are church members, thereby implying that such candidates are untrustworthy, unreliable, and unfit for public office. Such criticism of, and implied opposition to, political candidates occurred in the 1984 vice-presidential campaign of Geraldine Ferraro and in the 2004 presidential campaign of John Kerry. In both cases, church authorities suggested that these candidates were not authentically Catholic because their views on abortion policy did not accord with the policy views and political judgments of church leaders. By challenging directly the religious orthodoxy of a candidate, church leaders implied indirectly that the candidate was generally unreliable, unreasonable, inconsistent, and morally suspect.

Forms of indirect political endorsement include challenging the religious orthodoxy of a candidate, thereby implying unfitness for public office, and telling congregants it is sinful to vote for a particular candidate. Both of these tactics were employed by some Catholic bishops in the 2004 presidential election---in a partisan effort to undermine the candidacy of Senator Kerry. Indeed the partisanship was so blatant that one Catholic editor wrote, "If the fear that had to be dispelled in 1960 when John Kennedy ran for president was that the pope would somehow dictate U.S. policy, the fear I have in the wake of the 2004 race is that the church, at least in the public's perception, will be so aligned with one party that it will be severely compromised."⁵³

What has happened to the arms-length posture and respectful distance between candidate and clergy characteristic of John F. Kennedy's campaign for the presidency in 1960?

Washington, D.C., stated, "We should not tell people how to vote or sanction voters. This is contrary to our teaching, may be a violation of civil law, and is often counterproductive." Jerry Filteau, "Cardinal McCarrick: No Simple Answers on Bishop-Politician Relations," Catholic News Service, 23 June 2004. See also Mary Segers, "Political Endorsements by Churches," in Ann Duncan and Steven Jones, eds., Church-State Issues in America Today (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), Vol. 1, pp. 195-226.

⁵³ Tom Roberts, Editor's Note: "A Few Bishops Seduced by Politics," *National Catholic Reporter*, Vol. 40, No. 43 (8 October 2004), p. 2.

The difference between the respectful deference of Catholic bishops to Kennedy in 1960 and their aggressive, partisan attacks on Ferraro and Kerry in 1984 and 2004 is sobering to consider and invites explanation from historians and from Catholics themselves.⁵⁴ The single-issue focus of the American bishops on abortion, their partisan intervention in election campaigns, and their presumption in issuing policy directives to voters and lawmakers seem to confirm the worst fears of many Protestants in 1960--- that Catholic clergy do not accept religious freedom and church-state separation and that it would therefore be risky, even dangerous, to elect a Catholic president because he or she would be beholden to the authority of church officials.

Thus it appears that the problems JFK faced are still with us. Far from being extreme, it seems that he was right to insist upon absolute separation of church and state in 1960. It is worth recalling how emphatic Kennedy was in stating that, if he received a political directive from his Archbishop, "I simply would not obey it." During the 1960 West Virginia primary, Kennedy reiterated that

As President he "would not take orders from any Pope, Cardinal, Bishop or priest, nor would they try to give me orders....If any Pope attempted to influence me as President, I would have to tell him it was completely improper.... If you took orders from the Pope, you would be breaking your oath of office....and commit a sin against God.... You would be subject to impeachment and should be impeached."⁵⁵

Again, in the question-and-answer period following his Houston address, Kennedy insisted upon complete separation between presidential governance and church supervision. Asked what his response would be if his church attempted to influence his public duties, he said he would "reply to them that this was an improper action on their part...one to which I could not subscribe, that I am opposed to it....[as] an interference with the American political system."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The relevance of religious convictions to political leadership in high public office continues to play a part in American politics at the state as well as the federal level. For example, Governor Kathleen Sebelius of Kansas, a Catholic whose name is frequently mentioned as a possible Democratic vice-presidential candidate, has vetoed a number of bills that would restrict abortion rights in Kansas, prompting the archbishop of Kansas City (Naumann) to suggest that she stop receiving communion. John M. Broder, "Obama's View on Abortion May Divide Catholics," NYT, August 7, 2008, p. A16. See also *National Catholic Reporter*, May 30, 2008.

⁵⁵ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 145.

⁵⁶ Sorensen, *Kennedy*, p. 192.

For his part, Romney, in his 2007 address, was equally emphatic in stating that “No authorities of my church...will ever exert influence on presidential decisions.”

Conclusion

Both Kennedy and Romney faced a similar problem: their religious beliefs were perceived as a barrier to the presidency. The constitutional answer to their problem was fairly straightforward and unequivocal: according to Article VI of the U.S. Constitution, “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” They could argue that a candidate’s religion was not a legitimate criterion for voting decisions. Whether their argument was convincing depended partly on voters’ understanding of their particular faith traditions, Roman Catholicism and Mormonism. A major criticism of both Kennedy and Romney is that each was obliged by their religious beliefs to take orders from church leaders---the Pope in Rome or the President of the Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah. Because each belonged to a hierarchical church, it was felt that they could not govern effectively from the White House.

As we have seen, JFK and Romney had different responses to this dilemma. How and why? It seems facile to say that they were simply responding to different political pressures. Other factors were operative. Summarizing them might help us understand better the differences between the approaches of Kennedy and Romney.

Political Context: They were operating in different electoral contexts. Kennedy did face “the religious issue” (as it was called in 1960) in the primaries, particularly in the Wisconsin and West Virginia contests. But he won the Democratic nomination and gave his historic Houston speech in September, as part of the general election race between himself and the Republican nominee, Richard M. Nixon. His speech was targeted at the large (23%) group of undecided voters in the national electorate.

Romney, on the other hand, gave his address in the run-up to the early Republican primaries in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Michigan, Nevada, and Florida. Because his speech was given on the eve of the 2008 GOP primaries, his primary audience was the Republican Party rather than the nation. Moreover, Romney’s speech was directed more to the conservative evangelical base of the Republican Party (whose support he needed in his race for the nomination) than to moderate Republicans, Log Cabin Republicans or Republicans for Choice.

Historical Context: Both Kennedy and Romney faced opposition from Southern Protestant whites. The difference between 1960 and 2008 was the rise of the Religious Right as a powerful electoral constituency in the Republican Party's base. The political ascendancy of conservative evangelicals has changed the dynamics of campaigning in both the primaries and the general election. Their candidate in 2008 was Mike Huckabee, not Mitt Romney (and not even John McCain for that matter).

Religious Context: There were some 40 million Catholics in the general population in 1960, whereas Mormons numerically were a smaller group (5.6 million) in 2008. More important, the American public at large knew something about Catholicism in 1960 whereas people knew relatively little about Mormonism in 2008. While both Kennedy and Romney sought to dispel misconceptions about their religious traditions, Romney may have had more difficulty here because of the minority status of Mormonism and general ignorance about LDS beliefs.

Personal Religiosity: Romney's commitment to Mormonism runs deep, as evidenced by his family history and his willingness to assume leadership roles in the LDS church. As he stated in his address, "I believe in my Mormon faith and I endeavor to live by it. My faith is the faith of my fathers---I will be true to them and to my beliefs." He did acknowledge belief in Jesus Christ as "the Son of God and the Savior of mankind"; this confession of a particular faith may have been an effort to convince evangelicals that there are affinities between LDS belief and Christian evangelicalism.

In his speeches about civil rights and the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy tended to talk about ethics rather than religion. According to Sorensen, "Kennedy's was a secular mind." Bishop John Wright of Pittsburgh, a friend of Kennedy's, said that JFK was not a Catholic intellectual, but was a child of the faith in Boston, identified as a Catholic, and wanted to die as a Catholic.

In the course of his presidential campaign, Kennedy characteristically used humor to de-fuse tensions about the religion issue.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I sat next to Cardinal Spellman at dinner the other evening, and asked him what I should say when voters question me about the doctrine of the pope's infallibility. "I don't know, Senator," the Cardinal told me. "All I know is he keeps calling me Spillman." Remarks of Senator John F. Kennedy at the Bronx Democratic Dinner, New York City, April 1960. From Theodore C. Sorensen, "Let the Word Go Forth": The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), p. 130.

Less humorous but telling is the remark of Jacqueline Kennedy about anti-Catholicism during the 1960 campaign: "I think it's so unfair of people to be against Jack because he's Catholic. He's such a poor Catholic." Kennedy's reputation for womanizing (publicized after his death) was not widely known at the time. Garry Wills, Bare Ruined Choirs: Doubt,

The Setting: Romney gave his speech to a carefully selected audience at the George W. Bush Presidential Library in Texas, and took no questions after the formal address. Kennedy spoke to a skeptical (hostile) audience of 300 ministers at the Rice Hotel in Houston, then took questions for another 45 minutes. The Q and A period was three times as long as his speech.

The Message: Whereas Kennedy strongly supported virtually absolute separation of church and state, Romney argued for the presence of religion in public life while insisting simultaneously that religion was irrelevant as a criterion for public office. Both insisted that, if elected president, they would take no orders from church authorities.

Summary

On one hand, Romney downplayed the significance of his LDS allegiance and made the separatist argument---that voters should bracket religious belief when evaluating presidential candidates. This was the JFK non-discrimination argument that worked for Kennedy in 1960 and worked for Romney in Massachusetts in 1994 and in 2002.

On the other hand, he appealed to Christian faith and moral values that he claimed to share with evangelicals---minimizing the important doctrinal differences between Mormons and evangelicals---and ignoring the deeper paradox of the JFK religion-is-irrelevant argument: The irony is that, in discussing theology and religious belief in a campaign, a candidate suggests that religion is relevant to presidential qualifications, thereby contradicting the non-discrimination argument that there shall be no religious litmus test for public office.

The difficulties experienced by Kennedy and Romney over the compatibility of their faith with high public office help us understand the appeal of the strict separationist position. To be sure, questions about the political implications of a candidate's religious beliefs are legitimate. Faced with the task of judging a candidate's character as well as competence, voters may want to consider the relation between a candidate's religious beliefs, moral convictions, and policy commitments.

Yet such questions are also an invitation to the clergy of a candidate's church to reflect publicly upon the political implications of the candidate's religious beliefs. Such an invitation can be dangerous and risky---akin to opening a Pandora's box. Why? Most church authorities reserve to

Prophecy, and Radical Religion (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co, 1971), pp. 80-81.

themselves---as theologians, pastors, canon lawyers---the right to define church doctrine and its implications. This clerical tendency helps to explain, at least in part, the difference between the hands-off attitude of Catholic bishops towards Kennedy in 1960 and their more aggressive posture towards Ferraro and Kerry two generations later.

Perhaps a future candidate would be prudent to confine his remarks about religion and politics to a discussion of the political implications of the First Amendment religion clauses and Article VI of the Constitution. Again, it seems that JFK got it right: stick to the Constitution and keep a respectful distance from bishops, priests, clerics, and theologians.

There are legitimate questions about how a president, who happens to be a Mormon or a Catholic, will resolve possibly conflicting obligations to his religion and his duty as president. Neither Romney nor Kennedy addressed these questions in their reflections (other than JFK's considering the possibility of resignation). Cuomo did. One may not agree with his answers, but we are indebted to the former New York Governor for his thoughtful analysis.