

WHY NOT A ROMAN CATHOLIC PRESIDENT?

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hierarchy — has ever repudiated these "infallible" pronouncements of Rome — and, indeed, it would be ecclesiastical suicide, if not heresy, for him to do so.

As the *New Republic* states: "One characteristic of the American Catholic remains unchanged: he is a faithful member of an hierarchically organized religious community which has spiritual concerns and secular interests . . . and its center of authority vested in the Pope in Rome."

There are those, of course, like Roman Catholic Governor Stephen L. R. McNichols of Colorado, who say that a man's religion is "irrelevant" in his political life. But is that really true? One need only go back to December of 1959 to find General De Gaulle, of France, so strongly favoring a bill to increase state aid to Catholic schools from 12.3 million to 41 million dollars a year that he threatened to "reform" the Constitution if the bill didn't pass. Under that kind of pressure — from an ardent Roman Catholic president — the bill passed.

That couldn't happen here in America!

Couldn't it?

In 1954, when Edmund Muskie was elected the first Roman Catholic governor of Maine, the Roman Catholics immediately stepped up their demands for bus transportation to Roman Catholic schools — at public expense.

When Albert D. Rosellini was elected governor of Washington — the first Roman Catholic governor of that state — the Catholic lobby immediately descended on the state capital, pushing a legislative program calling for various kinds of subsidies to parochial schools and a proposal to revise the state constitution so that public funds could be used for church activities.

In Ohio, with the second Roman Catholic governor in its history, approval has been given to place garbed nuns on the public payroll as teachers in public schools. There are now over two thousand (2,055) nuns and priests teaching in public schools, and on public payrolls, in the United States. Nineteen states now give free transportation to parochial school pupils, and five states furnish them free textbooks — all at public expense — and ALL a clear violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

One of the first bills to be presented to the Colorado lawmakers after the election of the first Roman Catholic governor of that state was a bill for free transportation to parochial schools — paid for, of course, out of tax funds.

It has been estimated that Congressman John W. McCormack, (Dem., Mass.) who is a devout Roman Catholic, has been personally responsible for legislation which, under various categories, has brought public funds of more than thirty million dollars to the institutions of his church. As someone said, "If a mere Catholic congressman can do that, what couldn't a Catholic president do!"

Whether a Roman Catholic president would himself initiate measures giving preferential treatment to his church is not the point. By the very nature of his position he could help to create a climate in which such preferential treatment would develop and flourish.

The Threat of Excommunication

But do the members of the American hierarchy actually put pressure on politicians to carry out the wishes of the Catholic church? Indeed so! And in ways that no other church could possibly exert such pressure: by the threat of excommunication, which means, to a Roman Catholic, the damnation of his soul.

No Protestant president could ever be under such a threat. No Jewish president could ever be under such

pressure. But a Roman Catholic president would always know that that authority of the hierarchy existed.

As was stated in the *Christian Century*: "Protestant and Jewish leaders sometimes mix politics and religion, but they cannot 'excommunicate' or damn the soul of one who refuses to fall in line with their church's pronouncement. And they cannot enforce obedience to their will under pain of sin. There lies the crucial difference — and a person is not a bigot who takes that difference into account."

Is this threat of excommunication ever used in America?

It is.

In the New Orleans diocese, the members of the Louisiana Legislature were threatened with excommunication if they supported compulsory segregation laws applying to Catholic parochial schools.

In St. Louis, when the Catholic archbishop decreed desegregation, many Catholics petitioned and threatened to use legal action to force the Archbishop to reverse his action. The following Sunday a pastoral letter threatened excommunication to any who associated with this movement. The movement promptly collapsed.

In these coming crucial months every American must ask himself this question: Could a Roman Catholic president actually divorce himself from the control and pressure of his church to the extent that his judgment on certain controversial questions subject to political determination such as government aid to parochial schools, gambling, birth control, divorce, censorship, relations with foreign countries — Spain and Israel and Latin-American countries, for instance — would his decisions be objective and wholly unbiased by his church's position on these questions?

And the answer, substantiated by examples of Catholic pressure and power in America and around the world, is NO.

It is true that Senator Kennedy stated (in *Look*, March 3, 1959) that "religion is personal, politics are public, and the twain need never meet and conflict. But with Roman Catholics, they have met; and they would meet, and conflict, if a man were a sincere politician AND a true Catholic — and Senator Kennedy is both.

And when Senator Kennedy said, in the same article, "For the officeholder, nothing takes precedence over his oath to the Constitution," the press of his own church castigated him unmercifully and said that his statement was certainly not good Catholic doctrine.

One is left to believe that much of the talk about "American Catholicism" being different from the "official" or "traditional" Catholic views is, in Wilke's phrase, so much "campaign oratory."

Daniel Poling reminds us that when Senator Kennedy was invited to an inter-faith ceremony, he refused to attend — because a high-ranking member of the hierarchy advised him not to. And when the motion to censure Senator McCarthy (a Roman Catholic) was before the Senate, Senator Kennedy did not declare his stand.

As Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Senator Kennedy knows what courage is, but he is not free to exercise it." Exactly! And that is true of any Roman Catholic who has, or will have, designs on occupying the White House. A Roman Catholic president would not be free to exercise courage because he would never be free, as a true Catholic, from the control and pressures of the traditions and the hierarchy of his church. This fact may be difficult for Protestants to understand, but it must be understood — before it is too late.

After Al Smith was defeated in his bid for the presidency in 1928, he said that the time had not yet

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