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*Voting On A Prayer*

Religious Objection to Presidential Candidates and Response in the Progressive Era

By

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An Undergraduate Honors Thesis under the direction of

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*“I believe in my Mormon faith and I endeavor to live by it. My faith is the faith of my fathers - I will be true to them and to my beliefs. Some believe that such a confession of my faith will sink my candidacy. If they are right, so be it. But I think they underestimate the American people. Americans do not respect believers of convenience. Americans tire of those who would jettison their beliefs, even to gain the world.”*

*- Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican Presidential Nominee*

Standing in front of curious voters to deliver an impassioned speech at the George H. W. Bush Presidential Library in December of 2007, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney defended himself against calls that his adherence to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and his promoting of a faithful, devout Mormon image would carry dire consequences for his presidential hopes. Though he would not win the Republican nomination in this election cycle, his speech on “Faith in America” speaks to the obstacle his religion posed during his political ascent. Many, including Romney, would be shocked just five years later to see the role anti-Mormonism and religious dialogue would play in the presidential election of 2012. Indeed, national polls were taken on the issue. Political analyst John Sides states that in his analysis of the 2012 election “nearly 20% of Americans said that they would not vote for a Mormon for president, a number exceeded by the fraction who would not vote for a Muslim or an atheist.”<sup>1</sup> Though Mormonism is theologically closer to Christianity than Islam, higher perceived animosity towards Muslims was created in part by the events of the September 11th attacks. It is conventional wisdom that the electorate is skeptical of those who are sensed to be unlike them. During the 2012 election’s nomination phase, this xenophobia was influenced by a categorical uncertainty: almost one-third of Americans did not believe that Mormons were Christians,<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> John Sides, *The Gambler: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 209.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

causing further detriment was the dissent of 42% of white evangelicals toward the categorization of Mormonism as a branch of Christianity.<sup>3</sup> The Obama campaign did not run any ads alluding to Romney's religion, however Romney dealt with evangelical attacks in both 2008 and 2012 on a regular basis. Though his election is far removed from the subjects of this study, his speech, and the necessity of it, portrays religious bigotry and its effect on voter choice in the present era. Situations like the one Romney found himself in are fundamental to American political history, and must be examined. This task illustrates the purpose of this thesis: to analyze attacks on minority religions by examining two Progressive Era presidential campaigns and to evaluate the personal responses of candidates towards these religious objections over time.

It is a troublesome thing, American politics. In a system built on religious freedom, personal belief and religious or moral orthodoxy are often part of a complicated litmus test that the American public implicitly requires presidential candidates to make. Indeed, Article VI of the Constitution of the United States reads as such: "no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."<sup>4</sup> Though a strict interpretation of the Constitution would lead one to believe that abuse of this clause has never happened in any official or formal capacity, historians of American religious history realize that religious "tests" have been implicitly administered by sections of the public for social desirability in the way of open letters, journalistic interviews with pastors, and in theological questions asked to candidates. Indeed, noted scholar of the sociology of religion Robert Bellah writes that "the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension."<sup>5</sup> These voter-imposed religious tests have important ramifications for American history. Religious

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Const. art. 6. sec. 3. cl. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no.1 (1967): 3.

objections to presidential candidacies have taken place since the election of 1800, when many pastors such as Rev. William Linn, first chaplain of the United States House of Representatives, condemned the candidacy of Thomas Jefferson. Linn stated that his objection was “founded singly upon [Jefferson’s] disbelief of the Holy Scriptures; or, in other words, his rejection of the Christian Religion.”<sup>6</sup> In reference to the above described public opinion religious trial and Article VI of the Constitution, Linn stated that “though neither the Constitution, nor any law forbids his election, yet the public opinion ought to disqualify him.”<sup>7</sup> A few weeks before the vote, the *Federalist Gazette of the United States* wrote that the “Grand Question” was the question of allegiance between “GOD AND A RELIGIOUS PRESIDENT [John Adams] or impiously declare for JEFFERSON AND NO GOD!!!”<sup>8</sup> This situation at the turn of the eighteenth century has presented itself in almost every presidential election. The religious litmus test has been brought about by the campaigns of almost every presidential candidate, though in changing degrees of efficacy, impact, and publicity, varying from a simple passing remark about a candidate's moral character to entire books published on the orthodoxy (or unorthodoxy) of a candidate. This fact reveals the embedded nature of religion in the political realm. The common representation that religion and politics are opposing worldviews that are mutually exclusive is problematic. Understanding the role of religion in politics, and how it can be utilized as a negative force against candidates, allows one to understand the role of religion in the modern electoral process.

A number of factors determine the degree to which campaign attacks are used by preachers and politicians alike. The candidate’s own faith, periods of tolerance and intolerance

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<sup>6</sup> William Linn, *Serious Considerations on the Election of a President: Addressed to the Citizens of the United States* (New York, 1800), 20.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

for specific religious denominations, divisions and ideological splits between churches, support for or against religiously imbued political issues such as Prohibition, the outward image of a candidate's personal faith, professed morality and religiosity, and many other related variables contribute to this process. Phase of candidacy is also important to note. During the nomination phase, intra-party attacks occur more often than in the general election phase, when the party coalesces around the candidate. However, when a single candidate is determined for both parties, religious and moral attacks from the opposing party have a more direct aim and increase. An example of this is the choice of the so-called "Religious Right" to attack Ronald Regan for his divorce within the nomination phase and to then selectively ignore it during the general election.<sup>9</sup> The transformative nature of these attacks over time is not only interesting but is applicable to the contemporary American religious landscape. By presenting lesser known cases of religious intolerance, this thesis creates a space for civil dialogue and serves as a reference for those who seek to learn about intolerance within the American religious landscape.

Before exploring the subject of particular electoral outcomes, it is important to obtain a basic understanding of the religious tendencies of the American people in the beginning of the twentieth century. Rapid change characterized this era. Economic, liturgical, demographic, and social changes all occurred at a rapid pace after the Industrial Revolution.<sup>10</sup> Drastic shifts in Catholic immigration patterns broke the Protestant monolith which had been already divided after the Civil War.<sup>11</sup> According to historian Mark Noll, "the shift of balance of power from rural and small-town America where Protestants had made their home" was a key force in agitating

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<sup>8</sup> Mark A Noll, *One Nation Under God: Christian Faith & Political Action in America* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Rowe, 1988), 78.

<sup>9</sup> Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), 113.

<sup>10</sup> Sydney E Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 733.

resentment towards denominations not adhering to the tenets of conservative Protestantism.<sup>12</sup> This shift appeared as an affront to many Protestants, who were extremely vocal and organized against Catholics and other faiths in very active ways. Seeds of nativism sprouted and grew to hurt the political efforts of Catholics and Jews.<sup>13</sup> Other social attacks against Unitarians and those of faiths not regarded as “orthodox” by evangelical Protestants occurred as a conservative Protestant bloc coalesced heavily around certain fundamental tenants, such as the divinity of Christ and personal conversion.<sup>14</sup> Large periods of urban growth furthered what conservative Protestants considered to be materialism and secularism.<sup>15</sup> Ethnic groups, especially those who were Catholic, became ever more isolated within their own religious groupings and formed communities, especially communities of immigrants.<sup>16</sup> Community leaders and religious leaders at times sought to maintain this fragmentation to maintain power through division. Familial and cultural bonds drove Catholics into nationalized parishes and other more anti-secular denominations deeper into their communities. Slowly, cultural barriers dissolved and those of all minority faiths began to assimilate into a Protestant dominated society.

While each of these themes of the twentieth century were interconnected, they also fell into the confusing socioeconomic web encompassing racism, war, poverty, xenophobia, and imperialism. In the course of the development of these new realities, religious denominations began to move farther to the left and the right of the political aisle through polarization and

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 733.

<sup>12</sup> Mark A. Noll, ed., *Religion & American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980s* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990), 282.

<sup>13</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 733.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 845. | Carrie Blake to William H. Taft, Urbana, Ohio, 29 July, 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 89, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 735.

<sup>16</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: a History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 133.



sorting, following the American electorate away from the political center.<sup>17</sup> African Americans came to exalt liberation theology during demonstrations for civil rights, using spiritual beliefs to fuel their causes for societal change.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, corporate America cashed in on American religiosity and division while expanding the business and marketing side of religion through corporatization and advertising.<sup>19</sup> This may have made religious denominational choice less dependent on doctrinal themes and more dependent on the emotional nature of worship services. The early twentieth century also saw increased denominational splitting and factionalism, which would lead to the need for unity to maintain a Protestant moral establishment.

The beginning of the twentieth century has also been described as the “Progressive Era,” a period from around 1890 to the late 1920s. This era was one of relative economic prosperity and international conflict as America’s influence as a global power extended during international altercations. Domestically, the era was dominated by liberal progressive change. Candidates, activists, and muckrakers worked to expose societal problems often overlooked by the elite and to reform the nation in the industrial, economic, and civil rights sectors. This period of reform was epitomized by the efforts of President Theodore Roosevelt to hold large conglomerates accountable and by prohibition brought about by temperance groups with notable women leaders. Viewing the era with a religious lens one observes deepening currents of fundamentalism and modernism while age-old debates resurfaced in the era of rapid social change.<sup>20</sup> Protestants attempted to suppress the emergence of Catholics as a group with greater influence in American life at all costs. There was a “strong sense of unity” among Protestant churches in this period as they reacted to calls for prohibition, missionary activity to new

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<sup>17</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 1098.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 1072.

<sup>19</sup> Kevin M. Kruse, *One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2015), 132.

colonial acquisitions, Darwinism, and the Social Gospel movement. This unity allows one to cautiously view Protestants in the singular during this period.<sup>21</sup> With this ever-changing and uncertain religious backdrop behind them, political candidates began campaigns and placed themselves before the American people, ready to spread their message and fend off attacks on personal piety and worthiness.

In American elections, there is a lot to be said about choice and chance. The dichotomy between these two electoral factors is examined by political scientist John Sides in this way: candidates get to choose the image that their campaign conveys about their personal lives, and the media chooses which points of interest about a candidate to cover. Candidates have almost no control over objects of chance: which issues the opponent will draw on, the state of the economy, and current voter registrations. These factors can at times override other perceptions about a candidate, and are the greatest factors in voter choice.<sup>22</sup> The strongest part of a campaign is the person of the candidate. Those who were chosen by the public to become Chief Executive fight hard for the position, as do their opponents. This hard fight in the everyday confronts the theme of religion, and candidates must choose how to address the subject. Voter choice can be swayed by religious appeals and attacks, which makes religion a fundamental issue in American elections.

Both the nature of religious attacks in America and their receptivity by the public have changed dramatically over time, as have religious demographics and ecumenical tolerance. Inter-factional conflicts arise between congregations and create division. Denominations, as religious studies

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<sup>20</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 283.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 288.

<sup>22</sup> Sides, *The Gamble*, 3.

scholar Kenneth Thompson contends, are at times at war.<sup>23</sup> This division dominates in society as religiosity is still extremely prevalent in the religious realm. At times, unitive events of moral catastrophe, such as President Clinton's sexual scandal with Monica Lewinski, can bring denominations together to condemn immoral actions.<sup>24</sup> There have been periods where Americans saw themselves complacent with the morality of the Chief Executive, periods of nadir such as Watergate, and periods where the nation sought a "redeemer president" such as the one it found in Jimmy Carter who would "lead them out of the wilderness of shame and corruption."<sup>25</sup> An example of this behavior in the late Progressive Era would be religious reaction to the "Teapot Dome" scandal that would rock President Warren G. Harding's administration. Many groups, including representatives of religious minorities such as a prominent Jewish rabbi, would claim that the event was the sign of a "great moral awakening."<sup>26</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, religiously charged images of presidents in the media were extant, whether they be uplifting or moral critiques. Dwight D. Eisenhower's baptism in the White House and Jimmy Carter's televised sermon on morale are not events of circumstance but occurrences which serve to call attention to the importance of human religiosity in the American political landscape.

The context of certain terms used in this exploration must be provided to aid the reader. To be sure, this thesis is interdisciplinary and utilizes the methodology and terminology of the academic fields of history, religious studies, and political science. To categorize something as *religio-political* means that it is infused with and is influenced by both religion and politics not as separate parts but as one whole without dynamic tension between the themes. This nexus has

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<sup>23</sup> Kenneth W. Thompson, "Religion and Politics in the United States: An Overview," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, No. 483 (1986): 17

<sup>24</sup> Gustav Niebhur, "Testing of a President: The Clergy; Clinton Should Resign, 2 Religious Leaders Say," *The New York Times*, September 11, 1998, p. 20)

<sup>25</sup> Balmer, *God in the White House*, 79.

been studied by anthropologist Johann P. Arnason; the term itself recognizes that the two are used to gain power equally.<sup>27</sup> This power dynamic between the themes as well as the rhetorical power that the combination grants the user can be observed throughout this thesis. *Religious objection*, or *religious protestation*, is the action by which parts of the electorate refuse to support a candidate on denominational, theological, or moral grounds and is achieved through the use of negative action. Religious affiliation and dissent by religious opinion leaders influences voter choice in both communal and associative members. A distinction between adherent types should be made in order for a better look into the function of the religious electorate. Church members are defined as “communal,” which are those who identify with a religion but do not participate in the faith to a nominal extent; and “associative,” those who “alongside the denominational identity also go to church regularly and take an active part in religious organizations.”<sup>28</sup> This distinction is important as those who show an “associative” affiliation more often vote with their religious group.

Those candidates who fail the religious litmus test, as alluded to by Kenneth Thompson, are the victims of religious objection.<sup>29</sup> The first recording of this protestation toward a presidential candidate is referenced above through the actions of Rev. Linn towards Thomas Jefferson. John Side’s recent work on Mitt Romney’s “Stained Glass Ceiling” perfectly captures religious objection in the 2012 presidential election through a social science perspective.<sup>30</sup> This concept translates well into the reality of the Progressive Era, when “stained glass ceilings” existed everywhere in American society, carefully constructed by the Protestant elite. These two

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<sup>26</sup> Robert L Duffus, “Rabbi Wise Sees Religion Surely Gaining; Liberal Leader Views the Oil Scandal as One of Many Signs of a Great Moral Awakening,” *The New York Times*, March 16, 1924, p. 6)

<sup>27</sup> Johann P. Arnason, “The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections” in *Religion and Politics: European and Global Perspectives*, ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 358.

<sup>29</sup> Thompson, “Religion and Politics in the United States,” 18.

events serve as points on the American electoral timeline, with hundreds of links between, forming a chain of religiously influenced electoral objections.

Religious objection can be both formal and informal, institutional and non-institutional. Formal religious objection occurs in the way of press releases, speeches, printed materials, and definitive statements made by influential individuals; it also occurs when opinion leaders enthusiastically spread ideas through their platforms to oppose candidates on moral or doctrinal grounds. Informal or passive objection occurs extemporaneously within society, such as passing non-supportive sentiment through conversation with family and friends. Institutional opposition occurs when an organization such as a church or political group makes direct attacks against a candidate and issue directives to their followers. This opposition speaks as a collective. Earlier in the twentieth century, this occurred mostly within denominational groups, however opposition can occur from many other institutional types. Non-institutional opposition would include individual preferences that arise from personal opinion formation, not those ideas communicated by an individual's social group *en masse*. These attributes of religious objection at times overlap and develop as opinion changes. This change is what makes religious opposition dynamic. This opposition has minimal impact if weak, but can be the downfall of a candidacy if strong. Such strong opposition confronted of Al Smith, opposition which was still strong enough decades later to draw a response from John Kennedy.

There are a few candidates for whom attacks on their faith comprised a major part of the downfall of their campaigns. One of the most famous examples in recent American history of religious objection to a presidential contender were the malicious attacks against John Kennedy's Catholicism during the campaign of 1960. After this election, it seemed to many that Protestant

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<sup>30</sup> Sides, *The Gamble*, 211.

America had been defeated and that Catholics were able to “stand a little taller”.<sup>31</sup> Writing about political parties then and now, historian Mark Noll writes that Christianity is primed for political mobilization, and is highly successful at altering general conviction.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, political parties that emphasized Christian ideals were more successful at altering the public’s views through religiously imbued messaging. Almost every nominated Democratic or Republican presidential candidate has professed themselves to be Christian, making the Christian religious image a component of almost every campaign. Therefore, a look is needed into religious attacks on them and the nature of the response in order to see what sets the media portrayal of their faiths apart. Indeed, each presidential election has taken its own unique issues, and at times a candidate’s personal faith has played a small role. In the course of the primary and general elections, candidates are scrutinized and placed in positions of religious affirmation and are given media representations in different ways. Items of media focus for particular denominations have also changed throughout the years, and a good model for this double standard can be found in American Quakerism. Personal faith was an issue for Herbert Hoover but not at all for Richard Nixon. The reason for this transfiguration, and its causes, plays a vital role in this thesis as well.

The candidates and the respective campaigns chosen for examination have been selected not only for their significance to American religious dialogue but also because of the nature of their response strategy and the tenor of the attacks against them. Candidates of interest to this thesis are from different electoral time periods and different periods of religious tolerance, though both campaigned within the Progressive Era. They also lived in periods of evolving media rhetoric styles. Subjects chosen for this study are William Howard Taft (1908) and Alfred E. Smith (1928). Historical analyses of these candidates and contemporary religious attacks on

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<sup>31</sup> Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 192.

their campaigns are enlightening. These campaigns provide good models of the powerful influence of religious preference in American electoral history. Both were nominated by a major party and received a large portion of the vote share, and both were attacked not only by “whispering campaigns” but in the press, media, and ecclesiastic institutions. These candidates were also adherents to denominations that were not representative of previous American presidents. They also formed a response strategy, whether it be a message from an advocate, such as President Theodore Roosevelt’s defending of Taft,<sup>33</sup> through personal statements and speeches such as Smith’s campaign speech in Baltimore,<sup>34</sup> or by not dignifying the attacks with a response. Their elections are also spread chronologically in order to open an aperture through which one can see thematic change in media representation. Other candidates with mirroring situations and denominational affiliations can be compared to the selected two, such as the Catholic John Kennedy and Unitarian Adlai Stevenson.

A closer look at the elections of the two chosen candidates will ready the reader for deeper analysis later in the thesis. Principally, this thesis will comprise two chapters. The first chapter views religious objections to the candidacy of Republican William Howard Taft in the presidential election of 1908, in which he opposed Democrat William Jennings Bryan. At this time, the Republican Party was strong and held the Oval Office with President Theodore Roosevelt. Taft was Roosevelt’s hand-picked successor who was a very involved churchman in the Unitarian community. Unitarianism rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, placing Jesus and the Holy Spirit as subordinates to God. The Protestant establishment made charges against Unitarians for the rejection of the divinity of Christ. William Jennings Bryan, a Protestant

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<sup>32</sup> Noll, *One Nation Under God*, 146.

<sup>33</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, “Freedom of Religion in American Politics,” *The Daily Picayune* (November 9, 1908).

<sup>34</sup> Alfred E Smith, *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President (1928)*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1929), 249.

evangelical fundamentalist, facilitated attacks against Taft for his support of the Catholic Church while Taft was the administrator of the Philippines. Bryan was an avid preacher who gained the support of the Protestant evangelical establishment and had the solid support of the South. Ultimately, the Republican Party dominated in states which it won in the previous election and the very popular President Roosevelt was able to rally much support for Taft. Though Taft's religiously charged opponents did not have much success in forcing entire states away from the candidate, the use of anti-Catholicism against a Unitarian reveals that anti-Catholicism needed a vessel through which to flow during this campaign and used Unitarianism and Taft's dealings with the Catholic hierarchy as an open door. An examination into Catholic voting patterns as a function of Democratic anti-Catholicism reveals that the Catholic vote was a significant factor in Taft's election as well. Bryan would lose the election to Taft by 159 electoral votes.<sup>35</sup>

The second chapter examines the election of 1928, which was the first time in American history that a Roman Catholic was nominated for the presidency by a major party. Democrat Alfred E. Smith was a four-time governor of New York who secured the nomination for president against Quaker churchman Herbert Hoover. Anti-Catholicism at this time has been defined as being at "flood stage" with tensions high and attacks frequent and ranging from subtle comments to explicit calls for disqualification.<sup>36</sup> Racial, xenophobic, and moral qualms were directed at Smith, who defended himself against Republican attacks as well as affronts from within his own party. Later in the campaign, newspapers gave into demands for the discussion of Smith's faith. Hoover's Quaker faith was also commented upon, but never once did he address

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<sup>35</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The United States Presidential Election of 1908," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., October 30, 2019).

<sup>36</sup> Edmund A Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President: The Campaign of 1908* (New York, NY: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 145.



Smith's Catholicism in public in a negative light. In fact, he would condemn such attacks.<sup>37</sup> Hoover would defeat Smith handily by dominating in every region except for the South.<sup>38</sup> Smith's religion played a large role in his defeat, with all forms of religious protestation causing his support to diminish by the week. Due to the nature of his personal Catholicism, Smith received a greater share of prejudice than Taft and a style of media attack much more public. Due to the high volume of anti-Catholic circulars and articles, Smith did not have the ability to strategically remain silent on the issue, and would respond to religious objection more often and more articulately than any candidate in the twentieth century.

Against the backdrop of changing American religiosity and religio-political agenda setting, these candidates worked to win votes. In many cases, large portions of the electorate were, in fact, *voting on a prayer*. The ways in which religiously charged messages were disseminated is equally as important; media tone and style are vital to any successful campaign. Typically, Protestant moderates controlled national media outlets in the Progressive Era. Understanding how candidates defended themselves to obtain votes and how the opposition attempted to reduce votes for their opposition through religious objection in the media is not only interesting, but crucial to comprehend if one wants to view historic religio-political election events in a meaningful way.

Journalists have analyzed presidential candidates, as have historians, political scientists, sociologists, economists, and experts in many other professions. Perhaps this is a reflection of what the American society holds most salient and which items of history it insists be analyzed. Scholars of American religious history have supplied this demand by analyzing those of

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<sup>37</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933*. (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1952), 205.

numerous faiths to covet the White House. Glen Jeansonne's *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Fighting Quaker, 1928-1933* carefully details the way in which the thirty-first President's faith influenced his political life. This work can be situated against the scholarship of Hoover's competitor for the Oval Office, Al Smith. Edmund Moore's *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928* is a thorough work which documents religious zealotry in the campaign and is indispensable to any scholar of the Progressive Era.

Jay Dolan, a scholar of American Catholicism, notes the transition of Catholics and other minority religious groups from holding immigrant status to the status of "American" throughout the 20th century as well.<sup>39</sup> Though his book *In Search of an American Catholicism* is a landmark piece on American Catholicism, his examination of transition can be upheld in other immigrant communities. Political and social transitions in religion have consequences for prejudicial action and influence the characterizations of minority religions and derogatory remarks against them. No scholar captures the religious transitional period of the twentieth century for American religious groups better than Sydney Ahlstrom in his comprehensive work *A Religious History of the American People*. Ahlstrom maintains that the twentieth century's pattern of social crisis and religion's promise of "peace of mind and confident living" in an age of anxiety drove the electorate to become more religiously oriented during the period.<sup>40</sup> His view that Protestant evangelicalism became politically charged holds true historically and informs the work of anyone attempting to write on religio-political decision making.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The United States Presidential Election of 1928," *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., October 30, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 955.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 958.

Historian Mark Noll reminds those who attempt to separate race from religion within American politics that the two are inseparable. The influence of race and nationalism that he paints in his work *God and Race in American Politics* demonstrates the interplay between ethnicity and religious prejudice that would impact the candidacies of Alfred Smith and later candidates such as Barack Obama. Surely, Noll states the truth in saying that “the general interweaving of race with religion, along with a discernibly religious mode of public argument, pervaded the nation’s political history.”<sup>42</sup> His monograph *Religion & American Politics: From the Colonial Period to the 1980’s* is a seminal work which lays the foundation for this thesis through its historical explanation of the interplay between religion and politics. By expanding the work of these scholars and others an attempt can be made continue the pursuit of a non-confessional approach to understanding the narrative of religious history in the United States.

To begin an examination of Progressive Era presidential electoral history emphasizing the religious dimensions underlying campaigns, a careful inquiry into media representation and response should be made through the use of primary sources. This will allow for the sources to be analyzed by their respective merits and will also allow for the discovery of previously unsearched and unreferenced documents. The personal letters and papers of candidates are preserved and kept by institutions such as state governments, universities, and the Library of Congress. Personal letters allow for an examination of a candidate’s thoughts, both public and private, and for an examination of very personal matters of faith. Newspapers both bygone and still in circulation are archived as well, allowing this thesis to be bolstered with primary content in order to reach its conclusions. Larger ecclesiastic newspapers such as *Commonweal* give insight into collective religious opinion, while national papers such as *The New York Times* can

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<sup>42</sup> Mark A. Noll, *God and Race in American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 2.

portray many sides of national opinion. Political circulars, press releases by religious groups, and magazine articles create a picture of the way in which the public visualized candidates. These circulars often reaffirm prejudices within a community, such as partisan campaign mailers. The availability of these sources allows for a dissection of the public's political information on a candidate's religion and religiously based issue preferences. The Library of Congress Manuscript Division's preservation of documents relating to William Jennings Bryan, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, and Alfred E. Smith have allowed for a thorough examination of religious prejudice from letters to candidates by everyday Americans. In this way, individual voices of dissent can rise to the surface. Sources produced after elections can be used to examine the judgements of informed individuals on the reason for defeat, religious or otherwise. This is true in the case of William Jennings Bryan's defeat in 1908 against William Howard Taft. Sources speak to the past and are the vehicle through which our thematic analysis will take place.

To understand why it was necessary for Mitt Romney to give a speech on his faith or why John Kennedy had to address a ministerial association on his Catholic upbringing one must understand the heritage of religious media in American elections. Periods of intolerance can both reveal trends of the past and inform the present. Therefore, it is now time for an observation of the political religious trial, a trial which the Constitution prohibits but that the American constituency institutes nonetheless. It is a trial that must be understood in order to have a full comprehension of American political dialogue. A careful analysis of religious objection and its publicity within the campaigns of William Howard Taft and Alfred E. Smith will reveal the power of religio-political media, the transformation of candidate responses as the era progressed, and the evolution of religious protestation to candidacies in the media throughout the early twentieth century.



## CHAPTER ONE: ANTI-UNITARIANISM & WILLIAM HOWARD TAFT

The American legacy of religious objection is not a creation of the twentieth century; rather it is a reality with roots in America's colonial period, roots that would deepen in the early Republic, beginning with the election of 1800 in which perceived unbeliever Thomas Jefferson was elected the third President of the United States. Reverend William Linn's resounding roar that Thomas Jefferson should not be constitutionally prohibited from assuming the presidency for his religious beliefs, but that "public opinion ought to disqualify him" created echoes throughout nineteenth century America, which bled into the twentieth century.<sup>43</sup> Throughout the span of electoral history, some areas of the electorate would barely hear of this noise and find it foolish. Others, caught in an echo chamber through their strong devotion to more orthodox Protestant denominations such as Methodism and Presbyterianism would hear this roar again and again. It is this echo that permeates America's electoral and religious history. Opposition to Jefferson serves as one event which begins the timeline of American electoral prejudice on religious grounds. The essence of religious objection survives throughout American history, though the objectors, media styles and candidates change. The survival of this reverberation's logic into the twentieth century and its strength fueled religious protestation and affected the election of 1908, in which William Howard Taft, a Unitarian, dueled for the office of the presidency against William Jennings Bryan, a fundamentalist evangelical.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the Unitarian tradition and its differentiation from traditional Protestantism,<sup>44</sup> giving a backdrop in front of which the election of 1908 and its

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<sup>43</sup> William Linn, *Serious Considerations on the Election of a President: Addressed to the Citizens of the United States*, (New York, 1800), 20.

<sup>44</sup> Orthodox Protestant Christian denominations such as Methodism, Baptist, and Presbyterianism contributed to this movement, with fervor also being presented by fundamentalists such as evangelicals. "Orthodox" means conservative Protestants who upheld beliefs in the Trinity and the three *solae* of Martin Luther's theology.

candidates will stand. This exploration of electoral issues as well as candidate profiles will set the stage for an examination of multimedia primary sources concerning religious protestation to Taft's candidacy. Newspaper articles, personal letters, letters from concerned citizens, pamphlets, letters to Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan from supporters, and ecclesiastical utterances are analyzed in order to create a picture of the tone and nature of the incursions against Taft's campaign. Secondary literature, notably the work of Edgar Hornig,<sup>45</sup> has laid the foundation for the religious aspect of the Taft-Bryan duel. Taft's response to these media affronts due to his faith, or lack thereof, will be examined along with institutional reactions by the Democratic and Republican parties. The chapter ends with a sub-conclusion and brings anti-Unitarianism into the contemporary period through objection to Adlai Stevenson's campaign and the Unitarian legacy today.

William Howard Taft took part in an electoral contest against a fervent evangelical preacher with a substantial base of Protestants who believed that America should not be governed by a less than orthodox president. Taft's response to these objections, as well as Theodore Roosevelt's response, grant the scholar an understanding of religious intolerance as an "unspoken" reality in American politics which would surface through media channels to attempt to defeat a Unitarian candidate with perceived Catholic sympathies. This election serves the historian trying to understand religious opposition in the Progressive Era well by illuminating less than fully understood aspects of the American religious landscape. The true substance which is intended to be conveyed by this chapter is the reality that religious objection, defined as political opposition on the basis of discrimination due to theological or moral concerns for an

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<sup>45</sup> Edgar Hornig's "The Religious Issue of the Taft-Bryan Duel of 1908" was the first publication in an academic journal to seriously consider the ramifications of religious bigotry in the election of 1908, though his work contains sources in need of verification.

opposing candidate, was a dynamic force in the election of 1908; the chapter also portrays the pervasiveness and potency of the political mobilizing force of the Protestant monolith in the Progressive Era.

Though not much scholarship has been produced on the subject, anti-Unitarianism is a concept whose premise is well-founded when one understands the orthodox Protestant mindset of inclusion and exclusion of groups. It can be reasoned by the religious historian, however the terminology of anti-Unitarianism is rare in religious historical scholarship. It is a sound claim that at the dawn of the twentieth century, Protestantism was not one body but many denominations professing similar beliefs. At the turn of the century, however, Protestants were in a time of internal tension and change which necessitated a stronger unitive architecture and caused the Protestant establishment to become increasingly homogenized.<sup>46</sup> The unitive framework of Protestantism was grounded not only on doctrine but also on identification with the group.<sup>47</sup> This means that though differences took place within Protestant ecumenical efforts, as a collective denominations separated themselves from other denominations with beliefs that crossed the threshold of their collective denominational orthodoxy. “The centrifugal forces that had divided them” were held in check by collective identification through opposition to an outside group.<sup>48</sup> The largest and most aggressive attacks on outside groups were aimed at Catholicism. In fact, anti-Catholicism was one of the most unitive and defining features of American Protestantism.<sup>49</sup> This aggression towards Catholicism is also examined in the next chapter concerning the election of 1928 in which the Roman Catholic Al Smith was a candidate. It is important to note because not only did anti-Catholicism serve as a model for prejudice and

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<sup>46</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 842.

<sup>47</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 288.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 283.



hatred towards other religious groups, it served as a vessel through which attacks on Unitarianism could cross religious channels with less uncertainty; this uncertainty was created by common Protestant unfamiliarity with Unitarianism.

The Unitarian denomination is one which borders the very edges of Christianity. It is one of the “liberal religions” by its own terminology, and William H. Taft’s.<sup>50</sup> It is difficult to define Unitarianism as it is a belief system not wishing to be held to a strict set of doctrines. By its very nature it attempts to be as inclusive as possible. However, a unique situation exists when the need to examine Unitarian beliefs in the time of William Taft and Taft’s personal faith presents itself. Though it was not delivered during the election of 1908, Taft gave a speech as Vice President of the American Unitarian Association (AUA) in 1917 that recounts his personal beliefs. As the second highest officer in the AUA, it also serves as a doctrinal proclamation as Taft was part of the ecclesiastic hierarchy. Ironically, Taft’s “Religious Convictions of an American Citizen” is a speech that many of his supporters wished he had given in 1908 to quell religious animosity among opposers to his candidacy:

"A Unitarian believes that Jesus Christ founded a new religion and a new religious philosophy on the love of God for man, and of men for one another, and for God, and taught it by his life and practice, with such Heaven-given sincerity, sweetness, simplicity, and all-compelling force that it lived after him in the souls of men, and became the basis for a civilization struggling toward the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>50</sup> The Unitarian Layman's League, *The Religious Faith of William Howard Taft* (Boston, MA: The Unitarian Layman's League, 1930), 7.

highest ideals. . . .[Unitarians] feel the life of Jesus as a man to be more helpful to them, as a religious inspiration, than if he is to be regarded as God in human form.”<sup>51</sup>

After a brief overview of Unitarianism at the time of Taft, who always asserted that his faith was a Christian one, one can understand the fundamental disagreements that it would have with most denominations of American Protestantism. Though many tenets of Unitarianism landed contrary to some orthodox denominations other tenets of Unitarianism were in line with those of other Protestant denominations. Moral prescriptions to help the individual as a brother or sister in Christ are examples of ethical similarities between Unitarianism and Protestantism. Some denominations had only one theological quarrel with a Unitarian precept, while others were diametrically opposed to the faith altogether. The most expedient way to explain religious antagonism to Unitarianism by the Protestant body as a whole is to acknowledge the fact that this belief system was opposed to the three *solae* which governed most Protestant theology. These *solae* were assertions of a new dogmatic theology presented by Martin Luther during the Reformation; assertions which would place more power into the hands of the individual and undermine the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. *Sola scriptura*, the theological precept that the Bible did not err and was the only source of divine revelation conflicted with Unitarianism’s assertion that the Bible was not to be interpreted literally. *Sola fide*, the theological precept that man could not achieve his own salvation through action but that faith alone governed salvific activity conflicted with Unitarian ideas that man “worked out his own salvation” with the aid of grace.<sup>52</sup> *Sola gratia*, the theological precept that man was saved by the Lord’s grace alone, was rejected by Unitarianism for the same reasons as *sola fide*. Though most

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<sup>51</sup> William Howard Taft, “The Religious Convictions of an American Citizen,” *General Conference of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Churches* (1917).

<sup>52</sup> Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, 392.

American Protestants at the time were not in the business of disputing complex theology, one central defining characteristic of Unitarianism caused the most aggression and antagonism: the rejection of the Trinity as the metaphysical explanation of the relationship between God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>53</sup> This view, to Protestants at the time, divests Jesus Christ of divinity and proclaims him to be an instrument of the Lord, not one being *consubstantial* with the Father and the Holy Spirit. For these reasons, Unitarians who openly professed their faith while rendering themselves to public scrutiny, such as during an election, could expect to receive accusations of being atheist, agnostic, unorthodox, un-Christian, or immoral from Protestants, especially evangelicals and fundamentalists. Anti-Unitarian objections to actions by the Chief Executive do not begin with William Howard Taft. Millard Fillmore, who obtained the office of President of the United States upon the death of Zachary Taylor in 1850, also faced pressure for his faith. Fillmore was chastised by clergymen of his own denomination and other liberal Protestant organizations for signing the Fugitive Slave Act, an act many viewed as immoral and in the aid of slavery.<sup>54</sup>

The presidential election of 1908 was not that challenging of a race to call for observers of incumbency statistics, the economy, and voter registration numbers. Most factors favored Republicans; Theodore Roosevelt was a very popular Republican president in an era of Republican dominance who had handpicked his successor, William Howard Taft.<sup>55</sup> Taft was a close friend of Roosevelt and had previously served as administrator of the Philippines under American control and as Secretary of War (1904-1908). It should be noted that Taft was

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 395.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Herz, "Millard Fillmore," in *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography* (Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society, April 15, 2008).

<sup>55</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "The United States Presidential Election of 1908."

reluctant to become president, and had ambitions for other judicial offices, namely the Supreme Court. Anecdotally, Taft was asked in 1907 about a woven floor mat given to him by Filipino islanders under his administration in the Philippines which bore the words “Al Presidente Taft.” When asked how being termed as president felt to him, the then Secretary of War Taft noted that the term was analogous to the word “welcome” over the door of a jail.<sup>56</sup> The Republicans held the Northeast United States, a concentration of electoral votes which would catapult any Republican candidate into office. Issues of prohibition, economic structuring through precious metals, anti-trust laws, and religion played key roles. No single issue dominated, and at times the contest was dull. Taft did not speak often, and many issues had bi-partisan support.<sup>57</sup> For all intents and purposes, President Roosevelt was charged with his hand-picked successor’s election and was the source of the Taft campaign’s power. The most notable issue of this campaign was that of financial laws. In this era of tremendous growth for companies colossal in size such as Standard Oil, both platforms centered on issues of “tariffs, trusts, railroad regulation, campaign transparency...and labor issues.”<sup>58</sup> Other issues of particular interest to Republicans were the rights of African Americans and the administration of newly gained territories.<sup>59</sup> William Jennings Bryan, an evangelical fundamentalist and Democratic nominee, created a religious aspect to many financial issues through biblical rhetoric during his campaign which is addressed later in the chapter. 1908 is also a year within the timeline of the regression of the “Protestant Monolith” due to an increase in religious diversity by means of theological splitting and

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<sup>56</sup> “The Family and Home Life of Mr. and Mrs. Taft.” *The New York Times*, June 21, 1908.

<sup>57</sup> Paolo E Coletta, “Will the Real Progressive Stand Up? William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt to 1909,” *Nebraska History* 65 (1984): 43

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>59</sup> The Republican National Committee, *Republican Campaign Text-Book: 1908* (Philadelphia, PA: Dunlap Printing Company, 1908), 466.

increases in immigration, especially among Catholics from Europe and Latin America.<sup>60</sup>

Collective Protestant efforts to maintain political power, championed by Baptists and Methodists, would cause attacks toward any candidate for office whose beliefs did not conform to their fundamental doctrines.

Before beginning an examination of electoral religious protestation in the election of 1908, one must have a conception of the predisposition that opponents had towards the use of religious opposition against William Howard Taft. This understanding can be achieved by a brief overview of the character and faith of both candidates. William Howard Taft was an active Unitarian churchman, not one of nominal faith. The Unitarian Layman's League, publishing a short pamphlet on Taft's passing in 1930, described his Unitarian devotion: "He always lived in the temperate zone of religion, far removed from the arctic frosts of skepticism and dogmatism where, for sheer protection, people must swaddle themselves in ecclesiastical garments until their own personality is quite hidden."<sup>61</sup> They state that his natural inclination to help the human race found an equal goal in the Unitarian faith<sup>62</sup> and that he praised the values of "tolerant loyalty" to his faith.<sup>63</sup> Taft himself held deep convictions for the Unitarian doctrine and spoke publicly about his faith. In a eulogizing pamphlet titled "The Religion of a Great American," the Unitarian Layman's League wrote that through all attacks on his faith, Taft kept a strong devotion to God, never wavering from his public church attendance and always keeping letters from adversaries.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 283.

<sup>61</sup> The Unitarian Layman's League, *The Religious Faith of William Howard Taft*, 11.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

Taft also held multiple leadership roles within the Unitarian denomination. Through a comprehensive list of his contributions to his faith would fully exemplify his devotion, it is more expedient to list higher offices. Taft was an honorary life member of the American Unitarian Association, served six years as its vice president (1916-1922), served as president of the General Conference of Unitarian and Other Liberal Christian Churches (1915-1925) and served as chairman of the Unitarian Campaign (1920). As Chief Justice, he gave several speeches on Unitarianism and the impact of religion on humanity, traveling across Europe to speak.<sup>65</sup> During World War I, Taft also became involved in a debate concerning the Unitarian Church and the Espionage Act of 1917.<sup>66</sup>

Taft's administration of the Philippine Islands quickly made him a non-Catholic target of vehement anti-Catholicism. While he was Governor-General and administrator of the Philippine Islands under the McKinley and Roosevelt administrations (1900-1904), Taft faced a difficult situation. The island was populated by Roman Catholics whose faith was imported there by Spain. The island was in need of land distribution, and Taft was able to negotiate with the Vatican to purchase 390,000 acres of church property in the Philippines for \$7.5 million. He then "distributed this land by way of low-cost mortgages to tens of thousands of Filipino peasants."<sup>67</sup> Inaccurate accounts of this negotiation hit the press and many Protestants believed that Taft had "unjustifiably favored the Catholic Church" in that transaction.<sup>68</sup> Taft was seen as aiding the

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<sup>65</sup> Herz, Walter. "William Howard Taft" *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography*. Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society, February 26, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> The Unitarian Universalist Association. "The Taft-Holmes Debate." *The Unitarian Universalist Association*.  
<sup>67</sup> Peri E Arnold, "William Taft: Life Before the Presidency," The Miller Center (The University of Virginia at Arlington, 2019).

<sup>68</sup> Hornig, Edgar Albert. "The Religious Issue in the Taft-Bryan Duel of 1908." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 105, no. 6 (1961): 531.

“evils of a pagan religion”, meaning Catholicism.<sup>69</sup> This misinformation, propagated by the Democratic National Committee led to extreme charges and religious objection. President Roosevelt was shocked at the bigotry against Taft “because of his Unitarianism and his having dealt squarely with the Catholics.”<sup>70</sup> A textbook entitled *Republican Campaign Text-Book (1908)* published by the Republican National Committee for grassroots organizers details William Jennings Bryan’s sentiments towards the Philippines and describes his position as one of the religious separation of the majority Christian parts of the islands from interaction with the majority Muslim islands, not cooperation.<sup>71</sup> The same textbook points to Taft’s accomplishments in the Philippines, which bring to the forefront other issues which may have caused the ire of Protestants, such as the settlement of churches, increased education that may have been inclusive of Catholic beliefs as some may have been in working conjunction with the Catholic Church.<sup>72</sup>

In an era when Protestantism was inherently linked to Americanism, Methodists sent missionaries to the Philippines to “Americanize” the islands.<sup>73</sup> Taft “shrewdly perceived that the missions could assist the government in its policy of attracting Filipinos” and “he assisted the missions directly with monetary contributions, intervened occasionally to settle disputes over property, invited missionaries to dinner, arranged for their testimony before the Senate Committee on the Philippines, and hosted receptions for visiting church dignitaries.”<sup>74</sup> Indeed, one Methodist missionary, Homer Stuntz, defended the candidate against associations with

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 531.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 531.

<sup>71</sup> The Republican National Committee, *Republican Campaign Text-Book: 1908*, 289.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 419.

<sup>73</sup> Clymer, Kenton J. "Religion and American Imperialism: Methodist Missionaries in the Philippine Islands, 1899-1913." *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 1 (1980): 36.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 39.

Catholicism.<sup>75</sup> This association with the Methodists, however, was not enough to spare him from anti-Catholic attacks. Many Methodists and other evangelicals would leave him, and he received letters concerning this matter as caused by his handling of the Catholic Church on the islands from supportive ministers.<sup>76</sup> Taft stated that during his administration of the islands, the Spanish government did little for public education: “The world owes to the Spanish *friar* the Christianization of the Filipino race. It is only the Malay or oriental race that is Christian. The friars beat back the wave of Mohammedanism and spread their religion through all the islands.”<sup>77</sup> This reference to previous Spanish colonialism would also anger evangelicals who saw Catholic nations as unjust colonizers. As Governor-General, Taft also became acquaintances with Bishop Gregorio Aglipay, a Roman Catholic priest who had formed the new “Philippine Independent Church”, which had an increasingly liberal theology. Taft was made its honorary President and attempted to sway the church towards Unitarianism.<sup>78</sup> This slight appreciation for the Catholic influence on the islands and cooperation with members of its clergy is the gust of wind that opened the door of Taft’s movement to attacks that he was a papist and a Romanist.

The ferocity with which Bryan’s supporters attacked Taft and the extent to which Bryan held the evangelical and orthodox vote can be explained by a brief exploration of Bryan’s life. Bryan was a very conservative fundamentalist layman who had a national influence. Though all of his work was motivated by his faith, he practiced law and was an influential politician from Nebraska who after the election of 1908 served as Secretary of State (1913-1915). He controlled portions of the Democratic Party and reached his zenith during the election of 1896 where he

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<sup>75</sup> Ralph M. Easley to Theodore Roosevelt, 16 October, 1908. Theodore Roosevelt Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>76</sup> F. A. M. Suire to William H. Taft, Iola, Kansas, 24 August 1908, William H. Taft Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>77</sup> The Republican National Committee, *Republican Campaign Text-Book (1908)*, 419.

<sup>78</sup> Herz, Walter. “William Howard Taft” *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography*.



secured the Democratic nomination at the age of thirty six years old “by a perfect blend of oratorical brilliance, political finesse, and sheer luck.”<sup>79</sup> His Presbyterian inspired fundamentalism was not regional in reach, but was a national affair. He fought against the teaching of evolution in schools and predicated his entire financial policy during his campaign in 1908 on his religious beliefs, famously giving his “Cross of Gold” speech in advocating for bimetallism. This speech portrays the ability of any issue, even context economic policies, to take on religious rhetoric:

“If they dare to come out in the open field and defend the gold standard as a good thing, we shall fight them to the uttermost, having behind us the producing masses of the nation and the world. Having behind us the commercial interests and the laboring interests and all the toiling masses, we shall answer their demands for a gold standard by saying to them, you shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns. You shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold.”<sup>80</sup>

Bryan also decided his position on other political issues, such as his support of total prohibition during the temperance movement, through the use of his religious ideology. As a politician and preacher he taught that Jesus Christ converted water to unfermented grape juice at the Wedding Feast of Cana.<sup>81</sup> He, along with Billy Sunday, was the nation’s “foremost spokesperson for temperance.”<sup>82</sup> Known as “The Great Commoner”, he was seen as a proponent for the empowerment of the common man and was given three nominations for the presidency

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<sup>79</sup> Russell, C. Allyn. "William Jennings Bryan: Statesman—Fundamentalist." *Journal of Presbyterian History* 53, no. 2 (1975): 94.

<sup>80</sup> *Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention Held in Chicago, Illinois, July 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11, 1896*, (Logansport, Indiana, 1896).

<sup>81</sup> William Jennings Bryan, *The Memoirs of William Jennings Bryan, by Himself and His Wife, Mary Baird Bryan* (Philadelphia, PA: The John C. Winston Company, 1925), 351.

<sup>82</sup> Russell, "William Jennings Bryan: Statesman—Fundamentalist," 98.

by the Democratic Party in 1896, 1900, and 1908. Though he did not personally or specifically attack William Taft for his Unitarian faith, it was well known that he was silent on the topic and at times supportive of the attacks.<sup>83</sup> Many Protestants, fueled by xenophobia of unorthodoxy tendencies towards nativism accomplished this task for Bryan. After Bryan's loss on November 3rd, 1908 several letters addressed to Bryan blamed Taft's association with Catholics to be the key factor in Bryan's demise. Typical of this assertion was a letter to The Great Commoner by a John Hamilton of Philadelphia:

*"My Dear Sir:*

*The Pope of Rome is the man who caused your defeat, and the downfall of Democracy. He issued his edict and the ignorant and subservient Catholics obeyed. I have been an American Democrat all my life - but I shall now turn to the Socialism, or better a native American Party:*

*Yours very truly,*

*John Hamilton.*"<sup>84</sup>

It should be noted that no single letter in the William Jennings Bryan papers held in the archives of the Library Congress from November 3rd, 1908 to November 7th, 1908 once mentions Taft's Unitarianism, only his association with Roman Catholicism. In letters of sympathy within the collection, this rhetoric that papal influence was the cause of Bryan's defeat dominates over any other explanation.

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<sup>83</sup> Herz, Walter. "William Howard Taft" *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography*.

<sup>84</sup> John Hamilton to William Jennings Bryan, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 5 November 1908. William Jennings Bryan Papers, Assorted Dates, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Primary evidence for religious objection during the presidential election of 1908 takes many forms. Personal letters addressed to William Howard Taft during the election cycle often asked questions of his orthodoxy, beliefs, theological standings on the nature of Christ's divinity, and his association with the Roman Catholic Church. Charges of atheism and agnosticism at times were made as well.<sup>85</sup> These letters primarily came from America's heartland and began to flood into Taft's mailbox before July of 1908.<sup>86</sup> One Chicago editor postulated that the religious issue was not an ancillary issue but that it was a "huge factor in this campaign" after receiving hundreds of letters requesting a synopsis of Taft's personal beliefs.<sup>87</sup> Many of these letters came from Nebraska, Bryan's home state and sphere of political influence. Presbyterians, most likely under the influence of Bryan's co-religionist pastors, reportedly fled from the Republican ticket in the Midwest.<sup>88</sup> A dominant letter format was an introduction followed by a doctrinal question presented to Taft. Below are two letters fitting this typology:

*"Dear Sir:*

*The report is being circulated that you do not believe in a personal Christ.*

*I would credit this story but I want to to be set right as I have two sons old enough to cast a vote for our President...We are Republicans and should hate to change.*

*Respectfully yours,*

*Mrs. Carrie Blake.*"<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Mark W Harris, *The A to Z of Unitarian Universalism* (Plymouth, PL: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 458.

<sup>86</sup> Hornig, "The Religious Issue," 530.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 530.

<sup>88</sup> William Barre to William H. Taft, Dayton, Ohio, 15 August, 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 91, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>89</sup> Carrie Blake to William H. Taft, Urbana, Ohio, 29 July, 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 89, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

*“My Dear Sir,*

*I write to you in the interest of our Party for information and trust you will favor me with an immediate reply. It is being broadcast...that you do not believe in the Divinity of Christ. This charge is being circulated for the purpose of doing you personal injury...*

*Your friend and supporter,*

*Ashley R. Williams”<sup>90</sup>*

This letter format often presents itself in an inquisitive and calm tone. Many Republicans were asked Taft about his religious beliefs not for themselves, but on behalf of others that they wished would retain the Republican vote. One such individual asked Taft for an account of his beliefs for a brother who said that Taft should be barred from office because he was “not a Christian man” because he “belong(s) to the Unitarian Church”. They wrote to Taft that her brother has been told “that [Taft] believes there is no god and that Jesus Christ is not divine but just an ordinary man and is a bastard.”<sup>91</sup> This rhetoric is strong in the letters of religious questioning to the ex-Secretary of War Taft during the later part of the election cycle. Letters were also sent to Taft associates in the Department of War, one of which was from a Republican in Virginia. An associate stated that he was concerned about newspapers on Taft’s unorthodoxy which “called him an infidel.”<sup>92</sup> The letter goes on to request that someone in the Department tell “of Taft’s religious views, as I am a Republican and believe it is hurting the party in the state of

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<sup>90</sup> Ashley R. Williams to William H. Taft, Woodruff, Kansas, 24 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>91</sup> O. V. Byers to William H. Taft, Glenwood, Iowa, 4 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>92</sup> C. J. Martins to William H. Taft, Staunton, Virginia, 27 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Virginia a great deal.<sup>93</sup> It should be noted that most letters that are inquisitive and not simply defamatory are from concerned Republicans who have read circulars from opposing Democrats. Personal correspondences to Taft that simply defame him do not seem to be extant. Another letter from a pastor takes a calm tone. In a letter to Taft, Minister T.G. Noblitt states that Taft will carry his state, Oklahoma, but that word had been circulated in the area that Taft was an “infidel.” As in others, the letter asks for an explanation of Taft’s faith so that the pastor may clarify Taft’s views to others.<sup>94</sup>

Other letters take an aggressive mood and present themselves more as a questioning. Here, the letter is addressed to Theodore Roosevelt, Taft’s most fervent national spokesman:

*“Dear Sir,*

*I am surprised at you and so are a great many people all over the country for recommending a man like Mr. Taft to the people for to be President of the U.S. when he is a Unitarian and Unitarianism is the next thing to infidelity because they do away with the Divinity of Jesus Christ...and he [Jesus] is made the greatest imposter this world has ever seen...and we don't want a man such as that at the head of our government...*

*Your Bro. in Christ,*

*Rev. Frank Lanthrop”<sup>95</sup>*

The letter from Rev. Lanthrop goes on to question Roosevelt’s reasoning and demands an explanation of his choice for Taft, along with a demand for Taft’s views. The letter praises

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> T. L. Noblitt to William H. Taft, Guthrie, Oklahoma, 8 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>95</sup> Frank Lanthrop to William H. Taft, Anna, Illinois, 22 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 95, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Roosevelt as well, calling him a “true American” unlike Mr. Taft. This personal and individual correspondence is often more general in questioning Taft’s beliefs due to his denomination, and centers on his non-belief on Christ’s divinity. As to the letters collected, none speak to other issues that create ravines between Unitarianism and orthodox Protestantism. Indeed, the five *solae* are never once discussed in the Library of Congress’ holdings or in any letters of Hornig’s research. This may be due to low public knowledge of Unitarian tenants or the emphasis of the dispute about Christ’s nature by Protestant pastors. These letters would be written by what Noll terms as “associative” members of congratulations who were hesitant to blindly accept conclusions of political discourse in their religious communities.<sup>96</sup> These congregants searched for the truth themselves and did not take the pulpit as the sole source of information. Personal correspondence also allows the historian to ascertain response strategy. According to records, Taft never once answered any private inquisition of his faith given by casual citizens. In fact, he stayed silent on the narrow issue the entire campaign.

Tangentially, other letters inquire about the religious composition of a potential Taft presidential cabinet. One letter simply asks Mr. Taft about the number of Jews he intends “to appoint as members of [his] cabinet.”<sup>97</sup> The author states that the answer would aid a Republican voter for many years in determining his vote. Well known for his ecumenist and liberal religious views, William Taft was most likely asked this question by a citizen concerned about specific Jewish politicians aiding the Taft campaign. Though this interrogation is not an attack on Secretary Taft, it serves to showcase the depth of religious concern for his election.

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<sup>96</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 358.

<sup>97</sup> Chas L. Egner to William H. Taft, New York, New York, 5 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Newsprint and printed circulars were used as a means to express religious objection to William Howard Taft in the 1908 election cycle. It is important to examine newsprint for many reasons: papers can have wide viewership and be national in scope, or they can be community based and show the collective sentiment of certain populaces across the nation. Unlike personal letters, objection through newsprint is typically characterized as being more detailed, thorough, and researched. It often uses community or leadership sources rather than non-sourced rumors, and can express information that was disseminated to an entire readership population rather than one individual. Finally, newsprint at times gives the voice of a collective, such as when political leaders speak on behalf of their colleagues or followers. Before an examination of religious protestation towards Taft and his faith in newspapers, one must understand that for many at the dawn of the twentieth century, newsprint was a primary way for individuals in most communities to find out information about events on the national scale. Thus, the information given in papers received less skepticism. Contemporary papers, especially in the South, were not secular and contained religious imagery. An average New Orleans newspaper, for example, would contain pictures of pastors or clerics and cite scripture often. Main papers, such as the liberal *World*, served as organs of the Democratic and Republican parties. Papers also contained bias due to geographic location, such as the *Daily Picayune* (currently Times-Picayune) of New Orleans. Late in the election cycle, the *Daily Picayune* printed multiple biographies of Bryan and electoral predictions favoring Democratic triumph.<sup>98</sup> Certain papers supplied guard to Taft's campaign and will be examined later.

An important link between personal letters to the Unitarian candidate and newsprint is established through the observation that many individuals referenced newspapers, and in fact

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<sup>98</sup> The Picayune Bureau, "Signs Point to Success," *The Daily Picayune*, (August 13, 1908, 201 edition, p. 1).

sent cuttings of articles to Taft who was passively campaigning. Periodicals and newspapers were circulated rapidly throughout the country on behalf of both campaigns. When letters detail “circulars” or national rumors, these periodicals or newspapers are the source of this information. Not all newsprint comprised opinion pieces on Taft’s religion. Indeed, some were informational in nature and can give insight as to the effect of the “religious question” in the election of 1908. William Barre, a concerned ally of Taft, stated that the middle and northern states (typically Republican at the time) may see a decrease in Republican votes due to Taft’s “religious views.”<sup>99</sup> Barre explicitly states that he is concerned about the Presbyterian and Methodist votes in the region, and attaches the article in his letter to Taft. The August 15th, 1908 article by the *Dayton Journal* presents the headline “Methodists Threaten To Bolt Ticket” and gave evidence that the flight from the Republican ticket by Methodists due to Taft’s religious views was not an individual, private discernment but that the situation “progressed to the stage of an organized movement” and that state leaders were gravely concerned.<sup>100</sup> The *Dayton Journal* also states that at their national assembly clergymen of the usually Republican Methodist faith politically proselytize to congregants telling them that “no good Methodist can vote for a President who openly avows that he does not believe in the divinity of Christ.”<sup>101</sup> In the opinion of the *Journal*, this movement was effective and swayed many congregants. The staunch Republican writer of the piece also relayed his personal experience of supporting the Unitarian as difficult. This is but one instance of clerical hostility affecting congregational voting among communal members; others confirm that clerical influence from the top down was a major influence of congregants.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> William Barre to William H. Taft, Dayton, Ohio, 15 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 91, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>100</sup> “Methodists Threaten to Bolt Ticket,” *The Dayton Journal*, (August 15, 1908).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>102</sup> “Mr. Taft and His Religion,” *The Nation*, (September 1908, 87 edition).



Another more informational piece on Taft's religious beliefs becoming more present during his campaign is a short article in *The World* which gave an account of his church attendance at All Soul's in Washington, D.C. with President Theodore Roosevelt. The entry proceeds by stating Taft's actions show "the ease and celerity with which religion, politics, and administrative statesmanship can be stirred into one conglomerate mass."<sup>103</sup> An article in the women's section of the *New York Times* details that Secretary Taft's faith was not the same as his wife, and that it might cause religious sentiment within the White House to divide further if Taft was elected in November.<sup>104</sup> Each of these articles takes a neutral and pragmatic tone not found in the attacks.

There are multiple religious newspaper articles within this time frame which are carefully curated as to not present an endorsement for one candidate. Most of these articles actually support the Republican Taft ticket through insinuation and connotation. These articles seek to portray neutrality and create an image of the Republican candidate within a homiletic letter to the editor, one of which is an article titled "God or Mammon?" which quotes extensively from a religiously charged speech of Taft's concerning frugality and materialism. The article simply states that one needs to follow the instructions of an "extremely equipped man" who is "one of the standard bearers for one of the great political parties as its candidate for President of the United States."<sup>105</sup> Articles of this sort are a less explicit sort of defense against Taft's perceived immorality by showing that he is well versed in Christian doctrine. Compared to other defensive pieces, this one would be considered weaker, however the subtle reference to Taft's religiosity may have satisfied some citizens looking for a less axiomatic tie between spirituality and politics

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<sup>103</sup> "Taft a Unitarian," *The World*, (August 2, 1908, pp. 5-5).

<sup>104</sup> "The Family and Home Life of Mr. and Mrs. Taft," *The New York Times*, (June 21, 1908).

<sup>105</sup> Marcy, William L. "God or Mammon?" Annapolis, 7 August, 1908.

in an article guarding Taft from religious protestation. Other short inserts, such as one from June of 1908, clarifies that Mr. Taft is not an atheist but that he is in fact a Unitarian.<sup>106</sup> Pieces that seek to inform or clarify are usually found earlier in the election cycle than religiously charged attacks.

Articles that take a more bellicose tone were also prevalent and increased in frequency as November neared beginning in August. On August 4th, 1908 an article titled “Taft Once Unitarian Fairy: His Old Pastor Admits He Was A Plump One” detailed Taft’s early faith. An interview with William Taft’s former childhood and later pastor, Rev. George Theyer, was given. The article took Rev. Theyer’s words and placed great emphasis on his description of Taft portraying a fairy in a church play. Taft’s weight was described as one hundred seventy-five pounds and the article included Rev. Theyer’s assertion that Will Taft was “a plump one.”<sup>107</sup> Though this article did not show an explicit bias, it did take quotations out of context in order to frame the candidate in a negative light. Another item circulated throughout the country by a Reverend S. C. Rees asked citizens to consider “if the homes of this great nation be trailed in the dust for four long years by the election of a...Unitarian president.”<sup>108</sup> It was a common item of concern for Protestants is that an unorthodox leader might slow progress in the nation. This is most likely connected to the idea that Christianization and the process of civilization are innately intertwined; an ideological tie which proved to Methodists and others that the nation could not move forward without a conservative Protestant. The most aggressive account can be found in *The Protestant Herald*, which claimed that the Republican candidate “looks upon our

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<sup>106</sup> “Taft as Churchman: Belongs to Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, Has Pew in Washington,” *The New York Times*, (June 17, 1908).

<sup>107</sup> “Taft Once Unitarian Fairy: His Old Pastor Admits He Was a Plump One,” *The New York Times*, (August 4, 1908).

<sup>108</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 531.

immaculate Savior as a common bastard...<sup>109</sup> Other newspapers repeatedly reminded readers that Taft would not define his faith, and implied that one who does not do so may not be loyal to a single belief system, meaning that Taft was less than steadfast in belief.<sup>110</sup> *The World* also published a headline “Unitarian Tenants, Which The Candidate For The Presidency Refuses To Define” and a following article on Unitarian beliefs which sought to differentiate it from Protestantism.<sup>111</sup>

Bryan’s speeches were posted in supportive newspapers as well, with the Nebraska hopeful concerned that Taft would be a puppet of “someone else”, possibly meaning the Pope of Rome if one places the assertion into the anti-Catholic rhetoric of the period.<sup>112</sup> Taft’s affiliation with Roman Catholicism was addressed constantly as “a fact being circulated” around the country, though Midwestern states that held higher concentrations of evangelicals and lower concentrations of Catholics experienced more anti-Catholicism than in the East.<sup>113</sup> A November 9th article written by President Roosevelt shortly after the election gives evidence of certain election cycle circulars painting William H. Taft as “an infidel”; these attacks also claim that his wife and brother are Roman Catholics.<sup>114</sup> Though his wife and family were devout attendees of St. John’s Episcopal Church, blatant lies were spread to create the optic that Taft was sympathetic to Catholicism. These circulars and newspaper articles would be the primary source of information through which concerned citizens would have used to form their opinion and questioning when writing letters to Taft about his beliefs.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 532.

<sup>110</sup> “Unitarian Tenants, Which The Candidate For The Presidency Refuses to Define,” *The World*, (August 2, 1908, pp. 5-5).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> “Bryan’s Tour of New York State.” *The Daily Picayune*. October 29, 1908.

<sup>113</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 53.

<sup>114</sup> Roosevelt, Theodore. “Freedom of Religion in American Politics.” *The Daily Picayune*. November 9, 1908.

One certain circular by a W. A. Cuddy sent to Taft's successor Secretary of War Luke Wright was disseminated throughout the nation. Wright sent the circular to Taft in a letter on August 2nd, 1908 which read "will our nation turn anti-Christ?...Let the war cry at this election be 'No anti-Christ to rule America!'"<sup>115</sup> Particular consideration must be given to this well printed circular, titled "The Paramount Issue," seeing as it received national attention and may have been a source of information for other circulars and articles. Like many, it begins with an attention catching phrase inciting spiritual urgency: "The Religion of Jesus Christ at Stake in the Coming Election: Will Our Nation Turn Anti-Christ?"<sup>116</sup> The notion of the "anti-Christ" is central to this passage, with William Taft being charged with the identification fourteen times.<sup>117</sup> This identification is important to religiously loaded accusations because of its interdenominational similarity. In the view of evangelicals, the anti-Christ was a ruling figure who would come to power as Satan's emissary on earth. For this reason, the association of Taft as the anti-Christ was one of the most extreme allegations any individual could receive. This egregious assertion would have been aided in part by Taft's supposed Catholic sympathy; founders of the Methodist,<sup>118</sup> Baptist,<sup>119</sup> and Presbyterian<sup>120</sup> faiths all associated the figure of the anti-Christ with the Roman Catholic Church. Though their association of the anti-Christ often lay with the papacy, later ministers in 1908 extended this accusation to Taft. It was also established through Taft's unbelief in the Trinity, triggering 1 John 2:22 to corroborate the charge.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> W. A. Cuddy, "The Paramount Issue." *The Prophetic Alarm*, Vol. 1, Washington, D.C., 1908.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Wesley, John. *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. 1st ed., 1755.

<sup>119</sup> Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians. *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. 3rd ed. London, England, 1689.

<sup>120</sup> Knox, John. *The History of the Reformation in Scotland*. Kyle, Scotland, 1566.

<sup>121</sup> "Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:22, NIV)

“The Paramount Issue” will be placed under analysis through utilizing a scrutiny of key themes in the circular which was granted national attention. The document begins with Cuddy justifying its publication by saying he was formerly a supporter of Roosevelt and Taft before receiving information on Taft’s belief. His pastorship obligates him to publish this information. Any candidate, he says, who does not profess belief in Christ should not be elected. He takes Roosevelt to task on his nomination often in the document: “Mr. Roosevelt neglected to consider the oracles of God in the nomination of Taft, and therefore has been deceived by the devil to betray the cause of Jesus Christ...”<sup>122</sup> He also writes, rather banefully, that “it would be better for you Bro Roosevelt that you had died before nominating Taft.”<sup>123</sup> His association of Taft as the “anti-Christ candidate” is made known early in his assertion that the anti-Christ candidate “will invite the Lord to shower his wrath upon our nation.” This fire and brimstone speech is meant to cause alarm to readers and focus their attention on the election as a defining moment for America’s salvation. He often places Roosevelt as a co-conspirator with Taft against both God and nation in this article as well. The notion of America as a Babylon ready for a spiritual fall is also used, as well as the punishing of an apostate Israel.<sup>124</sup> Unlike personal letters and newspapers simply covering the one dimensional dispute of divinity, this circular entertains theology including differentiation between orthodox Protestant faith concerning salvation and articles about Unitarian beliefs on the same salvific metaphysical realities. Histories of the Unitarian faith are quoted to portray a great divide between common Protestant beliefs and those of the Unitarian faith. This strategy would allow for Unitarianism to be viewed as foreign to congregants, as opposed to being viewed as a denomination of the Christian faith. Progressive scientific ideas supported by Unitarianism, such as evolution, are listed as well.

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<sup>122</sup> W. A. Cuddy, “The Paramount Issue,” 1908.

“The Paramount Issue” by W. A. Cuddy also called upon multiple groups of people to resist the Republican ticket, namely Protestant preachers through the means of informing congregants and Jews through remembering that “Taft financially supports these preachers to destroy their faith in the Bible of Moses”. Republicans were called to resist and were asked to accept Bryan’s election as an event that would “forever warn” Republican leadership to never nominate a non-believer again. According to the document, Catholic bishops and priests were to oppose Taft due to the need to fulfill doctrinal obligations in the Epistle of St. John. They also ask the Catholic laity to turn to Bryan and to follow the lead of certain Catholic clerics. Rev. Wesley Gaines Hill, a Methodist preacher who often spoke for Taft, is told that he should be sanctioned by Methodist bishops as well. In this sense, the document addresses many religious groups and offers arguments which would placate each of them. A strategic part of the document is its defense against “politicians and the press [that] may argue that this is a land of religious liberty.”<sup>125</sup> Many readers would have been concerned by the ideal of religious freedom, and the circular contains a proviso that the obligation to save the nation from the “anti-Christ” is greater than the obligation of religious tolerance. The document then ends with instructions on how readers can further disseminate the circular and spread the word against Taft on religious grounds. In its totality, the article contains deeper aspects of religious objection previously unseen in other documents, such as concentrated theology, biblical exegesis, and appeals to multiple faith traditions.

Ecclesiastic objection can be found in statements by the clergy of any denomination when they speak on behalf of their religious factions as singular units in opposition of a political

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

measure on religious grounds. Though the pulpit was a way for pastors to speak to their congregation and sway opinions, statements of ecclesiastic objection typically find their receivers outside of the immediate congregation because they are often read by clergy within a denomination's hierarchy. Newspaper articles, official proclamations by ecclesiastical governing bodies, and endorsements from the hierarchy found themselves to be useful in the election of 1908 for both Taft and Bryan. This type of objection would also reach what Noll considers to be an "associative" religious audience who would desire to know which candidates the leadership preferred, while "communal" members would have found reasons to object through both their conscience and the weekly pulpit. Statements of ecclesiastical objection in the presidential election of 1908 typically occurred later in the election cycle. On September 5th, 1908 *The Detroit Informer* presented an article to its readership on the endorsement of Bryan by Bishop Henry M. Turner, the Dean of the Colored Bishops of the United States.<sup>126</sup> This is enthralling as the Democratic Party at the time did not hold African American rights as one of its high priorities, though the Republican platform did.<sup>127</sup> Indeed, it should be noted that racially conservative Democrats in this time period were instituting Jim Crow laws to disenfranchise African Americans. In 1908 Bryan gave a speech in New York, proclaiming that "The white men of the South are determined that the negro will and shall be disenfranchised everywhere" and that whites "disenfranchised the negro in self-protection."<sup>128</sup> Turner gave justification of his support to the Democratic candidate, saying that black disenfranchisement had run wild under Roosevelt's administration, and that "the Republican Party is of no use to the negro."<sup>129</sup> Speaking for the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, Bishop Turner called for a vote

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<sup>126</sup> "Bishop Turner Will Vote For Bryan," *The Detroit Informer*, (September 5, 1908, 40 edition).

<sup>127</sup> The Republican National Committee, *Republican Campaign Text-Book (1908)*, 297.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> "Bishop Turner Will Vote For Bryan," *The Detroit Informer*, (September 5, 1908, 40 edition).

against Taft, stating that he believed in President Cleveland and that “we believe at heart that William Jennings Bryan is as good...”<sup>130</sup> It must be noted here that issues of religion and race in electoral politics can never be separated, and the one influences the other with strength. This ecclesiastical endorsement seems to be about racial disenfranchisement.

A key exemplar of official ecclesiastical opposition for spiritual purposes can be found in the proceedings of the Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1908. This official organizational body of the Methodist faith takes note that the Constitution prohibits a religious test for public officials and performs a negative appraisal of Unitarianism, stating that no Unitarian can reach salvation because they deny “all these fundamental truths as taught in the gospels.”<sup>131</sup> The criticism of Taft comes in a subtle form, through the Conference stating that Taft has every right to be unorthodox, that they would prefer an orthodox candidate, and that Unitarianism is “radically defective in its claim to be classed as part of our Christian system.”<sup>132</sup> It appears as well that they imply that the Commander in Chief should be eligible for salvation; in their eyes Taft is unable to achieve redemption through Christ due to his rejection of fundamental tenets. Understanding the need to address Taft’s past dealings in the Philippines, the Conference accuses him of being a “latitudinarian” with beliefs “so broad that even the Roman Catholics feel very kindly toward him.”<sup>133</sup> This anti-Catholic association surely strengthened their argument. Taft indeed knew of these proceedings as a transcript of the meeting minutes is contained within the collection of his papers.

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> G. C. Rankin, ed., “Christianity and Unitarianism,” vol. 3 (Nashville, TN: *Southern Methodist Publishing House*, 1908).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.



Ecclesiastic support is another type of religio-political media also in need of observation. Ecclesiastic support comprises institutional statements by clergy any denomination when they speak on behalf of their religious factions as singular units in support of a political measure. To be sure, not all congregants held the same preferences as their pastor, however this institutional response can give the historian a glimpse at official leanings of large organizations. It is important to note church support for Taft so that the historian will not be swayed by an emphasis on negative religious attitudes towards the candidate; it also paints a fuller picture of the national religious duel. Ecclesiastical support from non-evangelical churches and some churches in Catholic or Republican controlled areas benefited Taft. Some personal letters, such as those from clergy to Taft, give endorsement and advice on the campaign's religious feature in the cleric's region. In one such letter a Rev. F. A. M. Suire tells Taft of his anticipation for the election, and requests an account of Taft's dealings with the Catholic Church in the Philippines and information on his personal beliefs so that he may correct any errors or rumors being spread.<sup>134</sup> This is typical of an endorsement letter and also portrays the religious issue as a nationwide issue not constrained to one specific region. Another which offers region-specific advice is by Rev. G. E. Hiller, who notes that many Republicans "have been made to hesitate" due to false rumors and circulars.<sup>135</sup> Others, such as Rev. Charles W. Wendt, asked if they might write theological defenses on his behalf.<sup>136</sup> These, of course, went unanswered. The Baptist Missionary and Educational Convention of Texas lent Secretary Taft their support in a formal letter as well.<sup>137</sup> Moderate pastors wrote in several newspaper publications pleading for the American public to

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<sup>134</sup> F. A. M. Suire to William H. Taft, Iola, Kansas, 24 August 1908.

<sup>135</sup> G. E. Hiller to William H. Taft, Booneville, Indiana, 4 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>136</sup> Charles W. Wendte to William H. Taft, n.p., 2 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

disregard religious bigotry in the presidential election, with one saying that to oppose Taft on religious grounds was “the acme of political insanity and religious bigotry.”<sup>138</sup> Ecclesiastic support also came in the form of requests for Taft’s presence at many denominational church events, such as invitations to speak at Sunday schools,<sup>139</sup> requests for donations to religious institutions,<sup>140</sup> and offerings to lay cornerstones at religious buildings, such as requested by Trinity Reformed Church in New York.<sup>141</sup> Not every minister in the nation held religious views about either candidate. A certain Horton Page Loyd stated that on an overseas trip with multiple clergymen, a discussion was held on Taft’s election and the subject of his religious beliefs never once occurred.<sup>142</sup>

It is also important to understand Catholic appeals for Taft. These please were made nationwide and were caused by anti-Catholicism on the part of the Democratic team.<sup>143</sup> Fearful Democrats wrote concerns to Bryan that they had been informed that the Catholic Church had given “private instructions” to vote for Taft,<sup>144</sup> though no evidence corroborates this. This influx of Catholic votes to the Republican ticket is noted by Taft several times,<sup>145</sup> and by supporters of Bryan lamenting his loss.<sup>146</sup> It is also known that the anti-Catholicism by the Democratic Party

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<sup>137</sup> M. M. Rodgers to William H. Taft, La Grange, Texas, 7 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>138</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 534.

<sup>139</sup> Page Tedway to William H. Taft, New York, New York, 5 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>140</sup> C. L. Nest to William H. Taft, Fenwick, West Virginia, 7 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>141</sup> W. N. P. Dailey to William H. Taft, Amsterdam, New York, 24 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>142</sup> Horton Page Loyd to William H. Taft, London, England, 3 September 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>143</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 537.

<sup>144</sup> Jas Johnson to William Jennings Bryan, New York, New York, 31 October, 1908. William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>145</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 536.

<sup>146</sup> John Harkerto William Jennings Bryan, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 7 November 1908. William Jennings Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

contributed greatly to Taft's victory by the displacement of the Catholic vote towards the Republican ticket.<sup>147</sup>

Institutional support for Taft against religious protestation from non-religious groups can be found in the Republican National Committee's dissemination of Taft's "Christian Missions and Civilization" speech to the masses<sup>148</sup> and the 1908 Republican Campaign Textbook's discussion of the same.<sup>149</sup> These publications sought to paint Taft as a moral Christian. Each of these sources of support should be placed within the narrative of the election of 1908. It is evident through these examples that the Protestant establishment, attempting to continue its hold on religio-political power, partook in a partisan duel for the nation's Commander in Chief, giving the entire election religious undertones. However, the illusion of a political battle raged by a majority of Protestant clerics can present itself to the historian if one focuses on instances of ecclesiastic support and objection. It must be remembered that "directly partisan acts by clergy" are sporadic and uncommon.<sup>150</sup>

Research into the 1908 Republican presidential campaign's response strategy to religious protestation yields certain truths that help to inform history on the religious and political dialogue of this particular election. A number of response strategies were sent to the presidential hopeful via letters and in-person meetings, all of which sought to clarify issues of the former Secretary of War's faith. Taft's campaign was principally faced with three major issues: his Unitarian faith in need of definition, anti-Catholic canons constantly fired upon him for his dealings in the Philippine Islands, and accusations of atheism and anti-Christian spiritual associations. The

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<sup>147</sup> Herz, Walter. "William Howard Taft" *Dictionary of Unitarian & Universalist Biography*.

<sup>148</sup> "List of Literature Published By Republican National Committee," August 1908. n.p., n.d., William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 93, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>149</sup> The Republican National Committee, *Republican Campaign Text-Book (1908)*, 28b.

<sup>150</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 294.

religious issue was of great concern to him, and Taft did not underestimate the potential of religious bigotry to derail his campaign. Taft never once publicly defended his Unitarian beliefs during the campaign of 1908, because he believed that his Church “required no apology” and that his religion was one that could be trusted.<sup>151</sup> Many pleaded with him to clarify his faith, and he said nothing more than that he believed in the spread of Christian civilization, and that he was a Unitarian denominationally.<sup>152</sup> Rev. John Hill of New York also appealed to the candidate to make his religious beliefs known.<sup>153</sup> Taft replied cynically that “if a man’s religious creed is to play a part in his election...why the sooner we know it the better.”<sup>154</sup> It appears that on the issue of his belief, he would be publicly mute. This strategy of personal silence, coupled with strong defenses of him by President Roosevelt and other prominent ministers, forged a victory for Taft in both the media and the American electorate. Republicans criticized this strategy of silence because they wished to help the hopeful Unitarian’s cause. Many requested the information for their own personal newspapers. E. E. Coyle, editor of the *Baltimore News* and the *Detroit Free Press*, newspapers with large Catholic audiences that were favorable Taft, offered to print a story in which the Pope thanked Taft for his fair dealings in the Philippine Islands and congratulated him on his nomination;<sup>155</sup> it seems that the letter went unanswered.

Advice was given to Taft and the wider campaign leadership by President Theodore Roosevelt, the *de facto* campaign advisor, and Secretary of State Elihu Root. Roosevelt advised Taft, “never define your religious belief!”<sup>156</sup> Similarly, Secretary Root wrote a long letter to Taft in August of 1908, stating that though he could publish a letter that would settle the religious

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<sup>151</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue”, 532.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> E. E. Coyle to Fred W. Carpenter, Baltimore, Maryland, 24 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

issue “in the mind of any reasonable man” it was unwise to do so because it was not yet an imminent threat, and to publish would add to the controversy.<sup>157</sup> Taft and Roosevelt also reasoned that though Bryan never explicitly attacked Secretary Taft for his faith, he was behind the numerous articles containing religious objection through his association with the authors.<sup>158</sup> As election day came closer, fundamentalists and other protestants began to create more anti-Taft propaganda. Due to the frequency of the attacks on Taft’s religion during the late months of September and October, the campaign had to address the issue actively. Roosevelt decided to speak out. In a letter to his confidant Henry Cabot Lodge in late October, Roosevelt stated that he had gotten “worried” upon hearing that Taft’s Unitarianism was of main discussion.<sup>159</sup> He also asked Lodge how the religious issue was being treated in Massachusetts, to which Lodge replied that the issue in the Northeast was not of much concern.<sup>160</sup> In an effort to combat Protestant anger, Roosevelt asked Taft to join him during his Sunday church services, as mentioned in the section concerning newspaper publicity. The visit most likely had a desirable effect for the Republican campaign. Institutional defense came in the way of the Republican National Committee, especially in Midwestern states.<sup>161</sup> Chairman Frank Hitchcock instructed state Republican leaders to give special care to the religious issue.<sup>162</sup> Efforts to portray that Taft was not a Catholic were undertaken by the party’s press bureau as well.<sup>163</sup> The fact that special

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<sup>156</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue”, 531.

<sup>157</sup> Elihu Root to William H. Taft, Clinton, New York, 24 August 1908. William Howard Taft Papers, Reel 92, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>158</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue”, 533.

<sup>159</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, *Selections from the Correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Henry Cabot Lodge*, 1884-1918., vol. 1 (New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1925), 52.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Staff, “Religion Cuts A Figure: Underground Work Against Taft Among Methodists -- Republicans' Committee Now Working Hard.,” *The New York Times*, (October 24, 1908, p. 3).

<sup>162</sup> Hornig, “The Religious Issue,” 534.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

attention was given to the issue within weeks of the election portrays the threat that religious rhetoric had against Taft's presidential hopes.

Many newspaper articles were published in Taft's defense that would benefit him and settle the religious question for many American voters. An unknown Unitarian pastor published an article in the *New York Times* on October 26th, 1908 in which he chastised the American electorate for entertaining religious bigotry. He explicitly blames evangelical forces and asks that people vote for a man based on his character. "We are living in the twentieth century, but the flames of religious bigotry have not been extinguished."<sup>164</sup> A more official campaign response came from Theodore Roosevelt, who wrote a sophisticated defense of Secretary Taft as well as his opinion on religious dialogue during the election. Roosevelt's candid response was published in most major papers on November 9th, 1908, six days after Taft was declared victorious as America's Head of State. "President Condemns Bigotry In Politics" the byline read, "Men who tried to use Taft's faith against him insulted Americans."<sup>165</sup> Roosevelt begins with a defense of Taft's Unitarianism and refutes the claim that Taft, or any of his family members, are Catholic. To Roosevelt, William H. Taft's religious beliefs are "his own private concern" and to make them known would only be for the purpose of subjecting the Republican nominee to doctrinal disputes. He terms the call for Taft to release his views as "an abandonment of real freedom of conscience."<sup>166</sup> He also replies to concerns of Taft's Catholic sympathies that he received in a letter from a questioner who stated that most non-Catholics would vote against Taft on religious grounds: "I believe that when you say this you foully slander your fellow countrymen...are you aware that there are several states in this Union where the majority of the people are now

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<sup>164</sup> John Holmes, "Defends Taft's Religion: Opposition Because of It Is Religious Bigotry, Says Unitarian Pastor," *The New York Times*, (October 26, 1908)

<sup>165</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, "Freedom of Religion in American Politics," *The Daily Picayune*, (November 9, 1908).

Catholics?”<sup>167</sup> Interestingly, Roosevelt has a predilection that a Catholic would one day be president. Though Alfred Smith was unable to complete the journey in 1928, Roosevelt would find his prediction realized in 1960. Religio-political items of campaign strategy would prove true as well: The prophecy made by Chairman Hitchcock that Democratic anti-Catholicism would force Catholic votes towards the Republican ticket was fulfilled,<sup>168</sup> though by 1894 there were already about 70,000 Republican Catholic voters in the metropolis as a result of previous anti-Catholic campaigns by the Democratic Party.<sup>169</sup> Factors of race and ethnicity played a large role as well by means of immigrant group voting patterns. Scholars on Catholic voting patterns assert that religion granted the Taft campaign New York, a Democratic stronghold with a high Catholic population.<sup>170</sup> The swing of the Catholic vote in this region and others was a factor in the campaign as New York comprised over 8% of total electoral votes, votes which would contribute to William Howard Taft becoming the 27th President of the United States of America.

The sequence of media events involving religion in the 1908 presidential campaign, when viewed collectively, form the notion that religio-political events of religious objection have significant power in an electoral setting. Religious objection in the election cycle of 1908 was fueled by the past and subsequently caused alterations to America’s religious and political landscape. Religion, and use of religion to achieve political goals, caused individuals to realign

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Hornig, "The Religious Issue," 534.

<sup>169</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 292.

<sup>170</sup> William B Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith*, 1st ed. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 88.

themselves to new parties, political parties to continue their “general Christian impulse,”<sup>171</sup> and the presidential campaigns of Bryan and Taft to form response strategies.

Conversely, political actions caused many ministers and congregants to tie civic ideology to faith and to engage in a theological and doctrinal political discourse. Seeds of resentment towards “unorthodox” faiths such as Unitarianism were nurtured by ethnocentric and nativist Protestant attacks. Anti-Unitarianism in the Progressive Era was an infrequent prejudice that was extant but muted. In order to grasp hold of power, a fracturing and denominationally splitting Protestant monolith used Anti-Catholicism, a vessel much larger for religious animus to flow through, as its weapon of choice, and adapted its rhetoric to instill among the electorate visions about William Taft’s association with Roman Catholicism. These attacks were also occasions for unity that would benefit the fracturing establishment.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, almost every letter sent to William Jennings Bryan after his defeat on November 3rd concern Roman Catholicism, with one admirer writing that the Pope “had issued his edict and the ignorant and subservient Catholics obeyed.”<sup>173</sup> No letter to Bryan contains references to other items of note, such as prohibition, financial trusts, or Tammany Hall. Due to the use of anti-Catholic sentiments to achieve political purposes, Unitarianism was not an issue of much discussion in private letters; in all letters to Bryan from October 1st to November 9th, Unitarianism is not mentioned once.

Though religious intolerance was a defining feature of the Progressive Era American religious landscape, religious objection to Taft’s campaign was unique in its effort and became one of the defining issues of the election of 1908. The Protestant monolith as a collection of denominations with a common enemy would strive to maintain power and would use the ugly

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<sup>171</sup> Mark A. Noll, *One Nation Under God: Christian Faith & Political Action in America* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Rowe, 1988), 146.

<sup>172</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 288.



spear of religious bigotry throughout the twentieth century. It is important to note that Protestantism does not function as one singular unit during any attack, though some unity was gained through actions of religious objection. Since the election of 1908, the people of the United States have elected nine Unitarian U.S. Senators, five Unitarian U.S. Representatives, and many other officials who were defenders of liberal theology. Though media strength and religious tolerance would rise and fall in an undulating pattern during the twentieth century, Unitarianism would still be viewed in a negative light. Questions of Unitarian fitness for office would be asked during the presidential campaigns of 1952 and 1956 in which Adlai Stevenson, a faithful attendee of the Bloomington Unitarian Church, would become the Democratic nominee. Stevenson temporarily joined a Presbyterian church near his home, causing accusations from other Presbyterians and Protestants that he was unorthodox, and the ire of some Unitarians that he had left the faith.<sup>174</sup> These details continue and support the legacy of religious discourse within American politics. In a system clothed in ideals of secularism and tolerance, personal faith finds its way into the ballot box through the electorate.

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<sup>173</sup> John Hamilton to William Jennings Bryan, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 5 November 1908.

<sup>174</sup> Associated Press, "Stevenson Joins A Second Church," *The New York Times*, (December 18, 1955, p. 40).

## CHAPTER TWO: ANTI-CATHOLICISM AND AL SMITH

Unitarian William Howard Taft suffered bigoted blows for being on good terms with the Vatican in an administrative capacity, though he was not a Catholic himself. For the next two decades, presidential candidates would not endure questions of religious orthodoxy at the level of questioning during the election of 1908. The election of 1928 presented a much more injurious campaign of religious bigotry against a more susceptible target: a Catholic Governor of New York by the name of Alfred E. Smith. The legacy of Smith's campaign serves as a case study on religious intolerance within the American electorate. Indeed, scholars of many disciplines have studied the attacks on the Democratic nominee for his faith as well as the candidate's response to religious objectors. It is interesting that this electoral contest was not fought over large ideological differences; rather, both candidates held very similar views about public policy. In this sense, a true contest of the personality and relatability of the candidate and party demographics occurred rather than a battle with foundations in party platform "planks." This campaign was also rooted in ethnocentrism and was the first time in American history that a Roman Catholic was nominated by a major party. This election was also the first time that a member of the Quaker faith, Herbert Hoover, was nominated by a major party. Though the Constitution of the United States specifically excuses federal officeholders from religious tests, sections of the American electorate found themselves questioning the qualifications of both candidates on religious grounds. Smith's presidential aspirations would be crushed in a landslide result of a mere 87 electoral votes to Hoover's 444;<sup>175</sup> Louisiana would be the only state in which Smith would win every county.

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<sup>175</sup> David Leip, "1928 Presidential General Election Data - National," Dave Leip's Atlas of U.S. Elections, 2019.

Though many scholars and biographers would assert that no Democrat could have won in 1928 due to widespread “prosperity and the want for continuity” it is a fact and a legacy of history that Alfred Smith’s campaign was pathbreaking and that the margins of his loss would never have escalated to such a large degree were it not for the vehement attacks on his faith.<sup>176</sup> Maps depicting electoral votes reveal that Smith’s election marked the first time since 1872 that the Democratic Party lost a majority of the South and the first time since Texas’ annexation in 1845 that Texas voted for a Republican candidate. These results, as well as an astounding loss of over six million of the popular vote by Smith, portray the power of anti-Catholicism at what Edmund Moore characterizes as the discrimination’s “flood stage.”<sup>177</sup> The image held of Smith by many Protestants was shaped by numerous factors, all of which are in need of exploration. Presented within this chapter is a detailed examination of the religious protestation against Governor Alfred E. Smith and the image of him in the minds of voters.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the legacy of anti-Catholicism and its causes and effects in relation to conservative Protestantism. Electoral issue platforms as well as candidate profiles are explored, and this exploration will set the stage for an examination of primary sources concerning religious protestation to Smith’s candidacy in both the nomination and general election phases of Smith’s political operation. Newspaper articles, letters from concerned citizens, political party publications, pamphlets from institutions such as the Ku Klux Klan and other interest groups, political cartoons, and ecclesiastical objections are analyzed in order to create a picture of the tone and substance of forays against Smith for his faith. Secondary literature, notably the work of Edmund Moore, has laid the foundation for an analysis of the

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<sup>176</sup> Glen Jeansonne, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Fighting Quaker, 1928-1933* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 32.

<sup>177</sup> Edmund A Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President: The Campaign of 1928* (New York, NY: The Ronald Press Company, 1956), 145.

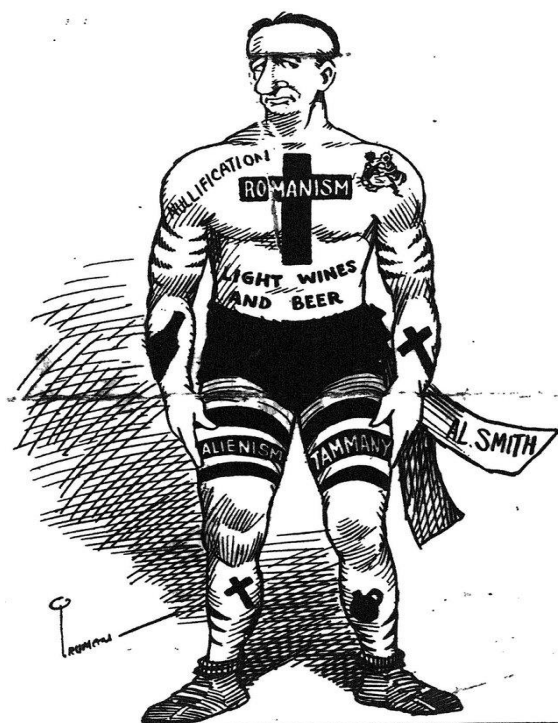
religious dimensions of the election of 1928. Smith's response strategy to affronts for his Catholicism will be examined along with institutional reactions by the Democratic and Republican parties. The chapter ends by bringing anti-Catholicism into the contemporary period through objection to John F. Kennedy's campaign and the Catholic political legacy today.

“The ministers of no Protestant sect could or would dare to attempt to regulate the votes of their people as the Catholic priests can do, who at the confessional learn all the private concerns of their people, and have almost unlimited power over the conscience as it respects the performance of every civil or social duty...A tenth part of the suffrage of the nation, thus condensed and wielded by the Catholic powers of Europe, might decide our elections, perplex our policy, inflame and divide the nation, break the bond of our Union, and throw down our free institutions.”<sup>178</sup>

This passage from Lyman Beecher's "A Plea For The West" (1835) illustrates the perception that many Protestants had throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth-century of the potential of Catholics to undermine American democracy as single-minded servants of the Bishop of Rome. Though this document was written over nine decades before Alfred E. Smith was nominated for the presidency, the perception of Catholic inability for democracy and free thinking still defined conservative Protestant political choice in 1928 and persisted long into the twentieth century, the intolerance being diminished after the election of Catholic John F. Kennedy in 1960.

Images of Catholics not as a fragment of American society but as an infestation totally separate from American culture remained in the mind of a majority of non-Catholic Americans in 1928, but why were Catholics so different? Did a system of beliefs constitute that large of a sociological divide? To understand the existence of anti-Catholicism in an appropriate way, the

deconstruction of the stereotypical image of a “Romanist” in the mind of a 1928 evangelical voter must occur. Only after deconstructing this image and giving cause to its various parts can one understand why American Catholics were called servants of the pope, drunkards, Europeans, and un-American before and after the election of 1928. This deconstruction can be accomplished through an analysis of primary sources typical of those seen by voters which existed before November 6th, 1908. A detailed election cycle political cartoon of Smith can serve as a window into the Protestant imagination.<sup>179</sup>



Inspecting the cartoon from head to toe, one will find subtle and overt appeals to the voter based on electoral issues. To begin, Smith’s nose and facial construction gives him a very nuanced Catholic look, making him look like an immigrant. The word “nullification” draped

<sup>178</sup> Excerpted from Lyman Beecher, *A Plea for the West*, 2nd ed. (Cincinnati, OH: Truman & Smith, 1835).

<sup>179</sup> New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections, Alfred E. Smith Cartoons, n.p., n.d.

across his left shoulder is a reference to his position on repealing prohibition, a move that Republicans and others viewed as the nullification of a constitutional amendment based on his personal preferences. One then notices the large cross with “Romanism” tattooed on Smith’s chest, a typical assertion. When Catholicism is termed as “Romanism” it is brought into a foreign context and given a negative connotation. This incursion was not due to any theological dispute but was an attempt to make Smith appear foreign and subservient to the Bishop of Rome. The stripes on Smith’s biceps are an allusion to his status as a member of Tammany Hall, the stripes mimicking those of a tiger, a common disparaging term about corrupt individuals as part of the New York political machine. The shadows of liquor bottles and the phrase “light wines and beer” portray the status of Smith as a “wet” or anti-prohibition candidate. These issues have racial undertones as well, as many Irishmen (predominantly Catholics) were seen as drunkards and immigrants. More overt appeals to xenophobia and corruption can be found on the thighs of this depiction, linking the Democratic nominee to Tammany Hall and foreign status; at times Tammany was viewed as a pro-immigrant (and therefore pro-Catholic) organization. These images, though here restricted to Smith, were typical perceptions of Catholic voters in 1928. It is also important to note that many Midwestern, Western, and Southern Protestants held geographic prejudices against Smith, or any candidate who would rise out of the Empire State. The East Coast was seen as the heart of secularism, with New York its beating center. Pundits painted Smith as “the personification of the worst features of the city,” a place many called Babylon rather than Main Street.<sup>180</sup>

It is important to understand the reasons why Catholics and the Roman Catholic Church were negatively viewed in American society in order to understand the criticism that Smith received during his election. Three main factors contributed to this negative depiction of

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<sup>180</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President*, 108.

Catholics: their allegiance to the Bishop of Rome, their immigrant status, and the nations of their ancestry.<sup>181</sup> As faithful adherents to their beliefs, Catholics respected the authority of the papal office as infallible in the teaching of faith and morality. Though most Catholics, including Smith, were not regular readers of papal encyclicals, they trusted their hierarchy to lead them in the right direction. One encyclical which caused social division and negative perceptions of Catholics in the years leading up to the election of 1928 was *Testem Benevolentiae* by Pope Leo XIII in 1899. This encyclical denounced the American church's tendency to go against standard Catholic administrative and ritualistic practices in order to bring it into fuller communion with international ecclesiastical traditions. Pope Leo XIII denounced this more adaptive expression of Catholicism by stating that "the rule of life which is laid down for Catholics is not of a nature as not to admit modifications" but that Americanism has stepped too far outside of the realm of tradition.<sup>182</sup> Protestants reading this easily interpreted the message to be an attempt by the pope to control the actions of Americans and to bring them away from American ideals and back to those of Europe.

The immigrant status of many Catholics also placed them as nonnative and foreign. The Catholic community was, at the time, a separate part of American society. It was an insular construct founded in nationalized parish geographies, with the local church at the center of everyday life, influencing when the community would interact and how. This reality created a much more diminished need to interact with the dominantly Protestant world around them. As Jay Dolan asserts, "the local parish became the center of people's lives, it ordered their

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<sup>181</sup> Michael Rooney, "Anti-Catholicism v. Al Smith: An Analysis of Anti-Catholicism in the 1928 Presidential Election," *Verbum* 9, no. 1 (December 2011): 3.

<sup>182</sup> Mark Massa and Catherine Osborne, eds., *American Catholic History: A Documentary Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017), 111.

universe.”<sup>183</sup> Indeed, a cultural wall was built on parish lines, not only in large cities but also in rural areas of America. Lackawanna County in Pennsylvania is an example of rural separation on religious lines.<sup>184</sup> This wall of separation led to widespread ostracism and skepticism by Protestant Americans. Existing in their own subculture, Catholics were regarded as a dangerous group, posing a threat to American values as European invaders camping on American soil. In describing this subclass status, Mark Massa writes that Catholics were in a distinct transitional period in which Catholicity and Americanness were intertwined. They lived both “inside” and “outside” of American life in dichotomous fashion.<sup>185</sup> Interestingly, Protestant distrust for Catholics had little to do with theology or fundamental beliefs, but was about cultural ideology with roots in xenophobia.

With an understanding of anti-Catholicism’s main origins, a look into essential political consequences must occur. With the increase of Catholic immigration, the Catholic Church became the largest single church in the United States by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>186</sup> Fears of Catholic subservience to the leaders of Europe, fears of anti-Americanism among Catholics, and concerns about a Catholic’s ability to exist in a democratic society routinely barred Catholics from pursuing political office. Struggles over the use of religious materials and prayer in American public schools and struggles between the Democratic Ku Klux Klan and ordinary Catholics epitomize the Catholic Church as a political target and as an issue within the political realm.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> Jay P. Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 130.

<sup>184</sup> Kathleen P Munley, “The ‘Catholic Issue’ in the Election of 1928 in Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania,” *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 108, no. 1 (1997): 56.

<sup>185</sup> Massa, *American Catholic History*, 71.

<sup>186</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 287.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 313.



The election of 1928 took place against this backdrop of religio-political tension. The campaign highlighted the fissures in American society. It also underscored the similarities between the two candidates and between the positions advanced by their parties. Indeed, there was not a great difference between the two self-made millionaires in the race. Both men called for lower taxes, the restriction of immigration, and the continuation of the great wealth that Americans were experiencing in the roaring 1920's. Prohibition was a religiously infused issue, one with roots in the Protestant ideal of purifying corruption through social action.<sup>188</sup> Catholics had a more relaxed attitude towards the temperance movement, giving the issue both religious tension and ethnic character as most immigrants remained "wet." This movement was also politically unitive for Protestants of all denominations,<sup>189</sup> and was a force for Christian mobilization after fears of social disorder during World War I.<sup>190</sup> Smith was also a member of Tammany Hall, the elite New York political machine which controlled portions of the Democratic Party. Tammany's pro-immigrant stance created the connotation of a wet, corrupt organization sympathetic to immigrants and Rome. A parallel was often drawn between this corruption and the papacy.<sup>191</sup>

Alfred E. Smith was of Irish, Italian, and German descent and had received no schooling beyond the eighth grade, when he dropped out of St. James parochial school to work in the Fulton Fish Market to aid in his family's survival. What he lacked in education, however, he made up for in charisma. Smith won election as Governor of New York in 1918 and was highly successful in leading the state through humanitarian and administrative reform. According to Edmund Moore, Smith "held ascendancy over both political parties" in the Empire State and was

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<sup>188</sup> Frensdreis, John, and Raymond Tatalovich. "'A Hundred Miles of Dry': Religion and the Persistence of Prohibition in the U.S. States." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (2010): 306.

<sup>189</sup> Noll, *Religion & American Politics*, 287.

<sup>190</sup> Noll, *One Nation*, 138.

“a master of practical political science without the benefit of academic degrees.”<sup>192</sup> This gave Smith an entrance into Tammany Hall. His association to Tammany and all things New York, such as his speech patterns and style of dress, brought ire from the rural areas of the United States. This geographic disparity and elite association had ramifications for voter attitude formation in rural areas.

Smith was a traditional Irish Catholic who frequented Mass, though his concerns about his faith were more linked to community, identity, and personal prayer rather than complex theological beliefs.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, “Smith’s refusal to eat meat on Friday was not a matter of theological reflection...[it] marked a Catholic’s identity and his loyalty to the church.”<sup>194</sup> When approached to defend himself against papal encyclicals condemning Americanism in 1927, Smith reportedly stated that “I don’t know what the words mean. I’ve been a devout Catholic all my life,” and reportedly asked “What the hell is an encyclical?”<sup>195</sup> It is in this context that Smith’s Catholicity should be viewed -- as a form of identity rather than a deep understanding of complex metaphysical realities. Nevertheless, Smith was often called to account for or to defend his faith against various ministers and laymen who would subject him to a religious examination. The way in which timelines of prejudice and the timelines of historical figures intersect is always interesting, and often vital to understanding historical context. An examination of the chronology of anti-Catholicism reveals that Smith’s choice to run for the nation’s highest office in 1928 occurred during a very religiously intolerant decade.

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<sup>191</sup> “Cabinet Meeting -- If Al Were President,” *The Fellowship Forum*, November 3, 1928, sec. Political Cartoon.

<sup>192</sup> Edmund Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 21.

<sup>193</sup> Curtis, Finbarr. "The Fundamental Faith of Every True American: Secularity and Institutional Loyalty in Al Smith’s 1928 Presidential Campaign." *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 4 (2011): 523.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, 534.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid*, 534.

Smith's opponent would rise out of a very contrasted set of circumstances. Herbert Hoover was not able to attain the benefit of a steady formal education or a comfortable childhood. Hoover was born in a farm hamlet of Quakers in Iowa in 1874, where he was orphaned at the age of nine and raised on the frontier with no education. He left his adoptive family to attend Stanford University at seventeen and started at the bottom of a mine to create a multi-national mining empire.<sup>196</sup> Though both parties sought him out to become part of their leadership, Hoover declared himself a Republican and placed himself on the California primary ballot in 1920.<sup>197</sup> Though Senator Warren G. Harding received the nomination, and later the presidency, Hoover quickly became popular and was chosen to become the United States Secretary of Commerce after leading the U.S. Food Administration during World War I.

Though Hoover's faith is not the subject of this thesis, it is important to examine his spiritual beliefs and those of Quakers, in general, to retain a full picture of the religio-political situation during the election of 1928. The Republican nominee was a devout man who remained so during his campaign, presidency, and thereafter. Hoover also was never one to use religious services as political events. When attending a Quaker meeting in September of 1928, Hoover received no special recognition and prayed ardently for his campaign.<sup>198</sup> His personal faith was contemplative and not very ritually expressive, as many recount that Hoover "worshipped in the simple manner prescribed by Quaker practice"<sup>199</sup> and that he was orthodox in his relation to adhering to Quaker doctrine. The media treats his less than common spirituality rather well. In relation to his political sensitivities, Hoover's Quaker faith brought him to understand that racism was an evil that needed to be abolished, that education should be prioritized, and that tolerance

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<sup>196</sup> Glensonne, *Fighting Quaker*, 5.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>198</sup> Staff, "Hoover and Family Worship In Silence At Quaker Meeting; Then They Hear Four of Congregation 'Moved by the Spirit' Make Brief Talk," *The New York Times*, September 18, 1928, p. 1

and opportunity should be afforded to every American.<sup>200</sup> The largest quandary that Hoover's faith placed him in was the Quaker doctrine of non-violence and pacifism, which many believed disqualified him to run for Commander in Chief.<sup>201</sup> This quandary presented itself again when Hoover refused a military parade in his honor for his inauguration.<sup>202</sup> His faith also influenced his political style. According to biographer Glen Jeansonne, Hoover "did not find spirituality between the walls of a church but within the divine spark that Quakers call the Inner Light.... He did not like crowds, delivering speeches, or fundraising. These traits are common in Quakers but rare in politicians."<sup>203</sup>

Though both candidates nominated for the presidency prayed outside of the Protestant spectrum, the issues of the election of 1928 affecting Smith would have wounded any candidate. It is a fact, however, that Smith's faith provoked a response by many Protestants to his issue positions; this response certainly had an ethnic and religious framework. Both the issue of prohibition and Smith's ties to Tammany Hall were religiously infused. Both candidates' positions on economic policy were much less articulate and too similar, and therefore did not acquire a religious infusion. Prohibition was the central social issue defining the election of 1928, with Smith's support for repealing the 18th Amendment serving as a weakness exploited by dry Protestants to create an image of Smith's personal immorality. Often these images had ethnic and religious ties. Cartoons were produced depicting Smith serving alcohol to Catholic clergy during a "cabinet meeting."<sup>204</sup> The stereotype that Catholic immigrants, particularly Irish and Italian Catholics, were drunkards has a legacy of its own, with anti-Catholic depictions of

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Jeansonne, *Fighting Quaker*, 32.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>202</sup> "Hoover Asks to Ban Military Display; Representative Kvale Tells House Inaugural Parade Does Not Befit. Hits Coolidge Specticle: If Hoover Repeats It, Declares Minnesota Dry, He Should Quit Quaker Church and Join Klan." *The New York Times*, December 12, 1928.

<sup>203</sup> Glen Jeansonne, "The Real Herbert Hoover," *Historically Speaking* 14, no. 4 (January 2011): pp. 28.

both of these ethnic groups as drunk and irreligious being produced for over a century. Another political liability, Smith's association with Tammany Hall, garnered religious protestation. Often his allegiance to this association with the semblance of corruption was discussed in parallel to his identity as a Catholic, with the church hierarchy seen as the most corruptive force on the planet. One political cartoon, titled "A Heavy Load for Al," illustrates this political burden by showing Smith being weighed down by a Tammany tiger and a Catholic cleric.<sup>205</sup> This weight is harming Smith, yet he continues to support it. Perhaps this is a depiction of his perceived unwavering allegiance to corrupt authority. Another campaign issue, the Tennessee Valley Authority, was a talking point for Smith in many of his campaign speeches but did not provoke a Protestant religious objection. Its passive resistance to religious objection illustrates that this objection only occurs when an issue can be articulated well. The issue must also not be extremely complex, must be founded in social or class division, and can be construed as to be defying a certain set of morals. Platform positions such as the Tennessee Valley Authority and economic sanctions are immune from this treatment as they are complex and do not translate into religious rhetoric well.

Alfred E. Smith's campaign to become President of the United States did not begin with his battle with Herbert Hoover, it began when he gained popularity within the party establishment. The contest for the Democratic Nomination for President of the United States contained its own arrangement of religious prejudice. Some party leaders, such as Henry T. Rainey of Illinois, stated that Smith should be nominated as a test to see if "the public is able to forget religious bigotry ... it might be worthwhile to suffer defeat in this cause"<sup>206</sup> Two wings formed in the Democratic Party over Smith's candidacy, leading to another contender, William McAdoo, to raise much support. McAdoo, aligned with the dry, rural Protestant wing of the

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<sup>204</sup> "Cabinet Meeting -- If Al Were President," *The Fellowship Forum*, November 3, 1928.

<sup>205</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 84.

Party, could not muster the leadership to win the nomination<sup>207</sup> as he was aligned with bigotry in the election of 1924.<sup>208</sup> Smith's nomination was a strategic move by the Democratic Party. The governor had the ability to garner "wet" votes, votes which were crucial to create a slim window of victory. Many viewed this "wet" vote as a necessary evil. Indeed, Edmund Moore postulates that Smith's candidacy would have been "less terrifying to millions" if he was Episcopalian, but that he would still be vulnerable in the dry South and West regardless.<sup>209</sup> Accepting this necessary evil, the Democrats nominated Smith as their candidate for president on June 28th, 1928 after a tumultuous protest by the dry Protestant establishment within the party.<sup>210</sup> This protest was depicted in newspapers across the country, and division within the party on religious grounds was predicted to bring Smith's demise.

Smith's approach to politics and campaigning for the presidency did not change substantially after his nomination. The candidate recognized his margin of victory early in the beginning of the campaign, though his perception of the impact that his personal faith would have on votership was restricted by his lack of travel to deeply Protestant areas. One might have sympathy for Smith, a man caught off guard by a sudden surge of religious attacks that seemed to be a *force majeure* in the middle of his campaign, inundating the prospective president and taking his votes with each newspaper article. A brief description of the transformation in transmission style and frequency of religious protestation during the election of 1928 is needed to understand the power of spiritualized attacks. The concepts and essence of this bigotry had precedent in the homes of voters before being published on the front page of magazines.

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<sup>206</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 38.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 39.

<sup>208</sup> Munley, "The 'Catholic' Issue," 58.

<sup>209</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 39.

<sup>210</sup> Rae, Bruce. "Combat Among Delegates; North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama Are Centre of Conflict" *The New York Times*, June 28, 1928.

Moore gives a detailed account of the transformation of attacks on Smith, beginning with a “whispering campaign” heard in close, white evangelical church associations changing dramatically into what he terms as “anti-Catholicism at flood stage” beginning in September of 1928.<sup>211</sup> During Smith’s nomination phase the topic of a candidate’s faith was not seen as politically astute to discuss. It was dubbed the “silent issue” and religious protestation was carried through implications to policy stances, such as the Volstead Act, rather than outright aggression towards any certain denomination.<sup>212</sup> Though organizations such as the Klan were early in their outright appeals, national leaders did not speak with disdain about Smith’s faith. After the publication of Charles Marshall’s “An Open Letter to Governor Smith,” a publication which will be the subject of analysis later, anti-Catholic groups in the South began to coalesce around a strategy of overt prejudice. This occurred, for instance, in Arkansas, even though Smith chose Joe T. Robinson, an Arkansas senator, as his running mate.<sup>213</sup> Normalized political intolerance in the South, it seems, started in January of 1928. Publications, such as a forty page pamphlet entitled *Out of Their Own Mouths Shall They Be Condemned* by the Women’s Ku Klux Klan, posited that no Catholic could be president, and that democracy was endangered.<sup>214</sup> As the campaign wore on, major publications began to give latitude to religiously charged articles, leading to a seeming breach in the floodgate professional, balanced journalism. Like all prejudice, anti-Catholicism was rooted in areas with low social interaction with minority groups and began to spread to more traditionally tolerant regions as it grew in potency. As anti-Catholic prejudice grew in popularity and spread from the South and the West (areas where Protestant political domination was almost exclusive) to the North and the East, individuals began to break

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<sup>211</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 148.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>213</sup> Kenneth C Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas: How Politicians, the Press, the Klan, and Religious Leaders Imagined an Enemy, 1910-1960* (Fayetteville, AS: University of Arkansas Press, 2016), 131.

down the barriers of subtlety. Put simply, Smith could learn to swim away from the waters of religious intolerance in the South in early 1928; but by September of 1928 he was drowning in his own territory, the Northeast. It should be noted that attempts to prevail against this surge of bigotry occurred in many areas of the country with high Catholic populations. As public religious bigotry gained traction, rural Catholics in “red” states began to solidify around Smith.<sup>215</sup>

Understanding the religious dimension of the political opposition to Governor Smith involves an analysis of the attacks against him for his faith. Though Smith’s lack of travel prevented him the ability to see his religion as a major political liability, the historian can note the extent to which Smith’s faith played a part in voter choice by analyzing instances of religious objection and their sources, as well as observing the substance of such objections and the intensity with which they were delivered. Primary evidence for religious protestation during the presidential election of 1928 takes many forms, with newspaper articles being the first subject of consideration as they were the prime media force bringing ideas about Smith into the minds of the electorate. The strength of newspapers in rural areas is understandably strong, allowing the historian to view the visions that many individuals had of the candidate. Indeed, religion played a large role in the news media during the second decade of the twentieth century, and religious language was often still seen as routine in the news.<sup>216</sup> The use of religious language to harm Smith as a candidate in newsprint is what is examined in this section.

There are principally two types of articles which find themselves creating a bad image of Al Smith’s campaign in 1928: those articles that use religion to show the campaign’s weakness,

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 131.

<sup>215</sup> Munley, “The ‘Catholic’ Issue,” 63.

<sup>216</sup> Doug Underwood, *From Yahweh to Yahoo!: The Religious Roots of the Secular Press* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 200.



and those articles that attack Smith as a person overtly. Generally, the latter degree is found in less than balanced publications whose biases can be identified at the outset, such as the *Kourier* produced by the Klan. Reputable national papers and local balanced papers harm Smith subtly if they do at all. Balanced magazines and papers felt that it wouldn't be tactful to discuss the issue of a candidate's religion, and were complicit in the furtherance of a "whispering campaign" until early 1927.<sup>217</sup> An example of a local paper portraying a weaker Smith campaign can be found in an article from the *Crowley Daily Signal* of Crowley, Louisiana. This article examines the likelihood of defections among Democrats due to Smith's Catholicism and portrays Smith's campaign managers as expecting "defections everywhere."<sup>218</sup> *The New York Times* did not attack Smith personally, but certainly discussed the division, disorder, and factionalism caused by his religion within the Democratic Party. In the four-column article titled "Delegates In Fight Over Religion," the issue is portrayed as having caused an actual tug of war for the "North Carolina" sign between two delegates divided over the party's nominee. The police had to break up this squabble, as well as many others. Quickly, the convention became a barroom brawl, and *The New York Times* deemed it "a noisy demonstration for religious tolerance ... for the Catholic Governor of New York."<sup>219</sup> These balanced publications, attempting to show disorder and factionalism due to Smith's faith, published these stories for a national audience. Though no personal attack was made, Smith's campaign suffered. Behind the mask of professional journalism, religious objectors sought to remove Smith from the contest.

Overt calls for Smith's disqualification and opposition can be found in newsprint generated by organizations seeking to uphold the religious status quo. Denominationally

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<sup>217</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 58.

<sup>218</sup> Associated Press Staff. "Voters Weigh Arguments at Campaign's End." *Crowley Daily Signal*, November 5, 1928, 31st edition.

affiliated newspapers regularly published tracts and embellished stories of Smith. This series of assaults would reinforce images that voters had of Smith, and many papers in rural areas constituted an arm of the Protestant monolith attempting to gain control and strengthened allegiance to the Protestant voter block for both “associative” and “commutative” voter types. The *Baptist Advance* published a story detailing Smith standing “breathless” in awe of a papal legate and bowing to kiss the papal ring. This story continues by asking readers to imagine how Smith would approach foreign policy with major Catholic countries, such as Mexico.<sup>220</sup> Ben Bogard of the *Baptist and Commoner* wrote in September of 1927 that any man should be able to choose his religion, but that no man should be put into office while declaring allegiance to a church that “declares its intention to rule the world.”<sup>221</sup> Both publications also inflated the numbers of Catholics working in various government agencies and portrayed exaggerated numbers of Catholic populations as a way to persuade voters that they were outnumbered and that a battle was coming. It should be noted that both of these Arkansas publications were Democratic-leaning and are evidence of the factionalism caused by Smith’s religion in the Democratic Party. They are relics of a pre-nomination intra-party objection on the basis of a man’s religious tradition.

Furthering the religio-political objection to Smith, pastors routinely submitted “open letters” to newspapers as religious guides, and these well-read tracts, under the guise of moral aid to the faithful, were published to destroy Smith’s candidacy in the South. An example can be found in Dr. Selsus Tull’s “Can Al Smith Be President?” found in both the *Baptist Advance* and the Klan’s *Kourier*, which stated that the New Yorker was ineligible for the presidency because

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<sup>219</sup> Rae, Bruce. “Combat Among Delegates; North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama Are Centre of Conflict ” *The New York Times*, June 28, 1928.

<sup>220</sup> Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 129.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

he was an “orthodox, endorsed representative Catholic.”<sup>222</sup> Dr. Tull later wrote to the Democratic Committee of Arkansas before their March meeting and attempted to sway their endorsement.<sup>223</sup> Many pastors across the nation wrote “open letters” to their respective papers in this way, so that religious objection was not a national issue propagated by a far-off presbyter, but a local issue with propagators in one’s church on Sunday. In this fashion, an amalgam of formal, institutional objections to Smith was declared across the nation in small and large communities, causing associative members of congregations to follow their pastors into the polls.

These newspapers may only service rural portions of Arkansas, but they serve as a microcosm for most rural publications. Appeals to voters in most of these publications would not have fallen on deaf ears, but also would not have had an impact. Evangelical denominations producing newspapers were disseminating information to a white, dry, rural Protestant audience that most likely would not have considered voting for Smith in the first place. Nevertheless, their reaffirmation role was strong. Later in the campaign, one could hardly read a paper without seeing three to four editorials about Smith’s candidacy; in the last week of the campaign, the issue of Smith’s religion lead all others for ten days according to the North American Newspaper Alliance.<sup>224</sup> It should be noted that cartoon images, such as the one dissected earlier in the chapter, found their vehicle in newsprint and proliferated during Moore’s “Flood Stage” anti-Catholicism beginning in 1928.<sup>225</sup>

Though the press and the pulpit were the dominant ways in which religious objection was circulated throughout America, the careful articulation of elite leadership positions outside of ecclesiastic institutions occurred earlier in the cycle. Organizational endorsements and press

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>224</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 195.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 153.

releases, as well as literature, portray the way in which issue champions and political/social influencers visualized Smith's candidacy as a threat. These formal and institutional tracts were often published and circulated by opinion leaders and served as the basis for the tracts which writers farther down the informal chain would write.

The most prominent voice of vehement social rage against Governor Smith's campaign was that of the Ku Klux Klan. This generation of the Klan took a much different nature than the Klan of the Reconstruction Era. Still an arm of the Democratic Party, the Klan of this time period was much more concerned with marginalizing religious groups such as Jews and Catholics than the Klan of the 1870s. This white supremacist organization had nativist roots, and viewed Catholics with disdain. In many ways, anti-Catholicism was the one of the most prominent features of the Klan in the 1920s, even equaling racism in some regions.<sup>226</sup> Advocating the Social Gospel and a new fundamentalism centered on bringing about the Kingdom of God in social ways, the Ku Klux Klan was completely inundated with evangelical theology and held all the dressings of a religious faith by 1925. It is in that year that an estimated forty thousand fundamentalist ministers joined the Klan, bringing the guise of morality and faith to the Klan, which in turn caused higher enrollment.<sup>227</sup> Historian Wyn Craig Wade describes the Klan as being depleted in energy by 1928. Nevertheless, men donned white robes and emptied their entire treasury to publish pamphlets defaming Governor Smith.<sup>228</sup> Religious opposition, it seems, was their dying act.

Many Klan members wrote articles in their local papers denouncing Smith and disseminated circulars alleging Smith's ties to a corrupt Rome. Official pronouncements by the

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<sup>226</sup> Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 135.

<sup>227</sup> Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1987), 171.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 253.

Klan, however, varied from state to state and represented an institutional directive. One such promulgation, an announcement which would have heavily influenced both associative and commutative voters, was written to all Arkansas Klansmen by Grand Dragon James Comer in July of 1928:

“Every native born Protestant in Arkansas should oppose the election of any man who subscribes to and is loyal to, or is a member of the Roman Catholic Church for the following reasons: First, that the Roman Catholic Church favors the joining of the Church and State. Second, because it does not subscribe to the free public school system. Third, because it is working toward the end of ultimately making America Roman Catholic and subservient to the will of that Institution ... and because all Roman Catholics who are loyal to that Institution ... will be guided by the dictation of the Pope.”<sup>229</sup>

This official Klan appeal to voters is typical of promulgations throughout the country. One may note that this passage does not contain explicit language or highly religious rhetoric. The calm nature of the passage as compared to the circulars assert an authority that the average voter with little experience with Catholics could appreciate. Moderately suspicious voters, such as associative members of denominations or individuals whose lives were “less pious” could obtain information from this pronouncement without seeing the large bias held within indecent circulars. Many pronouncements were also created by Klan committees specifically designed to ruin Smith’s presidential hopes. Unsurprisingly, these groups met to write their directives in Methodist and Baptist churches across the country and published documents such as “A Declaration of the Anti-Smith Democratic Voters League” which promised ruin if Americans

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<sup>229</sup> Barnes, *Anti-Catholicism in Arkansas*, 149.

chose New York's governor as their president.<sup>230</sup> These promulgations were not secular calls for reform, rather they were often read from the pulpit and were delivered with zeal and religiosity.

While the Klan's fold contained thousands of individual ministers who vocally opposed Smith, politics was not removed from the pulpits of those ministers who were not affiliated with the Klan. Official denominational objection occurred as well. Often regional conferences which met yearly or quarterly would delve into that particular church's social platforms, which regularly included vague appeals to voters. Individuals in the upper echelons of church hierarchy would issue opinions as well. For example, a group of Methodist ministers met together to form an appeal to their respective congregations in November of 1928, at the high point of the campaign. They declared that if the Catholic governor of New York were elected president of the United States, it would place "Rome in the White House."<sup>231</sup> Another set of Methodist bishops instructed their pastors to create sermons based on their "25 Articles of Religion," the tenets of the Methodist faith, and to contrast the "errors of Rome."<sup>232</sup> Sermon topics suggested included the following: "Church and State in Roman Catholic and in Protestant Teaching," "The Ethical Emphasis of Protestantism as Against the Sacramentarianism of Rome," and "The Duty of the Church to Interest Itself in Public Morals."<sup>233</sup>

Individual episcopal statements that were hypocritical, such as Methodist Bishop Adna W Leonard's writings condemning the Catholic Church for infusing government and politics, were met with harsh criticism. His "call for Anglo-Saxon unity, against foreigners, especially the

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>231</sup> Munley, "The Catholic Issue," 60.

<sup>232</sup> Rembert Gilman Smith, *Politics in a Protestant Church an Account of Some Happenings in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, During the Hoover-Smith Race of 1928, and of Some Events in 1929; Containing a Defense of the Equal Political Rights of Roman Catholic Citizens and Discussions of Other Burning Issues of the Day in Church and State.* (Atlanta, GA: Ruralist Press, 1930).

<sup>233</sup> Ibid.

Latins” was execrated by *The New York Times* and by other Methodist bishops.<sup>234</sup> As part of what Moore has called the “Protestant Crusade” of 1927 and 1928, clerics began to make exceptions to their various rules about involvement within politics as political participation was a necessary evil, the only way in which Protestants could maintain social order. A national leader of the evangelical fundamentalist movement, Rev. John Roach Straton delivered a sermon via radio which was tantamount to an official fundamentalist proclamation. The sermon, titled “The Moral and Religious Stakes in the Present Political Situation -- A Frank Discussion of the Dangers of Electing as President of the United States Any Man Who Advocates the Nullification of Righteous Law,” charged Smith with gambling and soliciting prostitution.<sup>235</sup> Among Presbyterians, their leader Dr. Hugh K. Walker published an appeal to the entire denomination in the *Presbyterian Magazine* that all churchmen should “fight to the bitter end the election of Alfred E. Smith.”<sup>236</sup>

It should be noted that though the Baptists had greater numbers of congregants who detested Smith, Methodism, through several prominent bishops, led the organization of attacks against Smith and sustained the most vehement attacks. In keeping with Roman Catholic canon law, Catholic clergy mostly abstained from preaching politics from the pulpit and only privately revealed their thoughts on the campaign of 1928. Ironically, it was Roman Catholicism which was praised by some non-Catholics for its fair mindedness about the separation of the sacred and the secular, the very item of issue Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians preached would ruin America.

Dry organizations were another subset of evangelical groups which opposed Smith’s election. These organizations had a legacy of religious motivation and were populated by pious

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<sup>234</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 48.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid*, 137.

individuals of all denominations. Local chapters were usually led or aided by the Protestant clergy. As part of the Constitution, most dry organizations viewed the 18th Amendment as part of moral or divine law. Smith's position against prohibition caused them great anxiety, leading to responses in the media. The issue is often termed as "nullification," for these groups viewed the Catholic candidate as attempting to "nullify" the moral law. The Protestant view of social order was enshrined in the ideologies of these organizations, and the historian can see the conservative Protestant worldview through their documents.

A pattern of connecting Smith to the interlocking theme of "rum and Romanism" is evident for these groups. For example, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WTCU) Pennsylvania chapter provided women a voice in calls for prohibition. Recently empowered by suffrage, these women met in conference to endorse Herbert Hoover for the presidency, as Smith's "past record, present attitude, and affiliations" would only support his position on "liquor condoned drunkenness."<sup>237</sup> The barrier of delicacy and shame which previously hindered talks of Smith's Catholicism did not exist for prohibition, as the national experiment was spoken of often, with and without religious connotations. Attacks from dry organizations such as anti-saloon leagues were not simple attacks against Smith's position on alcohol. There were distinct ties between his Irish ethnicity, and clear connections with his faith. One Presbyterian minister from Brooklyn remarked: "This is the program. Rum and Romanism are leagued together to put this plan across.... The good people must wake up and take united and energetic action at once or Prohibition and American democracy are doomed."<sup>238</sup> Religious scholar Finbarr Curtis asserts that the use of Prohibition as a central issue against Smith's early campaign was a use of coded language used to "identify Smith as foreign and irreligious"

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 173.

<sup>237</sup> Munley, "The Catholic Issue," 60.



without a frontal attack on Catholicism.<sup>239</sup> To dry organizations, one's identity as an American was innately tied to being a part of a proper social order in which drinking was immoral. Perceptions of Smith's Catholicism and "wet" positions placed him as both "foreign" and "immoral," barring him from a nationally acknowledged identity as "American."

The last institutional form of religious protestation to be examined by this thesis is the effect of official channels of the Republican Party on Smith's campaign. Press releases, opinions of the Republican National Committee's chairman, and prominent party officials were circulated to both national newspapers and to party members. Republicans vying for the defeat of Smith and anti-Smith Democrats appreciated these writings, though some members of both parties detested religious objection to Smith, most notably Republican candidate Herbert Hoover. During the "Flood Stage" of anti-Catholicism, the GOP's standard bearer wrote that "I come from Quaker stock, my ancestors were persecuted for their beliefs ... by blood and conviction I stand for religious tolerance in both act and spirit."<sup>240</sup> He later also wrote in his *Memoirs* that Smith "insisted that religious faith did not disqualify any man from public office. He was right."<sup>241</sup> Republican National Committee Chairman Hubert Work would give a speech shortly before Labor Day under pressure from the opposition to promise a "clean fight."

Though the official stance of the Republican National Committee condemned religious bigotry, party officials across the United States of all strata wrote letters and circulars. One such letter, written by Pennsylvania Republican Committeewoman Willie Caldwell, inspired party workers, stating that "we must save the United States from being Romanized and rum-ridden,

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<sup>238</sup> Curtis, "The Fundamental Faith of Every True American," 529.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 529.

<sup>240</sup> Herbert Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover, The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933*. (New York, NY: MacMillan, 1952), 205.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid, 205.

and the call is to the women to do something.”<sup>242</sup> The letter was later repudiated by Hoover and Chairman Work. Other instances of institutional intolerance include the Alabama Republican Party’s chairman, who “admitted disseminating 200,000 copies of an anti-Catholic pamphlet that he had written.”<sup>243</sup> Later, a Republican executive from the Coolidge administration “appeared before 2,500 members of the Ohio conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church” and called for them to use the pulpit against the Catholic Irishman.<sup>244</sup> Informal Republican calls for Smith’s defeat, at times, were taken as formal sermons to begin a partisan crusade.

There is a great deal of scholarship on religious prejudice in the election of 1928, many of which include an analysis of the attacks. One can observe the impact of the attacks on voters by examining election results in small regions and comparing them to the life experiences of voters. Though “life experience” is not directed entirely by denomination, social class, and political party, it is a contributing factor in votership. For example, *The Scranton Times* calculated election results for Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania and compared them to the relative denominational enrollments from the U.S. Census.<sup>245</sup> However, research into the election results of this county by the historian Kathleen Munley reveals that socio-economic concerns persuaded some Catholics to vote for the establishment.<sup>246</sup>

Another way to analyze the attacks is to view their ability to shift the common image of Alfred E. Smith through the use of political cartoons and religious rhetoric, as this thesis examines above. Many voters at this time used heuristics such as political party and personal perceptions of candidates to select their choice for President of the United States, and did not

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<sup>242</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 146.

<sup>243</sup> Rooney, Michael. “Anti-Catholicism v. Al Smith: An Analysis of Anti-Catholicism in the 1928 Presidential Election.” *Verbum* 9, no. 1 (December 2011): 18.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>245</sup> Munley, “The Catholic Issue,” 65.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

have access to platform issue information, or at least did not concern themselves with it. Indeed, heuristics were used more than any other information at this time, and the use of heuristics did not decrease until information was more readily available. Therefore, the mental image held by moderate Protestant voters of a New York Catholic elitist who was both a Catholic and a member of Tammany Hall certainly played a role in voter choice. Even non-regular churchgoers would have been exposed to this image with “Romanist” overtones within their community. Areas with very few Catholics, such as rural areas of the South, had the most ignorance about the tradition, and at times an individual's entire view of Catholicism was shaped not by Catholics but by Protestants. As historian of religious art Margaret Miles would assert, the images that one holds for something influence and construct a reality.<sup>247</sup> Slowly, images held of Smith would construct a reality in which he would never be Chief Executive.

A final way to evaluate the barrage of negative religious images which affected Alfred E. Smith's campaign for the presidency is to view them in light of the double standard held against Smith and compare it to treatment of his equally non-evangelical competitor: the Quaker Herbert Hoover. As mentioned above, Hoover's faith more directly prohibited certain acts of participation in government. The binding Quaker tenet of non-violence was a pillar of Hoover's faith. Though Catholics bore the burden of defending themselves and making it known that they would participate in American life, members of the Quaker faith routinely refused to participate in arenas such as the military. During World War I, over one million Catholics served in the U.S. Armed Forces, and Catholics actively participated in buying war bonds and performing other measures to support troops overseas.<sup>248</sup> Organizations such as the Knights of Columbus provided

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<sup>247</sup> Margaret Miles. *Image as Insight: Visual Understanding in Western Christianity and Secular Culture*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 144.

<sup>248</sup> American Catholic History Research Center and University Archives, “Background: American Catholics and World War One,” American Catholic History Classroom (The Catholic University of America).

support as well. Despite this, the image of an un-American, foreign Catholic persisted. Herbert Hoover's Quaker faith's legacy of conscientious objection, with roots in its *Peace Testimony of 1661*, did not seem to matter. Moreover, official statements of non-cooperation were not archaic. The Society of Friends' Yearly Meeting in 1915 issued a statement on World War I, which called not only for negative participation in the war, but also for a call for peace.<sup>249</sup> The difference between the way in which the two faiths were treated was not centered on theology but on ethnicity, nativism, and perceptions of Catholic corruption. Moore states that Hoover's Quakerism was "inconsequential politically."<sup>250</sup> Moreover, the attacks on the Catholic Church were for its perceived corruption and lust for power, not on church theology or practice. Quakerism was not susceptible to these attacks. Smith's failure against this double standard represents the many ways in which Catholics across America were consistently regarded as foreign even while working much harder to attain cultural nationalism than the average United States citizen. In a way, they formed communities and were strangers in their own land. The attacks on Smith are representative of that reality.

The method by which Smith responded to religious objection during the election of 1928 is as significant as the objections themselves. Typically, narratives of religious objection to Smith are used to preface the eventual protestation toward U.S. Senator John F. Kennedy during his election campaign. Kennedy's response is often examined as it purportedly sounded the death knell for anti-Catholic bigotry in the United States, while Smith's response strategy is often left out of the narrative as it is viewed as unsuccessful. Each of these events, however, is misunderstood. Kennedy's win, of course, would not end anti-Catholic bigotry, and Smith's responses had successes though they were limited. It is impossible to gauge the effectiveness of

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<sup>249</sup> Society of Friends, "Friends Peace Testimony," *Proceedings from the London Yearly Meeting of 1915*, London, England, 1915.

these responses, however, due to sheer empirical loss, party heuristics, and low data on individual voting concerns. Regardless, Smith's potent speeches and defenses were able to overcome some denominational prejudice; Smith received the largest popular vote any Democratic candidate had ever been given.

Governor Smith's original silence towards the religious issue can be understood through the way in which the candidate viewed the relationship between politics and personal faith. To Smith, the separation of church and state was absolute, therefore there was no need to respond to religious bigotry.<sup>251</sup> To do so, in his eyes, may have lowered many in the working class' perception of him as a reputable, presidential man who would not engage in a discussion that was less than civil. This silence was also urged by Smith's inability to gain publicity for his responses as most newspapers in "middle America" would most likely skew his answers. This theory was proven correct in 1928 when the New York *Herald Tribune* attempted to destroy the effect of his speech in Oklahoma which sought to settle the issue.<sup>252</sup> Smith's response was also informed by his political philosophy and ethnic upbringing. One can view these aspects of his liberalism through his own self-written speeches and responses. Official statements from the campaign and ghostwritten articles portray a less Smith-infused response. Finbarr Curtis' *The Fundamental Faith of Every True American: Secularity and Institutional Loyalty in Al Smith's 1928 Presidential Campaign* artfully illustrates the result of Smith's environment and experience:

"Smith's arguments about religious freedom reflected historical developments in twentieth-century liberalism in which classical liberal conceptions of individual rights

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<sup>250</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 150.

<sup>251</sup> Alfred E Smith, *Campaign Addresses of Governor Alfred E. Smith, Democratic Candidate for President (1928)*, 2nd ed. (Albany, NY: J.B. Lyon Company, 1929), 52.

<sup>252</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 185.

were revised in the face of practical concerns about institutional power and equality.... Smith's views about the secular political institutions were shaped in distinctive ways by the ethnic, political, and religious sensibilities of New York's Lower East Side. His defense of liberty overlapped with his defense of ethnic identities...."<sup>253</sup>

Governor Smith's Catholicism was his own, formed by his parish life. The world he experienced within the Catholic subculture of his neighborhood not only informed his identity but also his political theology. In a sense his views of religious freedom were strong, however they were not of the form which Protestant America was accustomed to. Smith identified with the shared Catholic conscience which was "shaped by ecclesiastical authority," while "his understanding of religious freedom was not reduced to individual choices; it included institutional and communitarian loyalties."<sup>254</sup> Constantly frustrated that Americans looked to his religion and not to his political record, Smith's hesitancy to approach the religious question was also a function of his hesitancy to fan the flames, an action which Herbert Hoover attributed to his defeat in his *Memoirs*:

"Governor Smith unwittingly fanned the flames in an address in Oklahoma against intolerance. He insisted that religious faith did not disqualify any man from public office...but up to that moment it had been an underground issue. The Governor thought that he would gain by bringing it into the open..."<sup>255</sup>

Smith's response to anti-Catholic whispering campaigns changes in level of explicitness, and one can observe this pattern of response in his campaign speeches when reading them in chronological order. In his acceptance speech upon receiving the Democratic nomination for president, Smith stated that he would not be influenced when considering men for appointment

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<sup>253</sup> Curtis, "The Fundamental Faith of Every True American," 522.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid, 538.

to his cabinet based on “the church he attends in the worship of God.”<sup>256</sup> Later, his speech in Oklahoma would unmask “cultural snobbery as a red herring for anti-Catholic prejudice.”<sup>257</sup> He responded to the coded language of Prohibition and immorality by treating it as a shield of decency through which Protestants could attack the habits of ethnic Catholics without conceding religious prejudice. Religious objection could no longer hide behind the veil of secular politics: “They know that this Tammany cry is an attempt to drag a red herring across the trail. I know what lies behind all this and I shall tell you. I specifically refer to the question of my religion.”<sup>258</sup> Smith asserted that even coded language was an affront against the nation’s founders. “I can think of no greater disaster to this country than to have the voters of it divide upon religious lines. It is contrary to the spirit, not only of the Declaration of Independence itself, but of the Constitution itself.... Our forefathers, in their wisdom, seeing the danger to the country of a division on religious issues, wrote into the Constitution of the United States in no uncertain words the declaration that no religious test shall ever be applied for public office.”<sup>259</sup> His Oklahoma speech then responded to the group which served as the most animated vehicle for objection: the Klan. To Smith, the Klan was an abomination not only to his Christian faith but also to the tenets of the United States. He could not understand how so many individuals identified with such a group, and his response was indicative of the complete denial of any claim to the American spirit that the Klan had:

“They [klansmen] breathe into the hearts and souls of their members hatred of millions of their fellow countrymen because of their religious belief. Nothing could be so out of line with the spirit of America. Nothing could be so foreign to the teachings of Jefferson.

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<sup>255</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 151.

<sup>256</sup> Smith, *Campaign Addresses*, 26.

<sup>257</sup> Curtis, “The Fundamental Faith of Every True American,” 530.

<sup>258</sup> Smith, *Campaign Addresses*, 51.

Nothing could be so contradictory to the whole of history. Nothing could be so false to the teachings of the Divine Lord Himself.”<sup>260</sup>

Returning to his political record, Smith described his long history of appointing Jews, Protestants, and Catholics to cabinet positions and of working with all believers to address the needs of the Empire State. His later speeches, such as his address in Milwaukee and his address Newark would repeat the assertions made in Oklahoma. Defenses against the Klan, questions of his allegiance to Prohibition, and assertions about his religion would be present throughout the heat of the campaign season. These late responses were most likely less powerful in defending Smith. As the campaign came to a close, Smith’s speeches were much less publicized as newsprint became more fascinated with poll reports and regional campaign news. In a sense, Smith’s response to religious objection was almost drowned out by a collection of more pressing campaign matters as well as heated editorial attacks which increased in the last few months of the campaign. The media attention which Smith’s Oklahoma speech was given filled the front pages of newspapers for ten days. The religious issue led all others in newspaper space; thereafter it “returned increasingly to a covert status.”<sup>261</sup> To extend an earlier analogy, Smith could no longer breathe under the waters of injustice by October 1928. Gasping for air, the four-time Governor would survive as a lesson to all Catholics who threatened the Protestant social order with their foreign ideals and ethnic backgrounds.

The final and most important examination of a personal response by Alfred E. Smith is arguably the most significant development in campaign response to religious objection in the early twentieth century: the Marshall-Smith exchange. Though this debate began in April of 1927 and culminated within one month, it has been placed in this section of the thesis for both

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, 53.



brevity and thematic continuity. Smith's reply does not represent a wholly Smith-oriented approach to response and only slightly resembles his other responses. The response was ghostwritten by two of his advisors. Surely Marshall's letter can be seen as an early attack on Smith, however this exchange did not take place during Moore's "Flood Stage" of anti-Catholic sentiment. It is important to analyze this debate as it allows one to form a greater understanding of both the Protestant rationalization of why a Catholic could never be head of state and why Smith believed this assertion to be anathema.

The exchange began in April of 1927 when Mr. Charles Marshall, a Protestant New York attorney with limited knowledge of Catholic canon law published "An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith, A Question That Needs An Answer" in *The Atlantic*, which presented a Protestant rationale as to why a Catholic should not run for the highest office in the land. The author responded not through overt ethnic or nationalist rhetoric but through an exegesis of canon law and earlier papal encyclicals. The latter was gentlemanly in presentation and centered on the theme of a Catholic's dual allegiance to both church and state, and issues which may come about when the two conflict. Urging Smith to respond as to how he would reconcile these two allegiances, Marshall presented several cases from the sixteenth century in which the same theme of dual allegiance was an issue. Further, Marshall's letter is not presented as an overt attack, but a systematic and itemized article of religious objection masked as a helpful way for Smith to make his beliefs known. The article states that it is giving Smith the opportunity to clarify his personal image against "certain conceptions which your fellow citizens attribute to you as a loyal and conscientious Roman Catholic, which in their minds are irreconcilable with that Constitution which as President you must support and defend, and with

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<sup>261</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 195.

the principles of civil and religious liberty on which American institutions are based.”<sup>262</sup> An example of a question concerning where Smith might stand when faith and politics conflict can be seen through this excerpt:

“It follows naturally on all this that there is a conflict between authoritative Roman Catholic claims on the one side and our constitutional law and principles on the other. Pope Leo XIII says: 'It is not lawful for the State, any more than for the individual, either to disregard all religious duties or to hold in equal favor different kinds of religion.' But the Constitution of the United States declares otherwise: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.’”<sup>263</sup>

The strategy of Smith’s response to Marshall’s assertions took place quickly, as *The Atlantic* demanded advanced copies of any letter before publication. Originally, Smith wanted to ignore Marshall’s letter. His advisor, the Jewish judge Joseph Proskauer convinced him that it’s placement in a national magazine and it’s well written quality forced a personal reply.<sup>264</sup> Smith’s lack of knowledge of canon law, or legalistic rhetoric in general, was a concern. In the end, it was decided that Proskauer would ghostwrite the response with the aid of Father Francis Duffy, a former military chaplain. Interestingly, the letter does not contain the words “Jesus” or “Christ,” with the word “Christian” only appearing in a direct quote. When it was finished, Smith added a few passages and signed his name to the response. Perhaps in Smith’s eyes the erudite article carefully placed in a national magazine would open lines of calm religious discourse that would put the issue to rest.

Smith’s article, entitled “Defense of Catholics in Public Office,” begins by stating that Smith would have liked to have kept the subject of his own piety out of the newsprint, and that

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<sup>262</sup> Charles C. Marshall, “An Open Letter to the Honorable Alfred E. Smith,” *The Atlantic*, April 1927.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

furthering discussion about his fitness for office would be an action against his vision of both Catholicism and what it means to be an American: “I should be a poor American and a poor Catholic alike if I injected religious discussion into a political campaign. Therefore I would ask you to accept this answer from me not as a candidate for any public office but as an American citizen....”<sup>265</sup> In this sense, Marshall opened the door and Smith’s reply was simply an effort to close it. He stated that he was not an attorney nor a theologian, and that what he learned of both theology and law came from his personal experience. This personal experience was paramount in the letter, for Smith’s reply was not intended to be a discussion of philosophy but a personal response against attacks on him personally. After stating that he had taken an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States nineteen times, Smith stated that he had never “known any conflict between [his] official duties and [his] religious belief.”<sup>266</sup> After having been given such trust by the people of New York, Smith asserted that he would have known of such a conflict between church and state by the nature of his duties. Through the use of his record of public service and accomplishments as governor, Smith asserted that support for items such as predominantly Protestant public schools proved his tolerance of all faiths.<sup>267</sup> Chastising Marshall for increasing the awareness of religious division around the nation, Smith asserted that young people would begin to question if “it is necessary to pay attention to religion at all” if the “bickering among our sects” continued.<sup>268</sup> The life and record of another American Catholic, the war hero Father Duffy of the 165th Regiment of World War I, was used to portray a deeply Catholic Americanism.

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<sup>264</sup> Curtis, “The Fundamental Faith of Every True American,” 527.

<sup>265</sup> Alfred E Smith, “Catholic and Patriot: Governor Smith Replies,” *The Atlantic*, May 1927.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*

With Smith's contribution to the letter finished, his companions began their defense. Proskauer would begin his counterargument, under the pseudonym of Alfred E. Smith, by showing the ways in which Marshall placed quotes from papal encyclicals and American Catholic bishops out of context: "you often divorce sentences from their context in such a way as to give them something other than their real meaning."<sup>269</sup> Repeated instances of "if you had read the whole of that article" occur, where Proskauer illuminates the ways in which Marshall deliberately took passages out of their historical context. Writing as Smith, Proskauer states that not every Catholic should be called to defend themselves against papal documents:

"By what right do you ask me to assume responsibility for every statement that may be made in any encyclical letter? ... These encyclicals are not articles of our faith.... You seem to think that Catholics must be all alike in mind and heart, as though they had been poured into and taken out of the same mold. You have no more right to ask me to defend as part of my faith every statement coming from a prelate than I should have to ask you to accept as an article of your religious faith every statement of an Episcopal bishop.... So little are these matters of the essence to my faith that I, a devout Catholic since childhood, never heard of them until I read your letter."<sup>270</sup>

In this statement one can see that Catholicism, to Smith, was not subject to an understanding of canon law but of one's allegiance to what he feels in his own heart. Institutional loyalty to the church did not mean loyalty to papal documents but to the legacy of the tradition believed to be handed down from Christ himself. To address the conflicts of church and state through an appeal to American Catholic leadership, Proskauer goes on to give thematic quotes from Cardinal William Henry O'Connell of the Diocese of Boston; Archbishop of the Diocese of

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid.

St. Paul and Minneapolis John Ireland and his successor, Archbishop Kevin Dowling; and Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore. Each of these individuals portrayed a Catholicism in allegiance to Americanism. This was a progressive trend within American Catholicism at the turn of the nineteenth century. As quoted in the letter by Smith, Archbishop Ireland would write that “both Americanism and Catholicism bow to the sway of personal conscience.”<sup>271</sup>

Proskauer’s next step was to undermine the logical reasoning presented by Marshall’s exposition of out-of-context quotations by doing something very interesting: comparing them to standard ecclesiastical documents of Marshall’s Episcopalian Church:

“The Catholic doctrine concedes; nay, maintains, that the State is coordinate with the Church and equally independent and supreme in its own distinct sphere. What is the Protestant position? The Articles of Religion of your Protestant Episcopal Church (XXXVII) declare: ‘The Power of the Civil Magistrate extendeth to all men, as well Clergy as Laity, in all things temporal; but hath no authority in things purely spiritual.’”<sup>272</sup>

This comparison would extend to the subject of annulments. It is shown in the letter how both churches do not recognize the spiritual validity of divorces granted by civil tribunals.<sup>273</sup> By showing the similarity of these doctrines, Proskauer asserts that both Catholics and Protestants alike are ordered by the dictates of their consciences. He brings forth Catholic and Protestant notions of allegiance to conscience. Interestingly, Proskauer paints a portrait of a uniform Protestant doctrine, though Marshall’s Episcopalian faith does not represent the faith or doctrines of other denominations. In generalizing these differing Protestant worldviews, Proskauer is asserting a similar generalization that was made of Catholicism: that all Catholics are alike in

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid.

thought on the issue of church and state. This is a generalization which Marshall could not refute, as he had made it himself. Finally, Smith through Proskauer defends himself against the assertion that American intervention into the internal affairs of Mexico, namely their religious freedom laws, would be commanded by the dictates of a Catholic conscience held by Smith. Carefully, Proskauer reiterates an American, non-interventionist attitude embellished with a Catholic calling to aid the oppressed.<sup>274</sup> It is this delicate juxtaposition that can be found throughout the document, careful not to usurp papal authority, but also cautious against stating anything undemocratic.

To end the letter of reply, Smith gives his “creed as an American Catholic,” a blend of both religious and political philosophy which could be understood by any layman. This creedal statement includes appeasements to all objections within Marshall’s letter and ends eloquently with the following line, a statement which Smith would use to attempt to both shame Protestants for causing such religious division but to also unify others who believed in a better political religious discourse:

“I believe in the common brotherhood of man under the common fatherhood of God. In this spirit I join with fellow Americans of all creeds in a fervent prayer that never again in this land will any public servant be challenged because of the faith in which he has tried to walk humbly with his God.”<sup>275</sup>

Institutional response occurred from the Democratic Party as well. Perhaps understanding his new leadership role, Franklin Delano Roosevelt defended Smith against internal attacks versus his religion from smaller members of the party during Smith’s nomination phase.<sup>276</sup> This

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<sup>273</sup> Ibid.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid.

<sup>276</sup> Moore, *A Catholic Runs For President*, 36.

represents an institutional response from internal attacks. This elitist view of tolerance was not shared by white Protestants in the South. Though the party was fractured because of Smith's faith, especially in the South, the party as a collective did fight back during the general election through its leadership. In fact, Smith appointed John J. Raskob, a Catholic, as Chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Raskob's zeal for his Catholic faith would place the party's position on Smith's faith not as one of minimization but one of defense. This is a change from previous Chairman Josephus Daniels, who would minimize the publicity of interaction by presidents with Catholics such as the pope.<sup>277</sup> Daniels would defend Smith, however, not as chairman but as the lead journalist for the Democratic Party.

“I summarize my creed as an American Catholic, I believe in the worship of God according to the faith and practice of the Roman Catholic Church, I recognize no power in the institutions of my Church to interfere with the operations of the Constitution of the United States or the enforcement of the law of the land, I believe in absolute freedom of conscience for all men and in equality of all churches, all sects, and all beliefs before the law as a matter of right and not as a matter of favor, I believe in the absolute separation of Church and State and in the strict enforcement of the provisions of the Constitution that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”<sup>278</sup>

The necessity of this creedal statement, delivered by Smith in response to Marshall's set of religious objections, lends history a lesson. Though Smith would never care to study complex Catholic papal documents, he would have to defend himself against encyclicals, though he could not spell the word encyclical itself. This enmity against Smith for his faith was a conflict with his

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>278</sup> Smith, “Catholic and Patriot”

identity as a Catholic, not as a resistance on Christological or lofty theological grounds. This religious objection to Catholic associations would be a formidable attack from Protestants with zeal far greater than Taft's opponents. The election of 1928 would bring conflicting visions for America's religious landscape to the forefront of the American mind and place religion not as an ancillary issue but an issue that would design the way in which many voters would cast their ballot. To be sure, most scholars assert that Smith would not have won the presidency even if he was a Methodist, Baptist, or Presbyterian. Even if voters would have granted Smith the entire former Confederacy, plus his original wins in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, Smith would have lost the presidential contest to Herbert Hoover by 233 electoral votes.

Praying for the nomination of Smith in 1927, American political journalist Louis Jaffe wrote that Smith's nomination would unite a party that had "lost its Jeffersonian bearings and has wandered off in a wilderness of beadleism and sectarianism, of classes and cliques."<sup>279</sup> Jaffe would state that "prohibition must be removed as an obfuscatory influence in the Democratic polity, religion must be banished as a political determinant, and the Solid South must be unfrozen and made politically fluid", and Smith's election would "serve these ends."<sup>280</sup> None of these realities would come true; it appears that these hopes would be dashed due to the unbearable strength of prejudice.

Smith's entire campaign, and the ramifications for his loss, demonstrates the continuation of religious bias in the American electorate during the Progressive Era. To be sure, politicians of religious minorities at all levels faced objections such as these and fought back for a fair trial within their respective campaigns. The result of Smith's election and the way in which questions were handled allowed the American electorate to view their religious landscape in a new light,

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<sup>279</sup> Jaffe, Louis I. "The Democracy and Al Smith." *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 3, no. 3 (1927): 336.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid*, 336.



and gave scholars and pious citizens alike new dimensions to view the complex relationships between Catholics and the state. Finally, Smith's defeat informs the political scientist by portraying the potency of religion in Progressive Era campaigns, and places religion as a subject of electoral socio-political choice in the forefront, and not as a side issue. Religious visions for a moral leader would influence the ballot box in extraordinary ways, strengthening the Protestant monolith's staying power, a force which would construct a stained glass ceiling and control the American electorate for the next three decades.

## CONCLUSION: THE STAINED GLASS CEILING

Social barriers and division in America are common topics of contemporary study, and the discussion of these problems is often deemed useful for both academia and social reform. The topic of religion in social discourse, however, is not often given precedence. Indeed, when one lists issues of social prejudice in America, many often place discrimination by faith at the end of such a list, and the notion which comes to mind is of individual preference against non-Christian religions such as Islam. Anti-Catholicism, a potent force of bigotry which has existed throughout America's history, is in need of further consideration. No better example of the potent force of anti-Catholicism can be found than in Alfred E. Smith's campaign, a campaign issue foreshadowed by the electoral attacks against William H. Taft for simply being sympathetic to Catholics. After careful observation, one can conclude that religious objection was an extremely powerful force in Progressive Era politics, and that candidates were forced to form response strategies which would individually change to fit increasing religious intolerance. The ability to remain silent on the religious issue, utilized by Taft, was not available for the Catholic Governor of New York. Media outlets became increasingly lenient in the publication of discriminatory articles, and this process would affect the way in which candidates were portrayed by both local and national newspapers. Circulars filled with religious rhetoric would enter mailboxes and church bulletins, and the issue of a candidate's religion, able to be ignored or avoided in 1908, would be inescapable just two decades later. The two decade span would also contain an increase in the use of organizational and institutional media against candidates of minority faith, as well as a general increase in the national salience of the tenets of a candidate's respective tradition. One other significant change within the span of the two elections was the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment which granted suffrage to women. After gaining the

right to vote, women effectively doubled the available votership. This is significant as women have been shown to have “higher levels of religiosity” than men within the Christian spectrum and are often the lay leaders within their religious communities in the United States.<sup>281</sup>

For decades the Protestant monolith carefully constructed a stained glass ceiling limiting the ascension of any religious minority coveting the nation’s highest office. Symbolically, this barrier was ornately constructed using pieces of colored glass which represent aspects of American life and their respective spheres. By passing laws that discriminated against religious minorities, the legal and political sphere was compromised. By disallowing minority assimilation into American culture, the artisans fused nativism, xenophobia, racism, ethnocentrism, and Protestant domination of government to create an obstruction for any religious minority attempting to achieve success and social acclaim in the Progressive Era. Both Theodore Roosevelt and Alfred E. Smith shined a light through this glass ceiling revealing it to the public in an attempt to decrease religious intolerance. With the light of candidate response beaming through, the American public could see the ceiling’s blemished colors.

The two subjects of study within this thesis provide evidence of the way in which religious intolerance affected the American landscape during the Progressive Era. Political actions caused many ministers and congregants to tie civic ideology to faith and to engage in a theological and doctrinal political discourse. Seeds of resentment towards “unorthodox” faiths such as Unitarianism and Catholicism were nurtured by ethnocentric and nativist Protestant attacks. Jews are mentioned as well, but only in passing. Anti-semitism does not seem to be a potent force in these religious objections due to the perceived distance of Judaism from the subjects of study. Each occasion of attack provided unity through the formation of a common

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<sup>281</sup> Landon Schnabel, “How Religious Are American Women and Men? Gender Differences and Similarities,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 54, no. 3 (November 17, 2015), 1.

enemy for a fracturing Protestant composite which was dividing over novel fundamentalist theology and social issues such as Darwinism. Smith's election provides history with a "worst case" scenario which portrays the Protestant obsession of matters concerning church and state, a situation quite ironic due to the influence of a *de facto* Protestant controlled government which did not allow for much inclusion, even the inclusion of female Protestants who had achieved the right to vote.

The lack of theological specificity within circulars filled with religious rhetoric illustrates a new understanding of religious objection: that candidates are objected to based on perceived untrustworthiness and un-Americanism due to the ostracized nature of their faith traditions. By asserting that Catholicism and Unitarianism were part of the "other," Protestants were able to bring objection and its purposes into the minds of the common American who had no experience with either faith. The common voter would not have understood complex theological disagreements, but could identify with an "us versus them" rhetoric legitimated by many components of the social establishment. The force of religious protestation was so embedded in the conservative Protestant lifestyle that it was able to overcome the greatest social barrier in the United States: race. As shown in the chapter discussing the election of 1908, an African Methodist Episcopal bishop called for the election of Democrat William Jennings Bryan. This is a significant moment in the progression of religious objection during the election because it shows a black Protestant ecclesiastic authority supporting the Democratic Party. Though Bryan was not a vehement racist, the dominant political activity within African American churches at the time was a response to Jim Crow legislation, a systematic prejudice perpetrated by the Democratic Party.<sup>282</sup> After understanding the power of religious protestation, one must

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<sup>282</sup> Noll, *God & Race*, 93.

understand its essence. Ascertaining the essence of religious objection and examining political issues that become religiously charged is quite complicated. Throughout the scope of this research, a few qualities of religious objection within the scope of Progressive Era elections have become clear. Though not much historical scholarship has been produced on the intrinsic nature of religious protestation, much can be concluded after a careful analysis of occurrences of Protestant objection throughout the Progressive Era.

Many platform issues can be pronounced with religious rhetoric even if those issues do not have a deep root of moral or religious themes. An example of this would be bimetallism, a complex issue dealing with precious metal values that was spiritualized by William Jennings Bryan in his “Cross of Gold” speech. However, these complex issues, though delivered with religious rhetoric and allusions to a higher power, are never used as instruments of opposition towards another candidate or party; they do not contain a negative component or delivery. They are used to advance and build support for one’s own party platform issues. Other complicated issues have passive resistance and immunity to religious infusion, such as complex economic sanctions.

For an issue to be used as a conduit for religious or moral objection, a few factors must be present. First, the issue must be well articulated and not easily compared to the position of another party or candidate. Second, the issue must be founded in social or class-based division, such as party division or ethnic division, and third, the issue must be construed to be defying a certain set of morals or religious tenets. Examples of issues containing these factors are Prohibition and abortion.

The religious intolerance of the Progressive Era is not a static force that continued throughout time, though this intolerance had implications for the future. After the election of

1928, transformations took place within the American religious landscape. The Protestant monolith began to fracture even more. Slowly by means of immigration, greater assimilation into the common culture, participation in American war efforts, and social activism; anti-Catholicism would lose potency. This also occurred indirectly through Protestant supported “Americanization” programs in the 1920’s and 1930’s to assimilate the “foreign born” into society.<sup>283</sup> Once Catholics became more “American” in the eyes of society, some features of the immigrant stereotype could no longer be utilized for hate. In other terms, one could no longer hold xenophobic views of Catholics because they were becoming more participatory in American democracy, and in some cases, more participatory than Protestants. This increased participation would pave the way for another election which would test the tensile strength of the stained glass ceiling: the election of 1960.

When Catholic U.S. Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy announced that he was running for the Oval Office on January 2nd, 1960, the nation was not surprised. However, those who thought that anti-Catholic injunctions against candidates for the nation’s highest office were a pre-war phenomenon were quickly proved wrong. Without going into detail about attacks against Kennedy for his faith, a few distinctions should be made. During an initial Gallup poll, 28% of Americans stated that they would not vote for a well qualified Catholic.<sup>284</sup> Though a much more muted opposition than previously incalculable prejudice, this reality haunted the Kennedy campaign and was termed by historian Shaun A. Casey as the “Ghost of Al Smith.”<sup>285</sup> During what Casey describes as “guerrilla warfare” in the media between conservative evangelicals and

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<sup>283</sup> Dolan, *In Search of an American Catholicism*, 141.

<sup>284</sup> Shaun A Casey, *The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon, 1960* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 25.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Kennedy, the soon to be President Kennedy fended off numerous accusations of Vatican manipulation by stating his affirmation of the separation of church and state. However, just as Smith's response fell on deaf ears, any response from a Catholic public official of the sort was "overwhelmed and nullif[ied]" by the "power of the hierarchy."<sup>286</sup> These attacks forced a greater response by Kennedy, who would counter these claims with a speech on September 12th, 1960 to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, where he would state that he believed "in an America where someday religious intolerance may end" and where he would show religious bigotry for what it was by comparing it to a "finger of suspicion" pointed at Jews and Quakers earlier in the nation's history.<sup>287</sup> This speech was needed, and was part of a system of campaign measures which would grant Kennedy the office of Chief Executive by just .17% of the popular vote. In a sense, this election forced American liberals to "extend the principle of religious freedom to American Catholics."<sup>288</sup>

Catholics and other religious minorities would continue to grow in political and social power in the twentieth century, and this growth would be seen through the nomination of many individuals of religious minority by major parties in the United States. Within sixty years after the election of President Kennedy, the Democratic and Republican parties would nominate five individuals of religious minority as their presidential candidate, including Greek Orthodox Michael Dukakis, Catholic John Kerry and Mormon Mitt Romney. It is notable, however, that John Kennedy is also the last president of religious minority. Being part of the Protestant establishment, however, does not excuse an individual from ridicule. Each and every president

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid, 134.

<sup>287</sup> Kennedy, John F. "Address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association," September 12, 1960.

<sup>288</sup> Thomas J Carty, *A Catholic in the White House?: Religion, Politics, and John F. Kennedy's Presidential Campaign*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 68.

has been the recipient of questioning and protest by religious groups simply due to the embedded nature of religion in America's social and political structure. For example, in the wake of the Monica Lewenski scandal, the President of the Southern Baptist Convention, Paige Patterson, as well as several other clergymen of the denomination, called for Baptist President Bill Clinton to step down from office.<sup>289</sup> These realities, as well as the rich history of American religious nationalism examined by this thesis, reveal much about the legacy of religious intolerance in American politics. This intolerance must be discussed in contemporary society if it is ever to be overcome.

Thoughts of injustice against religious groups seem to conjure images of the Middle East where Sunnis and Shiites fight sectarian battles, or images of the Holocaust where countless adherents of Judaism met horrible ends. Religious nationalism seems to be present in the American mind only in scenes surrounded by sand dunes. Though these images are real and have meaning, a discussion of contemporary American religious injustice must take place. Though no law today prohibits a Catholic or a Jew from office, media stereotypes of these individuals and others persist today. At times it seems as if overzealous members of some religious communities sacrifice their moral ideals for political or social gain. In his book *One Nation Under God?* historian Mark Noll asserts that at times Christians have "sold their faith captive to the intense political needs of the moment."<sup>290</sup> Individually, religious communities can alleviate this stereotyping and polarization by being conscious of their actions and giving more thought to the pluralistic values which embody American society today while maintaining their religious values. Issues of religious freedom are arguably why the first colonists made that daring voyage

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<sup>289</sup> Niebuhr, Gustav. "Testing of a President: the Clergy; Clinton Should Resign, 2 Religious Leaders Say." *The New York Times*, September 11, 1998.

<sup>290</sup> Noll, *One Nation*, 148.



to New England, to remove themselves from an unjust society. These issues still exist today. The burden of religious intolerance did not end with the election of 1960. Many believe that Kennedy's election shattered the stained glass ceiling, scattering its glass panels of assorted social barriers and colors once and for all. On the contrary, Kennedy created a small hole through which to pass alone that weakened the translucent colored glass. Through the use of greater religious discourse, pious Americans can shatter this stained glass ceiling once and for all by working ardently toward compassionate inclusion, and by praying even harder for greater religious tolerance.

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