

Politics and Religion - Reagan and Mondale

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The title of this paper may conjure up in the audience's mind any of a number of images from the 1984 campaign:

President Reagan standing before the annual convention of the National Association of Evangelicals, declaring: *America has begun a spiritual reawakening*.¹

Phyllis Schafley calling Geraldine Ferraro an *advocate of the radical feminist movement*.²

Geraldine Ferraro charging President Reagan with not being a good Christian.³

Jesse Jackson eloquently appealing at the Democratic convention: *In his appeal to the South, Mr. Reagan is trying to substitute flags and prayer cloths for jobs, food, clothing, education, health care and housing. But President Reagan is not even familiar with the structure of a prayer. He has cut food stamps, children's breakfast and lunch programs, the WIC program for pregnant mothers and infants, and then he says, Let us pray*.⁴

Republican Senator Paul Laxalt, sending a letter to 45,000 ministers in 16 states, addressing them as *Dear Christian Leader*, and declaring that Reagan *Has made an unwavering commitment to the traditional values which I know you share*.⁵

Archbishop Bernard F. Law of Boston describing abortion as *the critical issue in this campaign*.⁶

Cheryl Prewitt, Miss America of 1980, attacking Ferraro in a series of television spots sponsored by *Christians for Reagan*.⁷

Jerry Falwell proclaiming a National Day of Prayer and Fasting for the day before the election.⁸

A heckler in a Teddy Bear outfit at a Ferraro campaign stop, holding a sign that said: *15 Million Babies will never hug a Teddy Bear*;

The voices of children singing the Pro-Life Anthem:

Let me live
Let me walk into the sunshine,
Let me live.
Feel my mother's arms around me,
Feel my father's arms around me,
Be a part of God's creation,
Let me live.

Ronald Reagan, responding to a question by Marvin Kalb in the final television debate: *Do you feel that we are now heading, perhaps, for some kind of nuclear Armageddon?*

Religious issues in Presidential campaigns are not new to American culture. Until and including 1960, for instance, a number of campaigns centered around a candidate's connection with the Catholic Church. The campaign of Jimmy Carter in 1976 raised the issue again. Kenneth A. Briggs contended that the question was *whether a deeply committed evangelical Christian can appeal to an overtly more secular culture with his frank admission of conservative Protestant piety*.⁹ Four years later, Ronald Reagan took advantage of several highly emotional issues—two of which were the right to abortion and the right to prayer in public schools—to gain the support of the Moral Majority and other conservative religious groups. Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, claimed credit for getting four million to vote. He called the results of the election the *greatest day for the cause of conservatism and American morality in my adult life*.¹⁰

During the first several years of his administration, Reagan paid only token attention to these issues as he concentrated on the economy and national defense. With the advent of an election year, however, he turned his attention to these issues again. When this writer began research on this paper, he thought the topic would be challenging and the search for materials a little difficult. Instead, the religious aspect of this campaign mushroomed into a highly volatile set of issues with tons of verbiage on the subject.

A Little Chronology

The year started off rather slowly with minimal attention paid to Reagan's first address as a declared candidate for re-election, given significantly enough, to the convention of the National Religious Broadcasters. In this speech, he

equated the issue of abortion with the Civil War struggle to end slavery, charging that aborted fetuses suffer "long and agonizing pain." After his address, Pat Boone led the audience in a rendition of *God Bless America*, adding the words: "How wonderful to have a President who believes these words."¹¹ **The New York Times** editorialized that

You don't have to be a secular humanist to take offense at that display of what, in America, should be private piety. The devoutest Christians, who warmly respond to those words, have a higher stake in not having them used for partisan gain. That stake is the separation of church from state.¹²

February was relatively silent, but in March President Reagan addressed the convention of the National Association of Evangelicals. Charging that in recent years "America did seem to lose her religious and moral bearings," he contended that "Americans are turning back to God."¹³ As a result of these first two addresses, some critics began to pay attention to the President's church attendance patterns. In defending his record of having attended church services only nine times in his administration through February of 1984, Reagan responded that he disliked inconveniencing parishioners, and that furthermore, he did not intend to make morality a campaign issue.¹⁴

During the early months of the year, Reagan published a book — **Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation**. Actually, Reagan's part of the book is relatively short, using only twenty pages printed in large type. Writing in highly emotional language, the President argues that "Americans do not want to play God with the value of human life. It is not for us to decide who is worthy to live and who is not."¹⁵ In June, the National Right to Life Committee endorsed Reagan's re-election.¹⁶

Up to this point, the religious issue seemed to belong to President Reagan. No sooner, however, had Geraldine Ferraro been chosen as Walter Mondale's running mate, than she decided to enjoin the issue. "President Reagan walks around calling himself a good Christian. I don't for one minute believe it." His policies, she explained, were "discriminatory" and "terribly unfair."¹⁷ Jesse Jackson joined in the attack with the quotation noted earlier in this paper.

During the months of August and September, a heated exchange took place within the Catholic Church. Mario Cuomo, the Catholic governor of New York, became involved in a series of speeches and statements. Cuomo charged:

You have a President who has wrapped himself in religiosity. Reagan has used religion aggressively as a weapon, as a tool. He has held himself out as offering the American people a religious value that will be a foundation for the Government. You have Reagan moving into what was a vacuum and brandishing religious values.

Only by debating the proper role of religion in politics, Cuomo advised, could Reagan's grip on the religious issue be loosened.¹⁸

Cuomo also became involved in a discussion with Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York over the role of the church in politics. In the midst of that discussion, Bishop John W. Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement including these excerpts:

With regard to many issues, of course, there is room for sincere disagreement by Catholics and others who share our moral convictions, over how moral principles should be applied to the current facts in the public policy debate. But with regard to the immorality of the direct taking of innocent human life (e.g., by abortion or by direct attacks on noncombatants in war), our views are not simply policy statements of a particular Catholic organization, the United States Catholic Conference. They are a direct affirmation of the constant moral teaching of the Catholic Church, enunciated repeatedly over the centuries, as in our day, by the highest teaching authority of the Church. . . .

In proclaiming authentic Catholic moral teaching, therefore, we recognize at the same time the need to join the public policy debate in a way which attempts to convince others of the rightness of our positions. . . . It would be regrettable if religion as such were injected into a political campaign through appeals to candidates' religious affiliations and commitments. We reject the idea that candidates satisfy the requirements of rational analysis in saying their personal views should not influence their policy decisions; the implied dichotomy — between personal morality and public policy — is simply not logically tenable in any adequate view of both.¹⁹

Four days later, Ferraro responded by pointing out that the Roman Catholic Church has its right to state its position on moral-political questions, but that she had no obligation to follow them. Having no qualms about separating her religious attitudes from her political policies, she said; "I am convinced what I am doing is right." The same day,

Cuomo declared that there was nothing in Catholic law that required him to work to impose the teaching of the church on others.²⁰

Later that month, Archbishop O'Connor declared:

It is my responsibility to spell out for Catholics what the church teaches. If anyone in public office wishes to differ, wishes to say that is not Catholic teaching, then that individual ought to prove it is wrong. And if an individual does attempt to articulate Catholic teaching and it is not truly Catholic teaching it is my responsibility to say something.²¹

In the early part of September, Archbishop Bernard Law of Boston entered the arena. While declaring that the Catholic Church was not trying to tell its members how to vote, he said: "But we are saying that when you make up your mind, this is the critical issue."²²

Ferraro and Cuomo were joined in the dialogue by Senator Edward Kennedy. In an address titled *Faith and Freedom*, he claimed that what was at stake was "not a limit on religious expression, but the limits on public action itself."

Religious leaders may say anything they feel bound in conscience to say, but they may not ask Government to do something which it cannot do under the Constitution or the social contract of a pluralistic society. Where decisions are inherently individual ones or in cases where we are deeply divided about whether they are, people of faith should not invoke the power of the state to decide what everyone can believe or think or read or do. In such cases—cases like abortion or prayer or prohibition or sexual identity—the proper role of religion is to appeal to the free conscience of each person, not the coercive rule of secular law. Archbishop O'Connor surely has every constitutional right, and according to his faith a religious duty, to speak against abortion. And just as surely Geraldine Ferraro and Mario Cuomo are equally right that faithful Catholics, serving in public office, can agree with his morality without seeking to impose it across the board. . . . Personal choices like abortion should be questions for public debate, but in the end the answers cannot be matters for public decision. The issues should be discussed before the widest audience, but they can be settled only in the depths of each individual conscience. There is a logical line of separation between private morality and public policy — and it is the line between the role of Government and the role of individual rights.²³

A couple of days later, facing a large group of anti-abortion hecklers, Ferraro reiterated her stand that she would not impose her views about abortion on others. She quoted the words of John F. Kennedy; "I do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me." She added: "That is exactly my position today." Shortly after the speech, Bishop James C. Timlin of the Diocese of Scranton attacked her position on abortion as "absurd" and "not a rational position," saying her views amounted to "secular humanism."²⁴

On September 13, Cuomo spoke at the University of Notre Dame on the subject: *Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective*. Cuomo declared that "I protect my right to be a Catholic by preserving your right to believe as a Jew, a Protestant or nonbeliever, or as anything else you choose." Other excerpts include:

I accept the Church's teaching on abortion. Must I insist you do? By Law? By denying you Medicaid funding? By a constitutional amendment? If so, which one? Would that be the best way to avoid abortions or to prevent them? . . . God should not be made into a celestial party chairman. . . . I believe that legal interdicting of abortion by either the Federal Government or the individual states is not a plausible possibility and even if it could be obtained, it wouldn't work. Given present attitudes, it would be "Prohibition" revisited, legislating what couldn't be enforced and in the process creating a disrespect for law in general. And as much as I admire the bishop's hope that a constitutional amendment against abortion would be the basis for a full new Bill of Rights for mother and children, I disagree that this would be the result.²⁵

Another incident in the debate within the Catholic Church should be noted. On September 14, fifty-five Catholic theologians asserted that the Church's position on abortion was not monolithic. As members of Catholics for Free Choice, they had been advising Catholic members of Congress that, although the bishop consistently urged abolition of abortion, they were not required to follow that policy strictly in their official acts.²⁶

The end of August also saw the convention of the Grand Old Party, at which Reagan made clear that religion would

play a major role in his campaign. Speaking to a prayer breakfast the morning before his acceptance speech, he declared:

The truth is, politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related. We need religion as a guide. We need it because we are imperfect. And our government needs the church because only those humble enough to admit they're sinners can bring to democracy the tolerance it requires in order to survive.

In the same speech, in speaking about those opposing voluntary prayer in schools, he asked: "Isn't the real truth that they are intolerant of religion?"

That same night, in his acceptance address, Reagan continued to include religious themes in his ideas:

If our opponents were as vigorous in supporting our voluntary prayer amendment as they are in raising taxes, maybe we could get the Lord back in our schoolrooms and get the drugs and violence out. . . .Millions of average parents pay their full share of taxes to support public schools while choosing to send their children to parochial or other independent schools. Doesn't fairness dictate that they should have some help in carrying this double burden?²⁷

Thus Reagan, as he accepted the Republican nomination, had completely forgotten his earlier declaration that he did not intend to make morality a campaign issue.

A little over a week later, Mondale accepted the challenge. In a radio speech broadcast nationwide, he declared that the Republicans had "raised doubts whether they respect the wall our founders placed between government and religion." He further declared that mixing politics and religion "will corrupt our faith and divide our nation."²⁸

Two days later, in Salt Lake City, Reagan responded by using one of his favorite slogans that "some would. . .twist the concept of freedom of religion to mean freedom against religion." He also utilized what became a favorite straw man, as he declared that he "can't think of anyone who favors the government establishing a religion in this country."²⁹

Two days later, both Mondale and Reagan spoke to B'nai B'rith, a major Jewish organization. Mondale, clashing directly with previous statements of Reagan's, charged that an extreme fringe was "poised to capture the Republican Party and tear it from its roots in Lincoln." He declared that he did not doubt Reagan's faith, patriotism, and family values, "and I call on him and his supporters to accept and respect mine." Reagan's speech, by contrast, spoke in terms of generalities on the subject of faith; the closest statement to the religious debate was his use again of the straw man that the Constitution guaranteed there would "never be a state religion in this land but at the same time it makes sure that every single American is free to choose and practice his or her religious beliefs or to choose no religion at all."³⁰

Mondale's view on politics and religion was clarified somewhat by an exchange that took place between a street preacher and himself in Chattanooga. Mondale declared:

I don't deny, but I affirm that there's a relationship. As a matter of fact I believe that the reason that I am in politics is because of my faith and what it teaches me about what Christianity should involve—nondiscrimination, freedom, reaching out to lighten the burden of the vulnerable, trying to create a society in which the word "love" leaps out.

In the same exchange, he had said, in talking about his Christian home, that "I don't brag about it. I don't talk about it because I was taught that my faith was between me and my family and my God."³¹ A week later, in Mississippi, he defended his upbringing in a Christian family, but said that politicians should keep their "nose out of religion." Declaring that he did not want religion in the campaign, Mondale responded to hecklers who asked him how he could call himself a good Christian and defend the Democratic platform on social issues. Mondale responded:

What makes America great is our faith in between ourselves, our conscience, and our God, and we don't have to clear our faith by passing muster with some politician who happens to be running against us.³²

Mondale thus admitted that religion and politics are related; his distinction, however, is that a person's faith is a private matter and should not be forced upon others.

The intensity of the religious issues decreased in the latter part of the campaign, as far as the candidates were concerned. Other issues, such as international cooperation with the Soviet Union, and media events such as the

televised debates, crowded the religious perspectives out of the headlines. There were various groups, however, who continued to wage the religious wars.

Representative Henry J. Hyde, an Illinois Republican, in a speech to the Law School at Notre Dame University on September 24, urged Roman Catholic politicians to strive for a legal ban on abortions. "The duty of one who regards abortion as wrong is not to bemoan the absence of consensus against abortion, but to help lead the effort to achieve one." Arguing that the constitutional separation of church and state was "never intended to rule religiously based values out of order in the public arena," he questioned whether "the American experiment can survive the sterilization of the public arena that takes place when religiously based values are systematically ruled out of order in the public discourse."³³

A different perspective on the Catholic approach to religious issues in the campaign was presented by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago in early October. Bernardin approached abortion in the framework of a "broad range of issues" that he said threatened life; these included nuclear arms and poverty. In 1983, he had described the concept as a "seamless garment" which bound together several urgent concerns of the Catholic bishops.³⁴

The candidates had to deal with the issue again in the first televised debate on October 7. Reagan tried to put the responsibility for the religious issue being injected into the campaign on the Democratic ticket's shoulders by charging that "religion became a part of this campaign when Mr. Mondale's running mate said I wasn't a good Christian" — a charge that should amaze even the most naive observer of the campaign. In the same debate, Walter Mondale asserted that the Republican platform was creating a religious test for judges before selection for federal court.

In the same debate, the issue of abortion was brought up. Reagan declared that it was a problem of the Constitution, not a problem of religion. At the same time, he declared that "it is a sin if you're taking a human life." Mondale on the issue came up with this statement:

If it's rape, how do you draw moral judgments on that? If it's incest, how do you draw moral judgments on that? Does every woman in America have to present herself before some judge picked by Jerry Falwell to clear her personal judgment?³⁵

The religious issues again came to the forefront during the debate between the Vice-Presidential candidates. George Bush took the lead from President Reagan in charging that "it wasn't our side that raised the question about our President whether he was a good Christian or not." Geraldine Ferraro responded by stating that "it started in 1980, when this Administration was running for office and the Rev. Jerry Falwell became very, very involved in the campaign." Bush and Ferraro made other statements pertaining to religious issues, but they were mostly restatements of previous stands.³⁶

A few days later, Bishop James W. Malone, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, issued a statement contending that the bishops had no intention of creating a voting bloc. He also stated:

As a nation we are constitutionally committed to the separation of church and state but not to the separation of religious and moral values from public life. . . . Bishops are teachers in the Catholic Church entrusted with the responsibility of communicating the content of Catholic moral teaching and illustrating its relevance to social and political issues. We do not seek the formation of a voting bloc nor do we pre-empt the right and duty of individuals to decide conscientiously whom they will support for public office. Rather, having stated our positions, we encourage members of our own Church and all citizens to examine the positions of candidates on issues and decide who will best contribute to the common good of society.³⁷

On October 15, Archbishop John J. O'Connor delivered a much-publicized address, "Human Lives, Human Rights," before a group of medical professionals, nuns, and priests at Cathedral High School in New York. In this speech, he declared:

What do we ask of a candidate or someone already in office? Nothing more than this: a statement opposing abortion on demand, and a commitment to work for a modification of the permissive interpretations issued on the subject by the United States Supreme Court. It will simply not do to argue that "laws" won't work, or that "we can't legislate morality." Nor will it do to argue, "I won't impose my morality on others." There is nothing personal or private in the morality that teaches that the taking of unborn life is wrong.

O'Connor went so far in this speech as to appeal to the rape victim:

Certainly rape is always a frightening possibility, and a crime to be abhorred in every way. It is understandable that many would feel that an abortion should be justifiable if a woman or a young girl becomes pregnant through rape. We in no way minimize the horror and the trauma of rape. Obviously, whether we are speaking of a thousand cases or one case, a woman's life, a family's future, can be virtually destroyed. But as we have asked before, will violence against an unborn child compensate for violence against the woman raped, or will it, in many cases, simply increase her suffering? Is it at least **possible** that bearing a child, however conceived, and either rearing it or offering it for adoption to the hundreds of thousands of couples pleading to adopt, might bring, even out of the tragedy of rape, a rich fulfillment?³⁸

During the final weeks of the campaign, a new religious issue began to surface nationally, although its impact was apparently minimal. Joe Cuomo, unrelated to Governor Cuomo, made a documentary on *Ronald Reagan and the Prophecy of Armageddon*, in cooperation with Radio Station WBAI-FM in New York City. This 90 minute program was broadcast at various times in the campaign over about 175 public radio stations.³⁹ One of the early statements in the program was:

Ronald Reagan said it as Governor and as President, in his home in the White House, over lunch, over dinner, in the car and over the phone, to religious leaders and lobbyists, to his staff, a Senator and even to *People* magazine. On at least 11 occasions Ronald Reagan has suggested that the end of the world is coming, and it may be coming soon.

Among the "eleven occasions" were:

1. In the 1980 Presidential campaign, Reagan appeared on the PTL television network with Jim Bakker, and said: "We may be the generation that sees Armageddon."
2. During the same campaign, Reagan told a group of Jewish leaders in New York City: "Israel is the only stable democracy we can rely on in a spot where Armageddon could come."
3. In 1981, Senator Howard Heflin is cited as hearing Reagan say in a conversation on Armageddon: "Russia is going to get involved in it."
4. In 1983, the *Jerusalem Post* quoted Reagan as saying: "I turn back to your ancient prophets in the Old Testament and the signs foretelling Armageddon, and I find myself wondering if, if we're the generation that's going to see that come about."⁴⁰

The potential impact of such an issue could have been devastating. Some interpreters of the Biblical doctrine of Armageddon see the United States as the agent of God in a final nuclear holocaust. Obviously, if this were a President's interpretation, he would be committed to continuing nuclear buildup and the inevitability of nuclear war—making any attempts at peace worthless. Apparently, this was not Reagan's interpretation. In the second debate with Mondale, Reagan stated:

But no one knows whether Armageddon—those prophecies—mean that Armageddon is a thousand years away or day after tomorrow. So I have never seriously warned and said we must plan according to Armageddon.⁴¹

The idea did get some press coverage, however. Jerry Falwell declared that it was a "thinly veiled attack on Ronald Reagan by liberal clergymen."⁴² *Time* felt compelled to report Nancy Reagan's gasp of "Oh, no!" when the question of Armageddon came up in the second debate.⁴³ In a campaign filled with religious issues, the most this issue did was to inject some creativity into the dying minutes of a dying campaign.

The remainder of this paper will try to answer three questions:

1. Are religion and politics inseparable?
2. Did Reagan deliberately make this a major issue in the campaign?
3. What was the probable impact upon the election?

Some Observations

1. Are religion and politics inseparable?

The first of these questions cannot be answered adequately by just referring to philosophical statements. This paper has already observed a number of pronouncements and renouncements on the subject. It should be noticed that both candidates accepted the idea of a relationship between religion and politics — the difference is that Mondale insisted

that a person's faith is a private matter. Furthermore, a number of observers pointed out that liberal theologians used the pulpit in promoting civil rights and in opposing the Vietnam War. The critical question, however, is how the voting public regards the question.

But what did the voting public believe in 1984? **Religion in America**, Report No. 222 of the Gallup Report for March, 1984, revealed some interesting attitudes about what Americans were like. After revealing such statistics as the fact that only four adults in ten attended church during a week in 1983, and only six in ten attended once during a month, the same report pointed out: "The vast majority of the population say they wish their personal faith were stronger and that they want religion to play a greater role in society."⁴⁴ The report continued that "while religion has a powerful appeal for Americans, most of us fall into the category of nominal Christians."⁴⁵ The adult population of our country thus, while nominally Christian if at all, was apparently ripe for an appeal involving greater participation of religion in society.

The probable appeal of religious issues was further validated by the growth of the Moral Majority of Jerry Falwell. Achieving much publicity in the 1980 election with one million members, Falwell in 1984, claimed 6.5 million members⁴⁶ and planned to register one million voters each year.

2. Did Reagan deliberately make this a major issue of the campaign?

There were too many symbols in the 1984 campaign to conclude anything other than "yes." Obvious symbols which Reagan used include:

- (1) Presenting his first campaign address to the convention of the National Religious Broadcasters.
- (2) His address to the convention of the National Association of Evangelicals.
- (3) Publishing, during an election year, **Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation**.
- (4) Dining on church pasta at the St. Ann's Church festival while asking: "Why do those who claim to represent the most enlightened thought on Central America refuse to listen to the testimony of one of the greatest moral leaders of our time, his holiness Pope John Paul II?"⁴⁷
- (5) Addressing a prayer breakfast the morning of his acceptance speech at the Republican convention.
- (6) The selection of Jerry Falwell to give the benediction after Reagan's nomination at the Republican convention.
- (7) His visit to a religious shrine, the National Shrine of our Lady of Czestochowa, ringing the chapel bell, praising Pope John Paul II, and presenting a tapestry to the Pauline Fathers who care for the shrine—all of this at a time in which Reagan's aids had said he would ease up on the religious issue.⁴⁸
- (8) His film shown to the Republican convention, showing,
 - a. Reagan talking about Terence Cardinal Cooke, described by Reagan as "a wonderful man, a most dedicated man, and one of the most kindly men I have ever met." and also identified as one of his hospital visitors after he was wounded in 1981 by John Hinckley.
 - b. His declaration, following that shooting, that "Whatever time I've got left, it now belongs to someone else." The someone else, by the context, is obviously God.
- (9) The publication of a paperback, **Ronald Reagan: In God I Trust**, a compilation of Reagan's statements about religion, maintaining that Reagan was motivated to seek the Presidency because of his religious beliefs.⁴⁹

His frequent references to religious ideas, his use of religious symbols — all of these pointed to the inescapable conclusion that Reagan consciously decided to use the religious issue to his advantage.

3. What was the probable impact upon the election?

Time magazine made these observations in its article "For God and Country,"

As a great campaign debate looms, the risks are substantial for the two candidates and for the country. Reagan may have misread a national hunger for moral and spiritual uplift as a desire for a specific religious regimen. Mondale could be hurt if he is perceived as insensitive to religious yearnings. In either case, new religious tensions could be stirred.⁵⁰

The second of these was apparently the result. Mondale and Ferraro were stuck with a no-win dilemma. By insisting that religion not be a part of the campaign, Mondale overlooked what was a substantial desire on the part of the adult voting population for religion to play a greater role in society. Furthermore, he allowed Reagan to fill a vacuum and be the "religious candidate." When he did choose to talk about religion, however, he inevitably had to defend his stand upon abortion—a stand unpopular with the majority of the country. Only 30 percent of Catholics and 30 percent of Protestants, according to a recent national survey done by the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, approve of abortion on demand.⁵¹

Did the discrepancy between Reagan's statements and his church attendance hurt him? Apparently not. As noticed earlier, the Gallup Poll shows that Americans are nominal church goers themselves. Jerry Falwell answered critics of Reagan's church attendance by saying:

"I think it's masterful. The fact that he's not close to any minister, the fact that he's not part of any church, allows him to say the things he's saying without seeming like a religious zealot."⁵²

A second consideration about the handling of the religious issues also tilted the scales in Reagan's favor. Mondale talked too much in the abstract, arguing the philosophical relationship of church and state and the private nature of one's faith. Reagan, instead, generally talked to specific, emotionally-laded topics, such as abortion and school prayer. The vast majority of the voting public, too used to media-generated snappy spots, is not trained to think in the abstract.

More critically, however, the religious issue stalled the Mondale campaign. Not until the first television debate was Mondale able to create any excitement, and then it was too late for anything except a comeback against incredible odds, which Mondale was not able to handle. For a major part of the campaign, such issues as the Reagan deficit, poverty, civil rights, and the nuclear freeze, were pushed to the background.

In a *New York Times* exit poll conducted during the election, 80% of "white born-again Christians" indicated they voted for Reagan; 73% of white Protestants supported him; 55% of Catholics voted for him. He even gained 32% of the Jewish vote.⁵³ These figures seem too high to conclude anything other than the fact that the religious issues had a significant impact on the outcome.

But again, even more significantly, the religious issue's greatest impact came about from what it did not accomplish. Too busy from facing the hecklers and trying to refute charges brought about by conservative religious groups, the Democratic candidates were significantly stalled in presenting their agenda.

A Final Thought

To fragment a nation's culture into a series of air-tight, separate compartments, is neither realistic nor beneficial. In many ways, our understandings in one area will be a fundamental facet of our lifestyles in another. If a person is strongly motivated by religious convictions, he will be influenced in political decisions touched by them. Differences will arise over what is religious and what is not. Dangers will arise, on the one hand, when we deny to someone the right to express himself from a religious conviction, and on the other hand, when we misuse this right, picturing those who dissent from our view as anti-religious.

Notes

¹*New York Times*, March 7, 1984.

²*New York Times*, July 13, 1984.

³*New York Times*, July 15, 1984.

⁴*New York Times*, July 18, 1984.

⁵*New York Times*, September 1, 1984.

⁶*New York Times*, September 6, 1984.

⁷*New York Times*, September 15, 1984.

⁸"Old Time Gospel Hour," September 23, 1984.

⁹*New York Times*, April 11, 1984.

¹⁰*New York Times*, January 31, 1984.

¹¹*New York Times*, January 31, 1984.

¹²*New York Times*, February 3, 1984.

¹³*New York Times*, March 7, 1984.

¹⁴*New York Times*, March 7, 10, 1984.

¹⁵Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*, 1984, p.3.

- ¹⁶New York Times, June 10, 1984.
- ¹⁷New York Times, July 15, 1984.
- ¹⁸New York Times, August 3, 1984.
- ¹⁹New York Times, August 10, 1984.
- ²⁰New York Times, August 14, 1984.
- ²¹New York Times, August 25, 1984.
- ²²New York Times, September 6, 1984.
- ²³New York Times, September 11, 1984.
- ²⁴New York Times, September 12, 1984.
- ²⁵New York Times, September 14, 1984.
- ²⁶New York Times, September 15, 1984.
- ²⁷New York Times, August 24, 1984.
- ²⁸New York Times, September 3, 1984.
- ²⁹New York Times, September 5, 1984.
- ³⁰New York Times, September 6, 1984.
- ³¹Chattanooga Times, September 8, 1984.
- ³²New York Times, September 13, 1984.
- ³³New York Times, September 24, 1984.
- ³⁴New York Times, September 28, 1984.
- ³⁵New York Times, October 8, 1984.
- ³⁶New York Times, October 12, 1984.
- ³⁷New York Times, October 14, 1984.
- ³⁸New York Times, October 16, 1984.
- ³⁹New York Times, October 21, 1984.
- ⁴⁰Joe Cuomo, "Ronald Reagan and the Prophecy of Armageddon."
- ⁴¹New York Times, October 22, 1984.
- ⁴²New York Times, October 24, 1984.
- ⁴³Time, November 5, 1984, p.73.
- ⁴⁴p.12.
- ⁴⁵p.12.
- ⁴⁶Time, September 10, 1984, p.10.

⁴⁷New York Times, July 26, 1984.

⁴⁸New York Times, September 9, 1984.

⁴⁹New York Times, September 28, 1984.

⁵⁰Time, September 10, 1984, p.10.

⁵¹New York Times, August 12, 1984.

⁵²New York Times, September 10, 1984.

⁵³New York Times, November 8, 1984.