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Religion and the Electability of Presidential Candidates

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Abstract

Denominationalism appears to be an important factor in American politics, particularly in presidential elections. Evidence indicates there are, and has always been, favored and disfavored denominations. One such disfavored denomination is Catholicism. Although it is the largest denomination in the United States, there has been only one Catholic president. Until the 2004 election, whenever a Catholic was in the presidential race, anti-Catholic rhetoric was commonly employed against him. Fears of papal control and sinister machinations were expressed. The result was religious discrimination which, like all forms of discrimination, eliminates or greatly reduces the right of participation. This is a violation of social justice.

Introduction

Religion has been a basis for wars, persecutions, riots, discrimination and, in the United States, political exclusion. Such behaviors constitute violations of social justice in terms of sanctity of life, human dignity, equality, and contributive justice as explained by the U.S. Catholic bishops (Henriot et al, 1990). The focus of this paper will be on political exclusion as a consequence of religious bias.

Three aspects of religion may promote an interest in politics: creed, institutional interests, and social structure (Wald, 1987: pp. 24-26). *Creed*, or a set of beliefs, ideas and code of ethics, may lead followers to support or oppose government policies and laws. Historical examples in the United States include conflicts over slavery, civil rights, censorship, and more recently, abortion and gay rights. *Institutional interests* and activities, such as schools, social welfare programs, pastoral counseling, publishing, charitable fund-raising, hospitals and cemeteries are all subject to government regulations which affect the operations of some religions. *Social structure* of a religion can influence political views and actions. For example, members of a religion often tend to share a certain place in society which creates many commonalities beyond religious belief. Thus, their common secular experiences may lead them to develop shared social and political views. Such appears to have been the case with Catholics and the Democratic party.

Kornhauser (1959) indicated some of the ways that religion is important in political matters. Religious values can provide a basis for accepting or rejecting the actions or claims of the state by measuring them against sacred obligations. Religious institutions can serve as a buffer between the individual and the state and can encourage their members to seek acceptable solutions to serious social problems. Membership in a community of believers can mitigate or supersede the feelings of nationalism which can

lead to totalitarianism. An additional way in which religion is important in political matters is if there is a fear of or prejudice against a certain religion and a desire to keep members of that religion from gaining positions of power. Such has been the case regarding Catholic candidates in presidential elections.

Religion and Government in Colonial Times

The relationship between religion and government in the United States is somewhat unique since, unlike most modern nations, there was neither a pre-existing relationship between the two institutions nor a commonly accepted religion among the people. Most of the founding fathers of the new nation were theists, believing in God and the importance of religion. However, there was no precise agreement among them concerning the exact nature of the relationship which should exist between religion and government. George Washington, the “Father of Our Country,” and Patrick Henry, a signer of the Constitution, wanted to have an established religion, an official Church, following the example of other contemporary countries. However, Thomas Jefferson, the principle writer of the Constitution, and James Madison, a signer, were opposed to such an idea, believing that religion was so important that every person should be free to follow his or her own conscience in this matter. Besides, if there were to be an official religion, as existed in some of the colonies, whose religion should it be? Nine of the original thirteen colonies had an officially recognized religion, but not all had the same one (Johnstone, 1988: p. 198).

Many people who came to this new land did so to escape religious persecution. They were seeking religious freedom, not necessarily for everyone, but certainly for themselves and fellow church members. This was reflected in the colonies which they formed and the laws which they enacted. A modified theocracy existed in some colonies. Examples include Massachusetts Bay (which required government officials to be Congregationalists and created crimes such as heresy, blasphemy and idolatry) and Virginia (where all citizens were required to attend Anglican services and were taxed to support the Anglican Church). In Virginia religious services other than Anglican were not permitted (Johnstone, 1975: pp. 175-80). Meanwhile, Maryland, which was founded by Catholics under a charter from King Charles of England, observed religious freedom for all (Richter and Dulce, 1962: p. 4).

In addition to the religious differences, at the time the Constitution was being written, only one in eight Americans was a member of a church (Wilson, 1978: p. 194). Thus, the Constitution not only had to accommodate many different religions but also had to make allowance for the absence of a commitment to a specific religion or a belief in God. Theists, atheists and agnostics were to be equally protected under the law. This religious tolerance also made it easier to attract new immigrants from around the world to help build this new nation. In 1776 Virginia adopted a Declaration of Rights which had been drafted by George Mason with the aid of Jefferson and Madison who were opposed to an established religion. The Declaration stated, “All men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of their consciences” (Richter and Dulce, 1962: p. 5).

The concerns and disagreements regarding the federal government's right to mandate an official religion produced the First Amendment to the Constitution which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This prohibition, however, applied only to the federal government. Although states could have, at least theoretically, continued to have an official religion, none did after 1833, when Massachusetts ended its official relationship with the Congregational Church. The prohibition imposed on the federal government by the First Amendment was extended to include state government in 1868 with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment which guarantees equal protection under the law. Before 1824 relatively few people were eligible to vote. In addition to requirements of appropriate church membership, a person was required to own land, real estate or personal property above a certain value on which taxes were paid (Keyssar, 2000).

Protestants from England emerged from the colonial period as the majority group, accounting for 60 percent of the three million white Americans in 1790. Consequently, they became the dominant group socially and politically. This was the beginning of the identity of America as a White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant (WASP) country. The English were soon outnumbered by other nationalities, particularly by the Scotch-Irish and Germans. Nevertheless, they were able to remain the politically dominant group. Although immigration was encouraged throughout the 1800s and was generally unregulated with naturalization easily obtained, there was an element of xenophobia in American society. This was especially evident against Roman Catholics, an antipathy which was brought from Europe where there had been a long history of animosity between Protestants and Catholics in such countries as England, Ireland and Germany, all three of which contributed significantly to the growing population of this new nation. As a result, Catholics in colonial America were subject to limits on their religious and civil rights (Schaefer, 1984: p. 116). Anti-Catholicism was so widespread that in the late 1700s several prominent Irish Catholics wrote to President George Washington asking that the rights of Catholics be protected (Feagin and Feagin, 1996: p. 102).

Relationships in the Middle Years

From the beginning of the colonial period the Catholic population was relatively small and was subjected to discrimination due to a fear of popery. In the mid-nineteenth century the distrust of Catholics was expressed in Congress by a representative who stated that Catholics were tolerant of other religions only as long as they (Catholics) were a minority. However, he declared that if they were to become a majority they would move into power by means of the democratic process and their tolerance would disappear (Richter and Dulce, 1962: p. 3). This fear was so widespread that during this time seven governors, eight senators, and 104 representatives were elected chiefly as a result of campaigns which stressed anti-Catholic sentiments (Menendez, 1977: 26). Organized anti-Catholic activism erupted in the late 1840s and continued through the 1850s stimulated in part by the large influx of poor Irish Catholics. Consequently, bills were introduced in several state legislatures to restrict the right to vote to native-born

Protestants (Keyssar, 2000: pp. 83-85). At this time New Hampshire had a requirement which prohibited Catholics from holding public office (Menendez, 1977: p. 26).

During this period the relationship between religion and government was being shaped, with each influencing the other. Meanwhile, religion was also establishing its relationship with education. Most of the earliest schools, particularly at the highest levels, were church-based or religiously sponsored. The public school system was not established nationwide until the end of the 19th century, and then only at the elementary level. In order to preserve their faith, Catholic schools offered an alternative to public schools. The Judeo-Christian tradition, upon which both school systems operated, saw humans as having a “fallen nature” in need of supervision and control. Therefore, it was believed, a suitable Christian education should be based on the Ten Commandments. Thus, whatever the educational system, education in the United States contained a good dose of religion both directly and indirectly.

By 1918 all states had passed laws requiring children to attend school at least through elementary school. This gave rise to the question as to whether attending a parochial school satisfied this requirement. Oregon, for example, required all children to attend a public school. The question was settled in the 1925 case of *Pierce v Society of Sisters* in which the court decided that parents had the right to send their children to a parochial school if they so desired. However, Catholic schools, as well as Catholicism, continued to be viewed with suspicion. It was widely believed that they were divisive and therefore un-American because they were private and separated students by religion (Greeley, 1972: p. 217). This, it was contended, hindered the assimilation process (Moore, 1970). However, this contention has been refuted. Research has shown that Mexican Americans in parochial schools were significantly more assimilated than their counterparts in public schools (Lampe, 1976).

Anti-Catholicism appears to have been most virulent in the decades before the Civil War. Some prominent Americans, such as Samuel Morse and Ralph Waldo Emerson, spoke and wrote against Catholics, particularly the newly arriving Irish Catholics. From 1834 until 1854 mob violence against Catholics occurred across the country resulting in destruction and death. In addition, a political movement which incorporated nativism and anti-Catholicism resulted in the formation of what came to be known as the “Know Nothing” party, so called because members of the Party (which was anti-immigration, anti-Catholic and pro-Union) were instructed to reveal nothing about its program and if questioned, to respond that they knew nothing about it. Nevertheless, their political platform was popular enough to result in the party receiving 21 percent of the presidential vote in the 1854 election. Although such anti-Catholicism diminished after the Civil War, it did not subside completely. In the 1890s the anti-Catholic American Protestant Association was formed. Such actions were driven by a general fear of “popery,” which was based on the belief that if Catholics became dominant the Pope would take control of the United States and may even move the Vatican to American soil (Duff, 1971: p. 34).

Religion in Government

The United States, restricted by the First Amendment, does not have an official or established religion. Nevertheless, it does have “favored” and “disfavored” religions. Although all of the major religions can be found in the United States, every president except one has been Protestant. Within the Protestant denominations there are also “favorites.” During the first part of America’s history as a new nation, four of the first five presidents were Episcopalians, although one, Thomas Jefferson, who was raised Episcopalian, espoused no religious preference as president. Since three of these were elected for two terms, it can be said that an Episcopalian was elected in seven of the first eight presidential elections. This reflects the English influence on this recently-liberated British colony, since Episcopalian is the American version of Anglican, or the Church of England.

The United States has long been identified as a Protestant country, and the dominant segment of the population have been known as WASPs (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant). The accuracy of this acronym is reflected in the religious affiliation of U.S. presidents who have been elected and the chaplains who have been appointed in the Senate and House of Representatives. There have been 43 presidents of whom thirteen (not counting George W. Bush who was raised Episcopalian but became a Methodist) have been Episcopalian, six Presbyterian (not counting Polk who became a Methodist), five Methodist, four Baptist (not counting Lincoln who had been raised Baptist but later belonged to no specific denomination), four Unitarian, three Disciples of Christ, two Dutch Reformed (counting Theodore Roosevelt who also is claimed by the Episcopalians), two Quaker, and one Congregationalist. One president, Andrew Johnson, is considered to have been the least religious of all and appears to have had no religious affiliation, although some sources indicate his parents were Baptist. Fourteen of these presidents were elected more than once. The only non-Protestant was Kennedy who was Catholic.

As these numbers indicate, certain denominations are greatly overrepresented when compared to their percentage of the population. It must be acknowledged, however, that current percentages of church membership are not the same as in earlier centuries. Episcopalians and Congregationalists represented a larger percent of the population than is currently the case. Among those that are disproportionately represented are Dutch Reformed, Unitarians, Episcopalians and Quakers. At the other extreme are those that are underrepresented. At the top of the list are Catholics, who have had only one president although they are the oldest (excluding Native American religions) and most numerous religious denomination in America, representing one of every four Americans. Other religious groups that have been in this country for over a century but have had no elected presidents include Jewish, Lutheran, Mormon, Eastern Orthodox, Pentecostal and Church of Christ. Some of these, however, may never have had a member seek the presidency.

The religious affiliation of candidates in presidential elections for the two major parties are as follows: 35 Episcopalians, 22 Presbyterians, 11 Unitarians, 8 Methodists, 7 Baptists, 5 Quakers, 3 Congregationalists, 3 Dutch Reformed, 3 Catholics, 3 Disciples of

Christ, 1 Eastern Orthodox and 1 Christian. There were 6 unsuccessful candidates whose religion is unknown. The religion whose members have been the most successful in presidential elections is Disciples of Christ. All three of these candidates have won. Other religions whose members have won most of their presidential elections are Episcopalians (21 of 35), Presbyterians (13 of 22), Methodists (5 of 8), Baptists (4 of 7) and Dutch Reformed (2 of 3).

In general, this same religious bias or favoritism for presidents has also been found for vice-presidents. There have been 46 vice-presidents, thirteen of whom later became presidents. Of the 46, the religious affiliation of ten is unidentified, while that of the remaining number is as follows: eight Episcopalian, six Presbyterian, four Dutch Reformed, three Congregationalist, three Methodist, three Baptist, two Unitarian, one Disciples of Christ, one Quaker, one Native American religion, and one had no religious affiliation. Of major U.S. denominations, there appears to have been no Catholics, Lutherans, Jews or Mormons.

The religious affiliation of appointed chaplains has been similar to those of elected presidents and vice-presidents. The Continental Congress appointed an Episcopalian priest to act as chaplain in 1774, and ever since both the Senate and House of Representatives have followed the tradition of appointing chaplains except for a brief period in the 1850s. From 1855 until 1861 the House suspended the practice because of the competitive pressure of the members to appoint their favorite pastor. It was decided that local clergy would take turns opening the daily sessions with a prayer. This proved to be unsatisfactory and the practice of appointing a specific chaplain for an indeterminate period of time was restored. The Senate also tried to use alternating clergy from the District of Columbia from 1857 to 1859 but returned to the practice of appointing one chaplain on a permanent basis.

The full record of Senate chaplains shows there have been nineteen Episcopalians, including the first eight and ten of the first twelve, seventeen Methodists, fourteen Presbyterians, six Baptists, two Unitarians, one Lutheran, one Congregationalist and one Catholic. In the House of Representatives there have been twenty-one Methodists, seventeen Presbyterians, eight Baptists, four Episcopalians, two Christians, two Congregationalists, two Unitarians, one Lutheran, one Universalist and one Catholic. Again, as in the case of presidents and vice-presidents, biases, both positive and negative, are evident in the appointment of chaplains. In the Senate, Episcopalians, Methodists and Presbyterians are overrepresented, while in the House, Methodists and Presbyterians are overrepresented. Once again, Catholics are the most underrepresented in proportion to their numbers. In the Senate there has not been a Catholic chaplain appointed for over 170 years, and in the House the first one ever was appointed in the year 2000 following some controversy.

Religious bias may exist at all levels of government, although at some levels it is less noticeable. In the year 2000, Congress more closely resembled the religious affiliation of the people it is supposed to represent. The 107th Congress was composed of 535 members. These identified the following Church affiliations: 150 Catholic, 72 Baptist, 65 Methodist, 49 Presbyterian, 41 Episcopalian, 37 Jewish, 29 nondenominational Protestant, 20 Lutheran, 16 Mormon, 8 United Church of Christ, 7 non-specified and 41

other. Overall, Catholics have constituted the single largest denomination present in Congress since 1964. However, collectively there are three times more Protestants than Catholics, which reflects the approximately 60 percent of the population who are Protestant.

The religious affiliation of governors is, in a general way, similar to that of members of Congress. In 2000, of the 50 governors, there were sixteen Catholics, eleven Methodists, five Episcopalians, four Lutherans, four Presbyterians, two Baptists, one Mormon, six nondenominational Protestants, and one unspecified. The disparity between the large number of Catholics in Congress and among governors, and the lack of Catholics in the presidency and vice-presidency, can be explained by a combination of factors. Chief among them is geography. Whereas presidents and their running mates are chosen on a national basis, and must have a broad base of support, members of Congress and governors are chosen on a limited regional basis, with each state selecting their own representatives. For example, Catholic members are most often from the Northeast, the Great Lakes region and California, while Baptists, Methodists and Presbyterians are mostly from the South, and Mormons from Utah. Not surprisingly, office holders are likely to reflect the religious character of the state which they represent.

In addition to religion entering government through the religious affiliation of office holders, it has also entered through the election of religious officials. Not only have ordained clergy been appointed as Congressional chaplains, but some have been elected to Congress. From 1789 through 1997 there have been 70 ordained ministers, seven in the Senate and 63 in the House of Representatives. Most served in the 19th century, but some continue to serve. In the Senate the most recent was John Danforth, an Episcopal priest, who served from 1976 until 1995, while in the House Ron Lewis, a Baptist minister, began serving in 1994.

In the Senate two were Methodists and one each were Lutheran, Catholic, Congregational, Episcopalian and Presbyterian. Clergy in the House were not only more numerous but also more diverse. Congregational and Baptist Churches each had eleven ministers, Methodist had nine, Presbyterian had five, Catholics and Unitarians had three, Universalist, Lutheran and Episcopalian each had two, and Disciples of Christ, Christian, United Church of Christ and Reformed Protestant Dutch Church had one each. There were also eleven ordained ministers whose Church affiliation is unlisted.

It is worth noting that one of the original signers of the Constitution, John Carroll, was a Jesuit, and the last Catholic priest to serve in Congress was Robert Drinan, also a Jesuit. He served in the House from 1971 to 1981. In 1983 there was a change in Canon Law which made it unacceptable for a priest to hold political office. This was a change in policy which had allowed priests to run for office with the permission of their bishop.

Besides the 70 ordained clergy who became Congressmen, there were eleven Congressmen who became ordained clergy after they left office. Six became Baptist ministers, two Episcopalian and one each Christian, Methodist and Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Treese, 1997).

Catholicism in Presidential Campaigns

Interestingly, the first presidential candidate to be vigorously attacked for being a Catholic, which he was not, was John C. Fremont the Republican candidate in the 1856 elections. He was so popular that he was asked to be the Democratic candidate, which he declined because of the issue of slavery, before he accepted the Republican's nomination. During the campaign the attacks continued even after he had stated publicly that he was not, nor had ever been, a Catholic. He was then asked if he had ever been in a Catholic church, and if so, how many times. Many people refused to believe that he was not a Catholic and rumors circulated that Pope Leo XIII had issued an encyclical which directed American Catholics to exterminate all heretics (Myers, 1945: p. 177). This false rumor together with the belief that Fremont was hiding his allegiance to Rome was too much to overcome. A New York newspaper finally observed that "Col. Fremont's religious sentiments have been canvassed with far more bitterness and ferocity than his political opinions. . . ." (New York Times, 1856). He eventually lost the election despite his initial popularity.

In 1872 the first Catholic presidential candidate was Charles O'Connor, a prominent New Yorker, who ran as a third party candidate against Horace Greeley the Democrat and Ulysses Grant the Republican. O'Connor was selected by a group of disaffected Democrats who were unhappy with the nomination of Greeley. This was to be the first election in which a popular vote was used in all 37 states to select presidential electors (Lorant, 1951: p. 320). Ironically, anti-Catholicism not only affected the Catholic candidate O'Connor, but also the non-Catholic Democratic candidate. The publication *Harper's Weekly* believed there was a Catholic-Democratic alliance and that their candidate, Greeley, whom it called "a noted opponent of the Bible and a firm friend of Rome", was part of a plot to seize power. Therefore it exhorted "every sincere Protestant to labor ceaselessly to defeat the schemes of the Jesuits, and drive their candidate back to a merited obscurity" (Menendez, 1977: p. 28).

The first Catholic to represent a major party was Alfred Smith, who was the Democratic candidate in the 1928 elections. As in the 1856 campaign, the focus quickly turned to religion. A large amount of anti-Catholic rhetoric appeared in both print and speech. Old and new claims of plots and dire consequences were spread among the largely Protestant population (Moore, 1956: p. 189). Once again there was talk of the phantom encyclical of Pope Leo XIII as well as charges against the Knights of Columbus. One Protestant minister went so far as to tell his congregation, "If you vote for Al Smith, you're voting against Christ and you'll all be damned" (Moore, 1956: p. 189). Another minister, in a nationwide radio broadcast, charged Catholics with the assassinations of Lincoln, Garfield and McKinley as well as all of the political assassinations in the world (Menendez, 1977: p. 45) Starting and/or spreading such unsubstantiated rumors which result in defamation and discrimination are clearly violations of social justice. The accusations are an even more serious violation of justice if they are known to be false.

When the Catholic press and others criticized as bigots those who had been using anti-Catholic fear tactics against Smith, the *Christian Herald* wrote, "We deny that those who

question Smith as a Catholic are bigots” (Christian Herald, 1928, Oct. 11). The following month the *Herald* said that the Catholic question was really a political one which was concerned with Smith’s political feelings and motivations (Christian Herald, 1928, Nov. 1). Commenting on the numerous religious debates regarding Smith’s candidacy, the *Fellowship Forum* wrote that on one side is the Catholic Church which is seeking power and on the other are Protestant Churches and all citizens who believe in the separation of Church and State (Myers, 1945: p. 263). The depth of the feelings involved were revealed in a publication which stated that the many questions about Smith’s religious convictions were an effort to come to terms with the feasibility of a Catholic president, which is one of the most crucial and continuing problems in America (Smylie, 1960).

In response to all of this debate, Smith delivered a speech in Oklahoma City prior to the election in which he said, “I here emphatically declare that I do not wish any members of any faith in any part of the United States to vote for me on any religious grounds. I want them to vote for me only when in their hearts and consciences they become convinced that my election will promote the best interests of our country. By the same token, I cannot refrain from saying any person who votes against me simply because of my religion is not, to my way of thinking, a good citizen” (Williams, 1932: p. 318).

A study appeared in the 1950s which stated that, contrary to what some people believed, Smith did not lose the election because he was a Catholic. Furthermore, his candidacy did not hurt the Democratic Party but actually helped it. The study went on to say that the nation had changed since the 1920s and that a vice-presidential candidate who was Catholic would aid the Democratic ticket in the 1956 election. The “Catholic vote” could help the party win the election more than could the “southern vote” or the “farm vote” (Bean, 1956). In the 1956 election two Catholics, Senator John Kennedy and Governor Wagner, were considered as possible vice-presidential candidates to run with Presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson. However, they were dropped from consideration when anti-Catholic rhetoric began, such as an article in the Protestant publication *Christian Century* which stated that neither Kennedy nor Wagner “has demonstrated sufficient independence that he can be trusted to stand against the never ceasing drive of the Roman Catholic Church for access to public funds. . . and for preferential treatment by public figures and bodies” (Christian Century, 1956, Aug. 15).

The next Catholic to run for the presidency was John Kennedy in 1960. In an attempt to short circuit some of the expected anti-Catholic attacks he stated in a 1959 interview with *Look* magazine that an oath of office took precedence over personal religious beliefs or Church loyalty. This interview drew an editorial reaction from the Catholic weekly *America* which said “We were somewhat taken aback, for instance, by the unvarnished statement that ‘whatever one’s religion in his private life . . . nothing takes precedence over his oath . . .’ Mr. Kennedy doesn’t really believe that. No religious man be he Catholic, Protestant or Jew, holds such an opinion” (America, 1959: p. 651).

As the Democratic candidate he declared in a speech, which was reminiscent of one made by Smith, that he hoped that no American “will waste his franchise and throw away his vote by voting either for or against me solely on account of my religious affiliation. It is not relevant” (Richter and Dulce, 1962: p. 155). However, many people disagreed with

this statement and objected to having a Catholic in the White House. Margaret Sanger, the well-known leader of the movement favoring birth control, said that if Kennedy won the election she would find a home outside the United States. Meanwhile, a leading Baptist minister, Dr. W. A. Criswell, stated that the election of Kennedy “would spell the death of a free church in a free state and our hopes of continuance of full religious liberty in America.” (New York Times, 1960, July 4). In a broadcast sermon he added, “Roman Catholicism is not only a religion, it is a political tyranny. . . that covers the entire world” (Richter and Dulce, 1962: p. 159). A similar statement was issued by a group of Protestant leaders from various denominations. At the conclusion of a closed meeting they condemned religious bigotry, but went on to state, “there is a ‘religious issue’ in the present political campaign which is not the fault of any candidate. It is created by the nature of the Roman Catholic Church which is, in a very real sense, both a church and a temporal state” (New York Times, 1960, Sept. 8).

Opposition to the election of a Catholic president came not only from some public figures but also from religious organizations. Groups opposing a Catholic for president formed in such states as Michigan, Kentucky, Minnesota, Virginia, Missouri and Arkansas. However some non-Catholic individuals and organizations condemned these religious attacks. The Baltimore *Afro American* expressed its support for Kennedy, noting that they (Blacks) had long been the targets for such bigotry and at the heart of the election was the issue of religious freedom (Richter and Dulce, 1962: pp. 160-62). On September 12 one hundred churchmen and scholars from different faith traditions issued a public statement condemning the focus on religion as a clear violation of Article VI of the Constitution which states that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States” (Barrett, 1963: p. 9). Meanwhile, Jewish organizations strongly defended Kennedy against the religious bigotry, and Jews voted overwhelmingly for him. This led to the suggestion that the election of a Catholic President might also one day lead to the election of a Jew (Menendez, 1977: p. 86).

Although the election and subsequent performance of Kennedy as President apparently helped allay some of the fears of most non-Catholics, a 1969 Gallup poll found that 8 percent of the electorate said they would not vote for a well-qualified Catholic or Jewish candidate for president (Menendez, 1977: p. 87). Thus it appears that some fears or bigotry still persist, although clearly to a lesser degree.

The third, and latest, Catholic to attempt to ascend to the Presidency was John Kerry in the 2004 elections. Unlike previous elections in which Catholic candidates participated, Catholicism was not a dominant issue. It is unclear, however, whether the lack of such verbal attacks was accompanied by a lack of discriminatory voting. Ironically, Kerry’s religious beliefs appeared to be of more concern, at least publicly, to many fellow Catholics than to non-Catholics. His stand on abortion caused two bishops to publicly state that Kerry would not be allowed to receive communion in their dioceses. As a result some Catholics chose to vote for George Bush, whose public statements on abortion were more in line with Catholic teaching, or simply refrain from voting for either candidate.

Catholicism and Government

For its part, Rome considered America to be a missionary country until the beginning of the 1900s, and the education of young Catholic children was a major concern. Parochial schools were established to instill and preserve the faith, which was considered endangered in the Protestant-dominated public schools. Therefore, immigrants from Catholic countries were encouraged to send their children to Catholic schools, and they tended to attend ethnic churches which were common until the second half of the 20th century. These churches were served, when possible, by priests from the countries of the immigrants, and the vernacular was used for the benefit of the parishioners.

A connection was formed in the early 1900s between the predominantly immigrant and working class Catholics and the Democratic Party which seemed to address their concerns and meet their needs better than did the Republican Party. Since then Catholics have traditionally been Democrats and have been more supportive of government programs to address social problems. Protestants, on the other hand, have tended to be Republicans. This is especially true of fundamentalist Protestants. American fundamentalism began around 1900 as a conservative reaction to the perceived liberalism in government and religion. Religious fundamentalism is highly political and often expresses itself on political issues and pursues political goals. Some have explained this political affinity between fundamentalism and the conservative wing of the Republican Party by pointing out a convergence of certain key concerns.

Both religious and political conservatives tend to share dualistic, conspiratorial and individualistic orientations. First, fundamentalism views the world in terms of good and evil, while conservative Republicans during the period of the Cold War saw the world in terms of Americans and Communists. (Today the focus is on democratic and non-democratic nations.) Second, both have had a conspiratorial view of the world. Fundamentalists saw the Devil at the heart of the conspiracy while right-wing Republicans saw Russia, or Communism, which was referred to as the “Evil Empire” by President Reagan. (Today it is Muslim terrorists.) Third, both emphasize individualism. Fundamentalism is focused on the individual salvation aspect of religion, rather than the social gospel aspect, which matches the political right’s emphasis on laissez-faireism and few social programs (Johnstone, 1988: pp. 167-70).

It appears that with increased education and economic success many Catholics and Protestants have moved towards the center and become more politically conservative. Nevertheless, religious affiliation continues to have an affect on political attitudes and voting behavior independently of socioeconomic status. Overall, Jews are more liberal than Catholics, more likely than other religious group to vote Democratic, and support a variety of public issues ranging from civil rights and welfare to international relations (Parenti, 1967).

The Second Vatican Council, which began in 1962, signaled a change in the Catholic Church’s attitude toward political involvement. Church leaders felt that the Church had been remiss in remaining silent and passive during the Holocaust and that such passivity led to apathy on the part of many Catholics. Therefore, the Council supported four attitudinal changes. Catholics should become more politically involved, committed to the

humanization of life, committed to world justice, and have a preferential option for the poor. The Church, they recognized, shares responsibility for the secular as well as the sacred welfare of all people (Henriot et al, 1990: pp. 16-17). In the encyclical *A Call to Action*, Pope Paul VI insisted that politics is a vocation concerned with the transformation of society in light of the Gospel.

It appears that the Republican Party, with its emphasis on individualism, anti-abortion rhetoric and a proposal for an anti-gay marriage amendment to the Constitution, appeals to the more conservative Catholics and Protestants who identify with the Gospel of personal salvation. This is especially true in the deep South, also known as the "Bible Belt." For many decades the most loyal Republicans have been those variously known as the "Moral Majority" or the "Religious Right." In the 2004 election 42 percent of those who go to church weekly voted and of these 58 percent voted for Bush. Furthermore, the largest percentage (22%) of "single-issue voters" who voted for President Bush did so, they reported, for religious or moral reasons. This was approximately the same percent as in the 2000 election (Tumulty, 2004: 23). Not all those who voted for Bush were Republicans. As previously noted, some Catholic Democrats either voted for Bush or did not vote for either presidential candidate after two Bishops publicly criticized the Catholic Democratic candidate Senator Kerry because of his stand on abortion. In general, it appears the Democratic Party, which emphasizes social programs, health insurance, minimum wages and environmental protection, appeals more to liberal Catholics, Protestants and Jews who identify with the Social Gospel and preferential option for the poor.

Religion, apart from financial support and voting, involves itself through its members in a much more direct manner, by running for office. Many conservative Christians have become part of what has been called the "Christian Coalition" whose goal is to utilize the political process in order to make the United States a more Christian nation. In the past several decades this group has expressed a concern over what they perceive as a growing apathy and secularization in society. This concern has led some members to seek various political offices in order to help reform society. Members have run for local school boards with the goals of restricting sex education, requiring the teaching of creationism together with evolution, and instilling Christian values into the curriculum. In federal, state and local government, they hope to restrict abortion, embryonic research and human cloning, oppose gay marriage and support traditional "family values" and to pass "pro-life" legislation. All of these goals are consistent with Catholic teachings which leads to the question as to why this group has not supported Catholic candidates. It may be that a Catholic candidate may have a better chance of being elected if he or she runs as a Republican.

Conclusion

Religion has long been part of the political debate in presidential elections. In preparation for the 2008 election the religion of Republican hopeful Mitt Romney, a Mormon, has been raised but without the past negativity common to Catholic candidates. According to one study the question of religion has figured prominently on an average of

once every three campaigns through the 1960s (Johnstone, 1988: pp. 352-53). However, it appears that while religious issues have been hotly debated and specific individuals and beliefs have been attacked, the only religion which has been widely targeted in Presidential campaigns is Catholicism. Furthermore, many of the religious criticisms directed against Protestant candidates focused on a real or supposed friendliness or alliance with Catholics or the Catholic Church on the part of the candidate or a family member. Clearly many non-Catholics have feared Roman Catholicism. The history of often bloody religious conflicts which occurred in England and other parts of Europe, and the recent hostility in Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestants has served, in the minds of many, to justify this fear.

Another source of concern has been the growth of the Catholic population. By the end of the 1970s 22 of the 50 states had a dominant religion whose members comprised over half of all people who belonged to a specific denomination in that state. Roman Catholics were predominant in 15 of the 22 states, most of which were located in the northeast, midwest and southwest. Baptists predominated in five southern states, and Mormons predominated in two states, Utah and Idaho. Twenty-five states were dominated by two different religions, with one of these usually being Catholic (Menendez, 1977, pp. 15-20).

Commenting on the impact a candidate's religion has on his chances of being elected, one author wrote that there are only four ways that a candidate's religion could affect his fitness for office. These are: "(1) to have a messianic complex, in which he regarded his every decision as the will of God; (2) to discriminate in favor of or against certain religions in his policies or appointments; (3) to use his position to enhance or promote sectarian values; or (4) to combine the civil and religious roles in his Presidential office" (Menendez, 1977: pp. 15-20).

History indicates that religion and government are interrelated, and it is not possible to maintain complete separation between them. The First Amendment seeks to separate government and religion, for the general welfare of each. The meaning of the separation of Church and State appears to be more uncertain now than ever before. For approximately the first 160 years the meaning of the First Amendment's clause regarding religion was considered by the Supreme Court only six or seven times. Since then the Court has heard over 100 cases. During the period from 1971 until 1974 over 20 cases alone dealt with the constitutionality of some form of state aid to religion (Sorauf, 1975: p. 360). Since then the questions regarding such issues have continued to arise.

One writer noted the apparent bias against both Catholics and Jews in presidential elections and stated that in the past prejudice was a major reason. A poll taken in 1937 indicated that 47 percent of Americans said they would not vote for a Jewish candidate, and a 1958 poll revealed that 30 percent said they would not vote for one that was Catholic. Since then, however, attitudes have changed and in 1999 only 6 percent said they would not vote for a Jewish candidate and only 4 percent would not vote for one that was Catholic. Now different concerns work against Jews and Catholics who wish to be president. There are Jewish and Catholic issues which are divisive, while Protestantism has no comparable issues which so divide the population.

For Jews it is the question of Israel. If a Jewish candidate is perceived as being too pro-Israel he will be opposed by many Americans who believe the United States is already showing favoritism towards Israel compared to other countries. However, if the candidate is perceived as not being pro-Israel enough by the Jewish voters, they will turn against him. For Catholics the issue is abortion. The country is already deeply divided between those who are pro-life and pro-choice, and the official Catholic position is well known. The author states that since Protestantism is more individualistic, a Protestant candidate can make a statement against abortion and it will be interpreted by most voters as a personal opinion and that nothing will be done to change the law. If, however, a Catholic candidate makes a similar statement against abortion, it will arouse fear that he will try to change the law since Catholicism is more communal and has absolute standards of morality. Thus, he will be opposed by pro-choice advocates if he expresses opposition to abortion and will draw opposition from Church leaders and many fellow Catholics if he expresses support for it. (This point was validated in the case of John Kerry's defeat in the 2004 election, as previously mentioned).

A final point made by the author had to do with the public proclamations of faith which are an important part of American politics, especially during campaigns. It is customary to see candidates going to church, speaking to church groups, and giving public testimony of one's religious faith. Such a show of religion and expression of faith are taken as a proxy for honesty and overall morality. Voters typically know little or nothing about candidates apart from their political party and tend to accept public proclamations of their faith as an indication of moral integrity and trustworthiness. Such public professions are much easier and more natural for Protestants than for Jews or Catholics because, unlike Judaism and Catholicism, such testimonies are an expected and accepted part of the faith tradition of Protestantism (Plotz, 2000).

Religion is most readily apparent in politics during presidential campaigns where the results of the election can have more far reaching consequences than is the case in state or local elections. One way a president's religion can affect the nation is through the appointment of members of the Supreme Court who have the power to decide issues which many consider to be moral or religious in nature. In recent years the blatant attacks on candidates based solely on religion have all but disappeared. However, it is at such times that deep-seated religious prejudices and fears are most likely to surface and be expressed in actions. That is, voting for or against a candidate based on his or her religion. Such discrimination is a violation of the Constitution as well as social justice. Not only does it violate human dignity but also the right of participation. Discrimination against certain categories of individuals, based on race, sex, age or religion, is not only short-sighted but is a clear violation of contributive justice. Individuals have a right as well as an obligation to share or contribute their God-given talents for the common good. Therefore, discrimination not only denies individuals the opportunity to fulfill their obligation but deprives society of the benefits of their talents.

There were no public attacks on the Catholic Church in the 2004 presidential election as there had been in prior elections in which one of the candidates was Catholic. However, that does not necessarily indicate that religious bias no longer exists or that it did not play a role in the defeat of candidate Kerry. A 2006 survey found that 55 percent

of the respondents said that the United States is not ready for a Mormon president (AARP Bulletin, 2007). This does not bode well for Mitt Romney, or any other presidential hopeful who is Mormon. It remains to be seen whether, in the future, Catholicism, Judaism, Mormonism or some other religion will continue to be seen as an impediment to holding the highest office.

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