

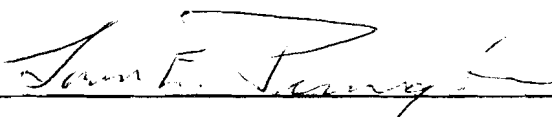
AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Craig A. Balden for the Master of Arts Degree

in History presented on May 17, 1986

Title: CRUSADERS ON CAMPAIGN:

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1984

Abstract approved: 

During the presidential campaign of 1984 religion became a topic of national debate. The issues which emerged included abortion, prayer in public schools, the imposition of religious tests, anti-Semitism, and a controversy regarding the relationship between religion and politics. These issues drew forth a variety of responses from the American religious community, the candidates of both parties, and a large number of concerned citizens.

This thesis describes the events and the differing perspectives which contributed to the issues mentioned above. Voting statistics are also analyzed to determine how religion affected the voting habits of Americans.

The source material for this work has been taken primarily

from newspapers and periodicals written during the campaign. The first chapter, a review of religious issues in previous presidential campaigns, was written with the aid of secondary sources.

Conclusions have been drawn sparingly in the writing of this thesis. Instead, the reader is invited to weigh the actions and viewpoints of those involved in the debate. Each reader, no doubt, will arrive at his or her own conclusion regarding the religious issues in the presidential campaign of 1984.

CRUSADERS ON CAMPAIGN:

RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN OF 1984

A Thesis

Presented to

the Division of Social Sciences

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

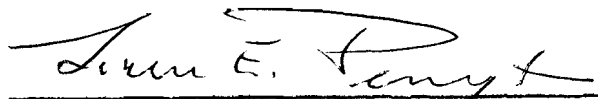
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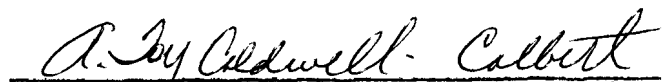
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INTRODUCTION

The mingling of religion with politics has been one of the more prominent themes in the history of our civilization. From Milvian Bridge to Montgomery, Alabama, religion has found its way into the political process on numerous occasions. There is, of course, some argument as to whether this sort of influence has been for the better or for the worse. From time to time this topic generates considerable debate. The phenomenon itself, however, continues.

In America, we have probably been fortunate that our national leaders have not been selected by priests, soothsayers, or medicine men. The electoral process may have its problems, but it certainly is an improvement when compared to the methods mentioned above. Religious ideals and prejudices, though, have occasionally figured into the choosing of the man who would be president. And more than a few candidates for that office have directed appeals to religious sentiment.

The presidential campaign of 1984 featured several issues which focused on religion. While it would be difficult to portray religion as the dominant issue in 1984, it would be harder still to ignore the impact of religion upon this particular campaign.

The purpose of this work is to examine those issues which

brought religion into the political life of the nation in 1984.
It was a year when candidates, and crusaders, went on campaign.

CHAPTER I

THE SPIRIT OF ELECTIONS PAST

Before turning to the events of 1984, it might prove beneficial to examine the role of religion in previous presidential campaigns. Not every campaign can boast of having a religious issue. Yet, as we shall see, more than a few votes have been cast with religious convictions in mind.

The story is told of a woman who thought it necessary to hide her Bible when she learned of Thomas Jefferson's victory in 1800. The Federalists, along with several men of the cloth, had prophesied a bloody persecution if the Virginian were to win.¹ One minister offered this stern exhortation: "Christians . . . as you value eternity, vote against this infidel."² The issue, of course, was Jefferson's heterodoxy, which was construed as atheism, or worse. The clergy had made the choice plain. America was to have "God and a religious president," or "Jefferson . . . and no God."³

As it turned out, other issues provided Jefferson with the winning margin in 1800. Among these was the reaction to the Alien and Sedition Acts plus the rift between Hamilton and Adams. Happily, the predictions of terror never materialized.⁴

Religion did not become a significant part of a presidential

election again until a new Republican party ran its first candidate in 1856. John C. Fremont, the pathfinder of the West, faced the accusation of being a Roman Catholic. The pamphleteers had a heyday with titles such as Colonel Fremont's Religious History and Fremont's Romanism Established. Although he did his best to convince Americans that he was actually Episcopalian, he could not erase the fact that he had been married in a Catholic ceremony. In 1856, that alone was enough to seriously harm any candidate for president.⁵

In the Grover Cleveland-James G. Blaine contest of 1884 a couple of issues drew forth some measure of religious response. Cleveland's premarital relationship with a woman created a stir among clergymen. One minister, after looking into the affair, announced that: "Investigations disclose still more proof of debaucheries too horrible to relate and too vile to be readily believed. For many years, days devoted to business have been followed by nights of sin."⁶ Cleveland, though, admitted that the affair had occurred, and then managed to sidestep the issue. His opponent was not so fortunate. Blaine's chance for victory was seriously impaired shortly before the election by an overzealous protestant clergyman. The clergyman in question thought he was doing Blaine a favor when he introduced the candidate and then denounced the opposition as being the party of "Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion."⁷ Blaine's subsequent failure to distance himself from the remark cost him thousands of Irish votes in the always important state of New York. Thus, while Fremont was hurt by anti-catholic sentiment in 1856, Blaine was harmed by his anti-catholic supporters in 1884.⁸

Two candidates in American presidential campaign history were especially adept at identifying themselves with religious ideals. William Jennings Bryan delivered one of the most rousing speeches ever heard when he addressed the Democratic Convention in Chicago (1896). "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold," he declared.⁹ The real issue was Free Silver, but the imagery was certain to have a religious appeal. His upcoming campaign was virtually a national revival. "It was a fanaticism like the Crusades," wrote William Allen White.¹⁰ Bryan's personal charisma was recalled by a man who was caught up in the excitement of that election year: "Bryan was a young David with his sling, who had come to slay the giants that oppressed the people . . . they felt that a new day had come and, with it, a new leader . . . clean of limb, clean of heart, and clean of mind."¹¹

Theodore Roosevelt made use of the same emotions when he ran on the Progressive Party ticket in 1912. He referred to his own principles as a "Confession of Faith," and his party's platform as a "Covenant with the People." He told his supporters that, "Our cause is based on the eternal principle of righteousness. . . . We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord."¹²

There was one election in which religion was clearly a major issue. The year was 1928. The candidate was Al Smith, the first Catholic to run for president. As one writer observed, the campaign had "cruel and savage overtones."¹³ Once again, anti-catholic feeling was demonstrated when

fiery crosses were placed along Smith's campaign route. The candidate could look out his train window and see them burning in the fields. The crosses were the handiwork of the Ku Klux Klan, but much of Smith's opposition came from men dressed in clerical black. One rousing sermon was entitled, "Al Smith and the Forces of Hell."¹⁴ Like the campaign of 1800, dire predictions were circulating. Some contended that if Smith were to win, all protestant marriages would be annulled. Others claimed that the Pope was waiting, with bags already packed, to come and live in Washington. The most bizarre tale had it that Smith would extend Manhattan's Holland Tunnel to the Vatican.¹⁵ The mindlessness of many voters was reflected in a conversation Smith had with a Southern woman after his defeat. Smith was informed by the woman that she held him in high esteem, but had voted against him because of his religion. Smith then questioned her about a local Catholic candidate for whom she had voted. Her response was, "Oh yes, I voted for him; but he is an Irish Catholic while you are a Roman Catholic."¹⁶

The election of 1960 produced a happier result for another Catholic presidential candidate. Kennedy won, but the same issue was brought to life again. During the campaign a group of ministers led by Norman Vincent Peale issued a statement. The clergymen contended that a Catholic president would be a potential problem for the nation because his loyalties might be divided between Washington and Rome.¹⁷ To clear the air, Kennedy addressed the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. He told the ministers at that gathering: "I do not speak for my church on public matters—and the church does not speak for

me."¹⁸ At the same time other clergymen of various backgrounds rose up on Kennedy's behalf. These churchmen also issued a statement in which they denounced their colleagues for trying to make Kennedy's religion a part of the campaign.¹⁹ A more grass roots opposition to Kennedy's candidacy continued, however, and the voting statistics proved that many Americans voted their religion in 1960.²⁰

The famed pollster, George Gallup, referred to 1976 as the "year of the evangelical."²¹ In that election both candidates professed to be evangelical christians. Jimmy Carter was able to make effective use of his claim to being "born again."²² He was especially popular among Blacks and often received glowing recommendations from Black clergymen.²³ A minor issue developed when Playboy printed an interview in which Carter outlined his religious views on sex. "I've looked on a lot of women with lust," he confided.²⁴ The point he was trying to make was that he did not condemn others for engaging in immorality. As one might guess, some ministers were perturbed by Carter's choice of a forum, not to mention his candid admission. The opposition made the most of the incident by portraying Gerald Ford as a more wholesome individual, complete with ministerial endorsements.²⁵

To some extent, the 1980 campaign foreshadowed the events which were to occur in 1984. The 1980 election featured the rise of a group known as the Religious Right. This group became quite outspoken on the whole range of political issues. Religious ideals determined the positions taken by this loosely knitted assemblage.²⁶ The Republican Party managed to gain

the support of the Religious Right by making an appeal to "traditional values." For many, this translated into the call for a reestablishment of religious values and standards in American society.²⁷ Religion, though, was not a major issue in 1980. Economic problems and international crises were the primary concerns for a majority of the electorate.²⁸

Looking back, it is clear that religion has often been an issue, though never the overriding issue. The same was true of the 1984 campaign. The religious issues raised in 1984, however, did give the campaign something of a unique character. It was not that the issues raised had never been dealt with before. Generally speaking, they had been. The uniqueness of 1984 was manifested in the convergence of so many different religious issues upon a single campaign.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

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CHAPTER II

JESSE JACKSON FOR PRESIDENT

Our time has come! . . . From slave ship to championship—our time has come! . . . From outhouse to White House—our time has come! . . . From disgrace to amazing grace—our time has come!¹

With these words Jesse Jackson announced his 1984 bid for the Presidency of the United States of America. His campaign was to be conducted much in the same tradition as those of William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt, but with one outstanding exception. While Bryan and Roosevelt were politicians appealing to religious ideals, the Reverend Jesse Louis Jackson vaulted from the pulpit into the political arena.

Jackson's entrance into politics was no strange thing in the eyes of the Black community. Black churches had made a habit of addressing political issues which concerned the race as a whole. Several Black clergymen had heeded the call of professional politics. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Andrew Young, Walter Fauntroy, and of course, Jesse Jackson, all followed this pattern.² As a professor at New York Theological Seminary observed: "Many Black leaders have cut their teeth politically in the church."³

But for Blacks desirous of entering politics church support was not merely a matter of expediency. It was a necessity.

"Before the Black politician is welcomed to the court house or to city hall, he has to be welcomed to the Black church," one prominent Black pastor asserted.⁴ Another was quoted as saying that, "No Black politician of note can say he or she has been elected without the Black church."⁵

Jackson was aware that the same rule applied to his campaign. If he was to get anywhere he would need the support of the Black churches. This he received. The churches provided Jackson with a forum, facilities, volunteers, funds, and most importantly, with an organizational network capable of conducting a national political campaign.⁶

Outside the Black community a few voices objected to Jackson's employment of the churches for a political end. An editorial in the Jesuit publication, America, February 1984, noted that several Black clergymen, churches, even entire denominations, had placed themselves completely at Jackson's disposal. The writer went on to say: "For churches, especially at the national level, collectively to endorse Presidential candidates and use church funds to support them raises a different set of questions than the phenomenon of individual ministers running for office."⁷ The editorial concluded that "Black churchmen as individuals can support any candidate they please, but institutional support should be avoided."⁸

Other observers reported on Jackson's evangelical style of voter registration. His appeals for registrants often ended with what amounted to an altar call: "If you're not a registered voter, stand up and come down front. We're going to set you free today."⁹ Sometimes he would lead voters directly from the church to the polls.¹⁰ There were apparently a few Blacks

who were concerned about Jackson's merging of the spiritual and temporal. One Black minister confided, "I'm just afraid this politician stuff is going to interfere with his higher calling."¹¹ For the most part, though, Jackson's particular mode of campaigning generated only minor criticism.

A different sort of religious issue, however, eventually overtook Jesse Jackson. The issue centered around his attitudes toward Jews. For some time prior to his announcement that he was a presidential candidate, Jews had been wary of Jackson. On numerous occasions he had made comments which were not received kindly by the Jewish community. He had once attributed Nixon's callousness toward the poor to the Jewish influence of his chief advisors. He had claimed that "Jewish-controlled industries, more than others, keep Blacks out."¹² He had also charged that both the media and the banks were dominated by Jews.¹³ If all this wasn't enough, there was always the unforgettable memory of Jackson being photographed in an embrace with Yasir Arafat.¹⁴ As his 1984 campaign got underway, Jackson gave additional ammunition to his critics when it became known that he had referred to Jews as "hymies" and New York as "hymietown." Jackson made these remarks while talking with a couple of Black reporters at National Airport in Washington toward the end of January. "Let's talk Black talk," Jackson began.¹⁵ In the conversation that followed he made the comments about "hymies" that soon began to haunt his campaign.¹⁶

The account of the conversation at National Airport surfaced a few weeks later when one of the reporters, Milton Coleman of the Washington Post, allowed one of his colleagues

to make reference to the remarks in an article dealing with Jackson's ties to the Arab world.¹⁷ Jackson's initial response was that he had "no recollection" of having made the comments and felt no need to make any apologies. Jewish groups, though, did not accept Jackson's story. As they began to fault the candidate, tension began to mount. Jackson said publicly that he was being "hounded" by Jews.¹⁸

The matter simmered for a few weeks until Jackson visited a synagogue in New Hampshire just before that state's primary. There he confessed that "In private talks we sometimes let our guard down and become thoughtless." He continued, "It was not in a spirit of meanness, but an off-color remark having no bearing on religion or politics. However innocent and unintended, it was insensitive and wrong."¹⁹

At this point the issue might well have subsided. But about the time Jackson was apologizing in New Hampshire, the entire affair began to take an ominous turn. Another Black minister attempting to defend Jackson started directing fiery comments at the Jews. This individual was the Reverend Louis Farrakhan. Farrakhan was the leader of a Black Muslim group known as the Nation of Islam. He had been a strong supporter of Jackson and had often appeared with the candidate at campaign stops. Jackson had even referred to Farrakhan as his "surrogate."²⁰

Prior to Farrakhan's entrance into the affair it could be argued that the matter at hand was entirely one of racial tension. Jackson had made no disparaging remarks about Judaism. In New Hampshire he had been careful to say that his "hymie" gaffe had no religious bearing. But with Farrakhan,

a religious dimension was added to the already difficult racial strain.

Farrakhan began by addressing the Jews in this manner: "I say to the Jewish people, who may not like our brother, it is not Jesse Jackson that you're attacking. When you attack him, you attack the millions who are lining up with him. If you harm this brother, I warn you in the name of Allah, that will be the last one you do harm."²¹ Reporter Milton Coleman also became the object of some very unpleasant sentiments for his part in the embroilment. Farrakhan likened him to Judas and then said, "we're going to make an example of Milton Coleman." Outlining his plan of action, Farrakhan continued: "What do [we] intend to do to Mr. Coleman? At this point, no physical harm. For now, I'm going to try to get every church in Washington D.C., to put him out. Put him out. Whenever he hits the door, tell him he's not wanted. If he brings his wife she can come in if she leaves him. But if she won't leave him, then you go to hell with your husband. One day soon we will punish you with death. You're saying, when is that? In sufficient time."²²

When Farrakhan's statements concerning the Jews and Coleman hit the press many Americans were stunned. But instead of responding directly to Farrakhan, the critics chose to go after Jackson. The burden of bigotry was placed on the candidate's shoulders.

At first, Jackson countered, "I cannot assume responsibility for every statement made by a friend or supporter of mine."²³ Jackson, however, began to distance himself from Farrakhan when the latter unleashed a new torrent of venom: ". . . the Jews

don't like Farrakhan, so they call me Hitler. Well, that's a good name. Hitler was a very great man. He rose up Germany from the ashes. . . . Now, I'm not proud of Hitler's evils against Jewish people. But that's a matter of record. He rose up Germany from nothing. Well, in a sense you could say there's a similarity in that we're rising our people up from nothing. But don't compare me with your wicked killers."²⁴

After learning of this statement Jackson said, "I find nothing great about Hitler and everything about him despicable."²⁵ But Jackson refused to accommodate those who were insisting that he renounce Farrakhan's support.²⁶

The critics, on their part, became more insistent. Mayor Edward Koch of New York remarked: "Jesse Jackson, if he doesn't repudiate him, he should get out of the race himself."²⁷ The leaders of several Jewish organizations said the same.²⁸ At the same time the Republicans made an attempt to discredit all of the Democratic candidates for not strenuously condemning Farrakhan. Vice President Bush went before a Jewish group and said, ". . . as shocking as I find Reverend Jackson's behavior, I cannot understand why Walter Mondale and Gary Hart have not continued to speak out loudly and clearly against this."²⁹ Actually, Mondale and Hart had expressed criticism. They were, however, also concerned about alienating Jackson supporters.³⁰

For the Democrats, this was the agonizing feature of the entire affair. The alienation of Black support would mean virtual suicide in November. Conversely, the continuing statements by Farrakhan might mean the defection of many Jews at the polls. Since both groups traditionally voted Democratic, the situation had the potential of creating a division within the

ranks of the Party itself. The Canadian magazine, Macleans, referred to this as "the Democrats' dilemma."³¹

Farrakhan's crowning remarks came in June, a month before the Convention was to begin in San Francisco. While addressing his congregation in Chicago he touched on his attitudes toward Israel and Judaism: "Now that nation called Israel never has had any peace in forty years and she will never have any peace, because there can be no peace structured on injustice, lying, and deceit, and using the name of God to shield your dirty religion under His holy and righteous name."³² Some reporters claimed that Farrakhan used the word "gutter" instead of "dirty" in this particular speech. Farrakhan vehemently denied this. His clarification, though, scarcely altered the impact of the statement.³³

A record album produced by Farrakhan appeared on the market as this last flurry hit the news stands. The recording was a compilation of Farrakhan speeches praising Jesse Jackson. On the front was a picture of the two ministers. The recording was entitled "Our Time Has Come."³⁴

Jackson was on a visit to Central America when Farrakhan made the "dirty religion" speech. Reporters managed to catch up with him in Havana. He was asked for his reaction to Farrakhan's tirade. "I have no reaction," he said. "In America people have freedom of speech. They can say what they want to about what they want to."³⁵

Suddenly, Jackson became the object of unprecedented criticism. Mondale characterized Farrakhan's words as "venomous, bigoted, and obscene." He then added, "It is crucial that all of us, including the Reverend Jackson, repudiate

Farrakhan."³⁶ Another Democratic official wrote that "Jackson's silence stuns the heart and diminishes his noble cause."³⁷ Columnist Jimmy Breslin wondered if Jackson might be afraid that Farrakhan would harm him physically following a denouncement.³⁸

Jackson, now in Managua, finally issued a statement: "I find such statements or comments to be reprehensible and morally indefensible. I disavow such comments and thoughts. I am a Judeo-Christian and the roots of my faith run deep in the Judeo-Christian tradition. . . . I will not permit Minister Farrakhan's words, wittingly or unwittingly to divide the Democratic Party. Neither anti-Semitism nor anti-Black statements have any place in our party."³⁹

Many applauded Jackson for his action. Mondale remarked, "Reverend Jackson has made a good statement, for which I commended him."⁴⁰ A spokesman for the American Jewish Committee said that Jackson "did what needed to be done."⁴¹ Others, though, were far less congratulatory. Nathan Perlmutter, chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, stated flatly that "Jesse Jackson's problem with Jews is bigger than Mr. Farrakhan."⁴² Macleans spoke of "Jesse Jackson's flawed crusade," and his repudiation of Farrakhan as merely a "qualified disclaimer."⁴³ Richard Cohen called Jackson's statement a "minimal effort." He then lamented, "We applauded him for whispering when he should be condemned for not yelling."⁴⁴

More than a few Blacks were offended at the manner in which Jackson had been cornered. An executive member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference wrote: "We watched as minister Louis Farrakhan was scathingly criticized and as the pressure mounted for one Black man, held responsible for

the words of another, to denounce him. . . . We were watching those so-called . . . liberals enjoying themselves as they did their divide-and-conquer routine with Jackson and Farrakhan."⁴⁵ Even at the convention, most of the Jackson delegates said that they were "favorably impressed" with Farrakhan. One of these delegates, an attorney from Virginia, commented: "I like him. He represents a group of Americans who need to speak out. I don't agree with everything he says, but I respect him."⁴⁶

Farrakhan's statements didn't change much after Jackson cabled the message from Managua. When the Senate voted to condemn his anti-Semitic rhetoric, he asked: "What kind of power does this small minority of Jews hold over the government that the Senate would call an emergency session to denounce me?"⁴⁷ He concluded by saying, "I don't think I owe anyone any apology."⁴⁸

It was a different sort of minister who addressed the Democratic Convention in 1984. "Tonight, we come together bound by our faith in a mighty God," Jackson began. "If in my low moments, in word, deed, or attitude, through some error of temper, taste, or tone, I have caused anyone discomfort, created pain, or revived someone's fears, that was not my truest self. . . . Charge it to my head, and not to my heart. My head is so limited in its finitude; my heart is boundless in its love for the human family. I am not a perfect servant. I am a public servant. As I develop and serve, be patient. God is not finished with me yet."⁴⁹

The people gathered in the convention hall that night saw a man bare his soul. Again, they heard the words, "Our time has come. Our time has come."⁵⁰ Unfortunately, though,

the Farrakhan affair had given many Americans cause to wonder whose time had come.

NOTES

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CHAPTER III

FERRARO'S INFERNO

While Jesse Jackson was attempting to calm the storm he had created between himself and the Jews, another issue involving religion began to appear in the campaign. The dawning controversy pitted several influential Roman Catholic clergymen against a group of equally influential Roman Catholic politicians. The issue was abortion.

Abortion had become a difficult subject for several reasons. A major part of this difficulty was the wide range of perspectives on abortion. For some, it was primarily a women's rights issue. For others it was a human rights issue. Others viewed it as a private moral issue. Some looked upon abortion as a constitutional issue. Still others recognized it as a religious issue. Such a variety of vantage points had made abortion a passionately debated topic for some time. Adding to the complication was the issue's virtual immunity to compromise. One writer noted, ". . . as a woman cannot be a little bit pregnant, neither can her fetus be a little bit aborted."¹

The Roman Catholic Church considered abortion to be the destruction of human life. The Second Vatican Council referred to it as an "abominable" crime. The Church, therefore,

urged the faithful to oppose abortion.²

In 1984, this particular issue posed a unique problem for politicians who also happened to be Roman Catholic. Should they allow their religious beliefs to influence their political stance on abortion? Or should they separate their religious ideals from their political position? During the course of the campaign several politicians were forced to confront questions of this nature.

The opening salvo was fired on June 24 when the Archbishop of New York, John O'Connor, made the following comment: "I don't see how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion."³ O'Connor's statement drew an intense response from New York's Governor, Mario Cuomo. Cuomo, also a Catholic, accused the bishop of taking a partisan political position. He retorted, "Now you have the Archbishop of New York saying that no Catholic can vote for Ed Koch, no Catholic can vote for Jay Goldin, for Carol Bellamy, nor for Pat Moynihan or Mario Cuomo—anybody who disagrees with him on abortion."⁴

O'Connor replied that the Governor had misunderstood his comment. He maintained that he had no intention of telling people how they should vote. "As Archbishop of New York it is neither my responsibility nor my desire to evaluate the qualifications of any individuals of any political party for any public office." O'Connor continued, "My sole responsibility is to present as clearly as I can the formal, official teaching of the Catholic Church. I leave to those interested in such teachings whether or not the public statements of officeholders and candidates accord with this teaching."⁵

Cuomo expressed pleasure when learning of the bishop's clarification. "I'll accept I misunderstood it," he said.⁶ He added that if bishops were to tell their flocks how to vote, the results would be detrimental to both politics and Catholics. At the same time, though, he encouraged further discussion on the roles of religion and politics. He ventured, "We should talk a lot about religion and politics. We've run away from it."⁷

Several observers praised Cuomo for speaking out against the Archbishop. The syndicated columnist, Mary McGrory, commended him for rushing in "where other politicians fear to tread." She noted that "Cuomo is the first Catholic politician to pick a fight with a prelate."⁸

A fight was certainly being picked, but it was not Mario Cuomo who took the worst punches. The abortion focus shifted to the Democratic party's vice-presidential candidate, Congresswoman Geraldine Ferraro. Like O'Connor and Cuomo, Ferraro was from New York. She was also Roman Catholic. Her views on abortion, however, did not coincide with those of her church. She had accumulated a "perfect 16" record on abortion voting according to the National Abortion Rights Action League.⁹ Ms Magazine had quoted her as saying, ". . . there are some things on which I won't compromise. I won't compromise on the moral issues. There's no halfway for me on things like reproductive choice."¹⁰ What she meant, of course, was that she supported the right to have an abortion. Unfortunately for Ferraro, her stand on abortion was considered by many to be a compromise of her Catholic faith. It was also to become a major stumbling-block in her campaign.

Ferraro had withstood previous rebukes from members of her church because of her position on abortion. She would sometimes relate the story of how she had spoken with a priest when she first ran for Congress in 1978. On that occasion the priest had said of her views, "Gerry, that's not good enough. You know you can't support that position." Her response was, "Okay, that's my religious view. I will accept the teaching of the church. But I cannot impose my religious views on someone else."¹¹ This was a statement she was destined to repeat many times in 1984. She had also been cancelled out as a speaker by a priest in her home town. The priest remarked, "If she is advocating abortion, she has no right to be speaking in this church or to any Catholic organization in this parish."¹²

Ferraro had little time to get her campaign out of the starting gate before she met with renewed opposition. Some of the highest ranking Roman Catholic clergymen in the nation found fault with her for not trying to translate her religious convictions into political action. Bishop James Malone, leader of the country's bishops, issued a statement which was aimed directly at Ferraro: "We reject the idea that candidates satisfy the requirements of rational analysis in saying their personal views should not influence their policy decisions. The implied dichotomy—between personal morality and public policy—is simply not logically tenable in any adequate view of both."¹³ Malone was careful to add that the Church would not endorse or anathematize particular candidates. He did, however, defend what he saw as the Church's obligation to address political issues.¹⁴

Ferraro defended herself by stating, "I am amazed at how times have changed." Twenty years ago people were afraid that John Kennedy would impose his religious beliefs on his decisions in government. Now some people are afraid that I won't."¹

Governor Cuomo entered the fray again on Ferraro's behalf. In a highly publicized speech delivered at Notre Dame University Cuomo outlined the position espoused by Ferraro and himself. He asked, "Must politics and religion in America divide our loyalties? Does the 'separation between church and state' imply separation between religion and politics?"¹⁶ In the process of answering his own questions he indicated that his religion did indeed affect his political activities. He qualified this, nevertheless, by saying that the American system demands that a politician be tolerant of other beliefs. He stated that in the absence of any consensus regarding the banning of abortion, he could not push for such a measure. Instead of viewing abortion as a problem for government to solve, he called it a "failure of the entire people of God." He then challenged his hearers to seek out alternatives to abortion. "If we want to prove our regard for life in the womb . . . then there is work enough for all of us."¹⁷

Senator Edward Kennedy also felt the need to present his views on the subject of abortion. First, he signalled his approval of the stand taken by Cuomo and Ferraro. He contended that, "Where decisions are inherently individual ones or in cases where we are deeply divided about whether they are, people of faith should not invoke the power of the state to decide what everyone can think, read, or do."¹⁸ He said that issues like abortion should be discussed, but that "they can

be settled only in the depths of each individual conscience."¹⁹

In effect, what Ferraro, Cuomo, and Kennedy were all saying was that in spite of what their church might teach regarding abortion, they were not going to toe the line.

Americans watched with interest as new personalities jumped in on either side of the controversy. Henry Hyde, a U.S. Representative from Illinois, spoke at Notre Dame soon after Cuomo had visited there. Hyde found fault with the idea of divorcing one's religious values from the political realm. He hinted that this was a danger to the American political system: "The question today is not whether a Roman Catholic commitment is compatible with American public office; the question is whether the American experiment can survive the sterilization of the public arena that takes place when religiously based values are systematically ruled out of order in the public discourse."²⁰

In what became a free-for-all in newspapers and periodicals across the nation, religious leaders from other faiths presented their views. A representative of the American Lutheran Church accused Cuomo of distorting his church's stance on abortion. The official teaching of that body, the writer claimed, was that abortion was sometimes "a tragic option," but that the "alarming increase of induced abortions" represented "an irresponsible abuse of God's gift of life."²¹ The Executive Director of the American Jewish Congress, meanwhile, took the bishops to task for trying to make abortion a public issue. In this case the writer contended that the right to have an abortion was a private matter. He also argued that the religious beliefs of some might be restricted

if abortion were outlawed.²²

Journalists added a supplement to the expanding argument. Ellen Goodman wrote that the bishops were behaving more like political bosses than clergymen.²³ William F. Buckley described Ferraro as being "morally evasive." In his opinion, Ferraro was saying: "'As a Catholic, I believe that it is wrong for parents to kill their infant children, but I don't want to impose my views on others.'"²⁴

Cartoonists found ways of depicting the antagonists in more vivid fashion. One placed Ferraro as an innkeeper in Bethlehem. As she was turning Joseph and Mary away, she asked them if they had thought of seeking out abortion counseling.²⁵ The bishops, likewise, found themselves being portrayed with equal virulence.²⁶ Several writers complained that the issue was getting out of hand. An article in National Review stated that such a "high decibel debate is a danger to democracy."²⁷

Ferraro, meanwhile, was discovering that her critics were not exclusively clergymen, columnists, and cartoonists. At virtually every campaign stop she was greeted by demonstrators and hecklers denouncing her position on abortion. This opposition was particularly strong in areas where Catholics made up a significant portion of the population. Placards sometimes compared her to Judas while children might carry signs reading, "I'm glad Ferraro wasn't my mother."²⁸ A woman in Kansas City displayed a sign declaring, "Mssssssssssssss. Ferraro, Thou shalt not kill. Author: God. Catholics for the Unborn."²⁹

It soon became apparent that such activities were being orchestrated by national anti-abortion groups. The National Right-to-Life Committee stressed: "It is vital that the

Mondale-Ferraro ticket always be met by pro-lifers."³⁰ The president of this organization spoke of abortion as the dominant issue in the election. "We think of it as a disqualifying issue," he said. "If a candidate supports abortion we believe that alone makes him unfit for office."³¹ Another group, the Pro-Life Action League, headed by an ex-Benedictine monk, offered instructions on how to protest effectively. Their aim was to keep the issue "alive right up until the election."³² Telephone recordings at pro-life locations would sometimes contain information regarding Ferraro's upcoming campaign appearances, thus alerting demonstrators as to where they might make their presence felt.³³

The anti-abortion pickets had a highly disruptive effect upon Ferraro's campaign. She admitted that some of the placards carried statements which disturbed her personally. After viewing one sign that showed three tombstones with a caption reading "Gerry's Kids," she remarked, "that's more than hardball politics."³⁴ Mary McGrory indicated that Ferraro was struggling to get out from under the weight of the issue so she could take up the causes of those already born.³⁵ A writer for the Los Angeles Times candidly observed that "For Ferraro, abortion has become the issue that will not go away or even fade."³⁶

Ferraro still had to take her turn in the ring with Archbishop O'Connor. The flash point was a letter which Ferraro had attached her name to in 1982. The letter, sponsored by a group known as Catholics for a Free Choice, had stated that "the Catholic position on abortion is not monolithic . . . and there can be a range of personal and political responses to

the issue."³⁷ This time it was O'Connor's turn to respond. Without mentioning the letter, O'Connor pointed out that Ferraro had "said some things about abortion relative to Catholic teaching which are not true."³⁸ Ferraro learned of the bishop's statement while she was on a campaign swing through the Midwest. She phoned O'Connor from Indianapolis and asked him for an explanation. In the thirty-five minute conversation that followed she inquired, "Why is this letter coming out now of all times? I think that if you make reference to it again, you ought to make it clear you're referring to a 1982 document."³⁹

As the two squared off, the bishop contended that the Catholic Church's position on abortion was, in fact, "monolithic."⁴⁰ Ferraro then made an effort to clarify the statement she had been party to in the 1982 letter. She conceded that the Church did maintain a "monolithic" stance on abortion. She argued, however, that the letter was only an attempt to point out that many Catholics did not share the perspective held by the Church.⁴¹ At the same time Ferraro said that if her religious views ever interfered with her job as a public official she would resign.⁴² It was almost as if she was asking O'Connor to come right out and tell her that she must choose one or the other.

O'Connor didn't do that. He settled for saying that if Ferraro had a problem it would be with the pope.⁴³ Eventually the pope did address the issue. Without mentioning any names, the pontiff hinted that a politician must not bury his or her religious beliefs upon taking office. As for Catholic politicians, he said that they should follow their "Christian

conscience."⁴⁴

During this last bout with O'Connor several other Catholic clerics joined in the melee. Bishop James Timlin of Scranton drew a parallel between abortion and slavery. He argued that it would be ridiculous to say, "I'm personally opposed to slavery, but I don't care if others down the street have them."⁴⁵ Cardinal John Krol wrote a letter which was read in the Catholic churches of Philadelphia on "Respect Life Sunday." The letter urged parishioners to use their votes in the fight against abortion.⁴⁶ On the same Sunday another bishop charged that abortion was creating an "arrogant cynicism" in America which was leading to the "deliberate killing of handicapped infants in many . . . hospital nurseries."⁴⁷ Archbishop Bernard Law of Boston, in an interview with the New York Times, attempted to find the heart of the issue when he said, "I think we have to cut through all that talk and say is this or is it not human life."⁴⁸

In the face of statements such as these, a group of Catholic theologians published a statement claiming that the Church had an ambiguous stand on abortion. They contended that the Church did not have a clear teaching on ensoulment (the point in time when the soul enters the fetus). The theologians also cautioned the bishops against harassing politicians who didn't agree them.⁴⁹ The theologians, by their action, indicated that the issue had caused some measure of dissension within the Church itself. Another influential Catholic cleric, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, deplored the idea of "single issue politics." Bernardin, who had been instrumental in the drafting of the bishops' pastoral condemning nuclear warfare, mildly

rebuked his fellow prelates for trying to make abortion the dominant issue. Instead, Bernardin argued that the issues formed a "seamless garment," and that all of the issues required consideration before one could cast an intelligent vote.⁵⁰

While the repeated confrontations with the clergy did result in some division within the Church, the ones who despaired of the situation most were the Democrats. One remarked that the abortion imbroglio was keeping Ferraro from raising the issues which she wanted to concentrate upon. Another hinted that people were beginning to wonder if the Democratic party was actually anti-Catholic. In general, the consensus was that the Democrats were being hurt much more than they were being helped by the controversy.⁵¹ The particularly nettlesome feature about the whole thing was that Ferraro had been chosen by Mondale largely because of her Catholic background.⁵²

After having chosen Ferraro as a running mate, Mondale, too, unwillingly entered the debate. He had been the object of some anti-abortion sentiment prior to Ferraro's signing on. Earlier in the year he had been on the receiving end of a twenty minute lecture on abortion at the residence of Bishop John O'Connor.⁵³ Mondale had also encountered sparse numbers of protesters. But as soon as Ferraro joined the ticket large numbers of demonstrators began to appear at his campaign stops.⁵⁴ On one occasion he was asked what he planned to do regarding the "slaughter of our American unborn." Reflecting his own religious ideals he confided that he had prayed about the matter. He also said that he felt a deep concern about it. But

Mondale went on to say that he could not bring himself to support legislation which would outlaw abortion. He called abortion a decision that people must make on "the basis of their own faith."⁵⁵

At one point NBC claimed to have information which indicated that the Republicans were promoting the disruptions at Mondale-Ferraro campaign appearances. The network also stated that the Republicans were acting in collusion with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Not surprisingly, the Reagan campaign denied the charge.⁵⁶ One anti-abortion activist admitted that he had requested help from the Republicans. The Republicans, though, turned him down.⁵⁷

Confirmation of Republican involvement with the bishops and the demonstrators will probably have to await the opening of someone's archives. It is certain, though that the Reagan campaign did benefit from the Democrats' thorn in the flesh. For while Ferraro was being chastised by the clergy, Reagan enjoyed a more cordial reception. On a campaign trip to a Catholic shrine in Pennsylvania he appeared with Cardinal John Krol amid shouts of "Four more years!"⁵⁸ On another occasion Reagan visited a Catholic church in New Jersey. There he outlined his own views on abortion while questioning those of his opponents: "Why do those who claim to represent the party of compassion feel no compassion whatsoever for the most helpless among us—the unborn?"⁵⁹

In the last weeks before the election Ferraro debated her Republican counterpart, George Bush. Abortion inevitably became part of the discussion. Each candidate was careful to defend the bishops' right to address political issues. Bush,

like Reagan, said he favored a constitutional amendment which would restrict abortion. Ferraro again insisted that she would not impose her religious views upon others.⁶⁰

After the debate Ferraro hoped for some respite. She received none. At one stop she reminded the demonstrators that she had already answered the abortion question on national television.⁶¹ It was her answer, though, which raised the ire of her critics. Her attitude of being religiously opposed to abortion yet publicly supportive of it, was irksome to many.⁶² Despite her attempts to shake the issue, it remained before her. Writers, following O'Connor's lead, continued to produce skeletons from her closet. One columnist informed his readers that Ferraro, in 1983, had said that if her daughter became pregnant and wanted an abortion she would give her the money and send her to a doctor.⁶³ Ferraro's difficulties were best described by a priest who commented: "When the nuns in the fifth grade told Geraldine she would have to die for her faith, she didn't know it would be this way."⁶⁴

NOTES

CHAPTER III

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⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., 4 August 1984, p. 7.

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⁸Mary McGrory, "Cuomo Makes a Difference by Being a Different Sort of Pol," Washington Post, 7 August 1984, p. A2.

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¹⁰Sheila Caudle, "Geraldine Ferraro: A Woman for This Political Season," Ms., vol. 13, no. 1 (July 1984), p. 63.

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¹²Ibid., 17 July 1984, p. A12.

¹³Ibid., 10 August 1984, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. A8.

¹⁶Ibid., 14 September 1984, p. A6.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸New York Times, 11 September 1984, p. A26.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Washington Post, 5 October 1984, p. A22.

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³³Ibid., 23 September 1984, p. A15.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Mary McGrory, "Ferraro Struggles to Return Campaign's Focus to 'the Born'," Washington Post, 20 September 1984, p. A2.

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³⁷New York Times, 11 September 1984, p. A26.

³⁸Magnuson, "Pressing the Abortion Issue," p. 18.

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⁴¹Ibid.

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⁴⁴E.J. Dionne Jr., "Pope Speaks Out On Political Role," New York Times, 22 September 1984, p. 9.

⁴⁵Magnuson, "Pressing the Abortion Issue," p. 19.

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⁴⁷New York Times, 5 October 1984, p. B3.

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⁵⁷Peterson, "Activist Advised Anti-Abortion Groups,"
p. A8.

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⁵⁹Los Angeles Times, 27 July 1984, p. I, 14.

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CHAPTER IV

GOD BLESS AMERICA

The issues discussed in the preceding chapters added some measure of religious excitement to the presidential campaign of 1984. Religious sensibilities, though, were further aroused when religion became a point of contention between the two major parties. By the time voters made their way to the polls in November, religion was a lively campaign issue and a topic of national debate.

The seeds of controversy had been sown during the Carter-Reagan campaign of 1980. In that election large numbers of Christian fundamentalists, collectively known as the Religious Right, made an entrance into the political fold. The Religious Right had concluded that American government was in need of a religious revival. From their perspective, the organs of government were falling into the hands of irreligious individuals who were becoming increasingly hostile to traditional values. As evidence, they cited Supreme Court decisions which legalized abortion and banned formal school prayer. They also felt that religious values were being threatened by the Equal Rights Amendment, homosexuality, pornography, sex and violence on television, and the encroachment of secular humanism within the

nation's public school system. In 1980, the Republicans put forth a candidate, Ronald Reagan, who seemed to share the ideals and concerns of the Religious Right. Armed with the hope of reforming government and combatting the forces of evil, millions of fundamentalists cast their votes for the Republican ticket.¹

As the 1984 campaign got underway the Religious Right joined in the effort to re-elect Ronald Reagan. With a style similar to that employed by Jesse Jackson, fundamentalist pastors registered voters at their churches.² One minister from North Carolina, speaking of Reagan, commented: "We see it as an absolute necessity that this man is re-elected so that he can continue the leadership to bring this country back to the moral absolutes displayed in the Bible."³ Reagan, meanwhile, bolstered his appeal among fundamentalists by making appearances at religious gatherings.⁴

Reagan's activities, and the doings of the Religious Right, provoked responses from both religious and secular observers. The Jesuit publication, America, noted that Reagan was doing "a fair amount of preaching" on the campaign trail.⁵ Hollywood producer Norman Lear expressed his dismay directly to the President by writing several letters to the White House. "What alarms me is your assumption of a governmental role as Evangelist in Chief," Lear wrote.⁶ The producer also cautioned Reagan against identifying himself too closely with the Religious Right.⁷

The most strenuous opposition to Reagan's conduct came from the Democratic Party's candidates. Geraldine Ferraro, not yet engaged in the abortion controversy, took the lead in

criticizing Reagan. "The President walks around calling himself a good Christian," Ferraro declared. She then added, "I don't for one minute believe it because his policies are so terribly unfair."⁸ The tone of Ferraro's comment raised the eyebrows of campaign critics. Elizabeth Drew, covering the campaign for the New Yorker, may have agreed with the substance of Ferraro's statement, but found fault with the style. "It was clear what she was getting at, but she got at it maladroitly," the journalist wrote.⁹ Another writer described the remark as "harsh" and "overpersonal."¹⁰ Mondale, though, agreed with the observation made by his running mate. He stated that "social justice is part of a Christian's responsibility," and in his estimation, the President's policies were not consistent with this ideal.¹¹ Reagan's reaction to these charges was subdued. As he put it, he simply "turned the other cheek."¹²

Religious feeling became more pronounced when the Democratic Party convened in San Francisco. While there, the Democrats continued to criticize Reagan, but they also began to make religious appeals of their own. The keynote speaker, Mario Cuomo, called Reagan an apostle of "Social Darwinism." By contrast, Cuomo argued that the Democrats were much closer to the Christian tradition: "We would rather have laws written by the patron of this great city, the man called 'the world's most sincere Democrat'—St. Francis of Assisi—than laws written by Darwin."¹³ Elizabeth Drew characterized Cuomo as "papal" and "rabbinical."¹⁴ The religious highlight of the convention, though, was the speech delivered by Jesse Jackson. Much of his address was devoted to the smoothing of Black-Jewish relations, still tender from the Farrakhan affair.

Jackson spoke of "our Judeo-Christian heritage" and seasoned his delivery with biblical images.¹⁵ The editors at the Los Angeles Times, alarmed by the religious display at the convention, felt compelled to comment: "One of the striking things about the 1984 Democratic National Convention is the omnipresence of religion. . . . All American political conventions pay dutiful obeisance to Divine Providence. This one is different. This one seems to take it seriously. . . . Religious expression so overt is not a part of the modern American political tradition."¹⁶

Shortly after the convention Mario Cuomo offered some justification for the heightened presence of religion in the campaign. From his standpoint, Reagan had introduced the issue when he "wrapped himself in religiosity." Cuomo added, "I believe it was wrong for us to allow the President to preempt and co-opt us on the issue. . . . The debate has begun in earnest now."¹⁷

Perhaps the most controversial event of the entire campaign occurred during the Republican Convention in Dallas, Texas. President Reagan, speaking at a prayer breakfast, shared his own ideas regarding the relationship between religion and politics. Offering a panoramic view of American history, the President discussed what he saw as the vital role of religion in American life. From the Mayflower Compact to the Civil Rights movement, Reagan found numerous examples of religious involvement in the political process. With each example he cited the positive effects of such an influence. As the President went on he decried what he viewed as the removal of religion "from its honored place."¹⁸ He referred in

particular to the Supreme Court decisions which held formal school prayer and Bible reading to be unconstitutional. Taking aim at those who preferred to keep prayer out of the classroom, Reagan asked, "Isn't the real truth that they are intolerant of religion?"¹⁹ Reagan ended by saying that "religion and politics are necessarily related," and that "without God democracy will not and cannot long endure."²⁰

The President's speech caused an immediate uproar of national magnitude. Jesse Jackson observed that "Reagan is trying to emerge as some kind of national theologian."²¹ Columnist Haynes Johnson wrote, "Reagan in Dallas came down as strongly as any president can on the side of increasing the links between religion and politics."²² The American Jewish Committee issued a statement declaring that "President Reagan has used the prestige of his office to endorse specific religious beliefs."²³

Reagan's speech was certainly the religious attraction of the convention, but the prominence of fundamentalists throughout also made headlines. Literally, from the invocation to the final benediction, fundamentalist pastors maintained a markedly high profile.²⁴ One of these ministers, the Reverend Jerry Falwell, referred to Reagan and Bush as "God's instruments for rebuilding America."²⁵ Even the Republican Party's platform seemed to affirm the political designs of the Religious Right. The document called for a constitutional amendment which would allow prayer in school. It also spoke of the need for an amendment to prohibit abortion. Dwelling on the subject of abortion, the platform called for judicial appointees who respected "the sanctity of innocent human life."²⁶ The document made no mention of the Equal Rights Amendment.²⁷ Commenting

on the Party's platform, the Reverend Falwell said: "If they had allowed us to write it, we'd have had difficulty improving on the content."²⁸

Religious issues began to fly like shrapnel after, and largely as a result of, the Republican Convention. It came to light that Senator Paul Laxalt, Reagan's campaign chairman, had sent a "Dear Christian Leader" letter to 45,000 ministers. The letter urged those ministers to take part in a drive to register more voters for the upcoming election. In part, the letter read: "As leaders under God's authority, we cannot afford to resign ourselves to idle neutrality in an election that will confirm or silence the president who has worked so diligently on your behalf and on behalf of all Americans."²⁹ Upon learning of the letter, a spokesman for the Democratic Party noted that such an attempt to gain votes ventured "beyond the bounds of political discussion."³⁰

With two months to go before election day, the Democrats determined to strike at the Republicans on a whole range of religious issues. Mondale opened a stinging assault upon the President and the Religious Right at the International Convention of B'nai B'rith meeting in Washington, D.C. He likened the activities of the Religious Right to what he called "moral McCarthyism."³¹ Mondale went on to say that a president should not imply "that political dissent from him is un-Christian."³² Touching on the issue of school prayer, he indicated that a number of religious groups opposed a prayer amendment. He argued that such opposition did not mean that they were being "intolerant of religion," as Reagan had charged at the prayer breakfast. Instead, Mondale hinted that the Republicans were

showing intolerance by insisting that they were the moral watchdogs of the nation. "Most Americans would be surprised to learn that God is a Republican," said Mondale.³³

Beginning with the B'nai B'rith speech, Mondale singled out certain fundamentalists for special criticism. Jerry Falwell on one occasion had said that if Reagan were to win, "We will get at least two more appointments to the Supreme Court."³⁴ Picking up on this theme, Mondale began to mention Falwell in his campaign speeches. "If you pull their lever, you'll be handing over the Supreme Court to Jerry Falwell," Mondale warned.³⁵ Television commercials appeared which began, "Ronald Reagan and Reverend Jerry Falwell cordially invite you to their party on November 6. . . . Think about the people who have taken over the Republican Party."³⁶ When Mondale debated Reagan in Louisville, the Democratic contender mentioned Falwell's name three times. Ferraro, too, hammered away at the minister during her debate with George Bush.³⁷

The Democrats were not the only ones to air the controversy on television. A former Miss America, Cheryl Prewitt Blackwood, recorded three commercials in which she criticized Ferraro for opposing school prayer and supporting abortion.³⁸ At a press conference Blackwood commented: "As a Christian woman I can not stand by silently while the people of America are being deceived and misled when it comes to morality."³⁹ The former Miss America was serving as co-chairperson for an organization called "Christians For Reagan."⁴⁰

The television debates, which took place in October, allowed the candidates to expound upon the religious issues face to face. In Louisville, both Reagan and Mondale were asked to

describe their personal religious beliefs. Further, they were questioned as to how their beliefs affected their political decisions. Responding to these questions, each candidate recalled a Christian upbringing which had left a lasting impression upon both of them. Speaking of his religious faith, Mondale said, "it's probably the reason I'm in politics."⁴¹ He did, however, find fault with those who he said were trying to impose their own religious views upon others. Pointing to the Republican platform, he indicated that the document called for a "religious test" regarding the selection of Federal judges. On the topic of school prayer, Mondale signalled his opposition to a constitutional amendment. He discussed the problems of selecting an acceptable prayer and the feelings of students who might feel embarrassed.⁴²

Reagan had to deal with a question which had cropped up periodically throughout the campaign. The matter of concern was his absence from regular worship services.⁴³ Reagan responded that rising terrorism made him uneasy about going to church and jeopardizing the lives of other worshippers. He said, though, that his minister supported his decision to stay away from church. "I miss going to church," said Reagan, "but I think the Lord understands."⁴⁴

The candidates also sparred on the issue of abortion. Reagan, discussing his views, said that abortion was not a religious matter, but one of constitutional rights: "I believe that until and unless someone can establish that the unborn child is not a living human being, then that child is already protected by the Constitution, which guarantees life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness to all of us."⁴⁵ In

similar fashion, Mondale declined to address abortion as a religious question. Instead, he argued that abortion was a "personal and moral" decision. Regarding a constitutional amendment Mondale said that the Government ought not to be "reaching into your livingrooms and making choices like this."⁴⁶

An issue raised by Reagan during the first debate, and then echoed by George Bush at the vice-presidential debate, was the charge that Geraldine Ferraro had been the one to inject religion into the campaign. "I think religion became a part of this campaign when Mr. Mondale's running mate said I wasn't a good Christian," Reagan contended.⁴⁷ In Philadelphia, where Bush and Ferraro met, the Democratic candidate responded to this accusation. "I'm not going to let you lay on me the intrusion of . . . religion into politics by my comments with reference to the president's policies," said Ferraro. Continuing, she asserted that "it started in 1980 when this administration was running for office."⁴⁸ The vice-presidential contenders also grappled with each other on the issues of school prayer and abortion.⁴⁹

The final debate, again featuring Reagan and Mondale, took place in Kansas City. On that night a new religious firebrand was launched when the discussion turned to the topic of "nuclear Armageddon." Reagan was reminded that he had previously made statements in which he shared his belief that Armageddon, a final battle between good and evil, was possibly approaching. Asked to describe his beliefs on this subject Reagan said that in "philosophical discussions" he had said that the "biblical prophecies" portending Armageddon seemed to be "coming together." He added, however, that "no one knows

whether Armageddon . . . is a thousand years away or day after tomorrow," and that he had "never seriously warned" others of its impending approach.⁵⁰

Talk of "nuclear Armageddon" called forth the strongest of responses from the American religious community. Over one hundred religious leaders from various backgrounds immediately issued a joint statement which denounced the theory of an inevitable showdown between good and evil. The statement also demanded that the presidential candidates disassociate themselves from the theory. Other clerics charged the Religious Right with propagating and popularizing the concept of Armageddon.⁵¹ Falwell, though, joined other religious leaders in urging the candidates to repudiate "any extremist world view which demands a nuclear Armageddon."⁵²

The tension between Blacks and Jews seemed to lessen somewhat as the larger debate between the parties began to intensify. Citing religious reasons, among others, the top rabbis of the Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform branches of Judaism gave formal endorsements to Walter Mondale. Each rabbi wrote to their respective constituents asking support for the Democratic ticket.⁵³ One Jewish newspaper, Washington Jewish Week, broke with tradition when it issued an endorsement, also of Walter Mondale. Religious factors were referred to in the publication's editorial announcement: "We'd rather take our chances with the Mondale-Jackson entente than with the Reagan-Schlafly-Falwell troika."⁵⁴ Phyllis Schlafly, mentioned in the editorial, was another prominent figure within the Religious Right.⁵⁵ Jews, on the whole, were upset by the maneuverings of the Religious Right. Many Jews, no doubt,

remembered that New Testaments were among the items that were to be given to delegates attending the Republican Convention in Dallas. It took a protest from the American Jewish Committee to have the books removed from the delegate packets.⁵⁶

Lingering animosity toward Jesse Jackson, though, generated some Jewish support for the Republican Party. In San Francisco the Democrats had failed to pass a resolution which would have condemned anti-Semitism. Later the Democrats explained that the resolution did not pass because of a technicality. The resolution was eventually added to the Democratic platform,⁵⁷ but there were Jews who felt that the Democrats had compromised in order to placate anti-Semitic elements.⁵⁸

Blacks, meanwhile, showed strong support for the Democratic ticket. With Jackson's help, Black churches continued to register voters.⁵⁹ At one point, George Bush contended that Black ministers were playing a leading role in turning Blacks away from the Republican Party.⁶⁰ Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young, a minister himself, urged Blacks to vote for Mondale, but conceded: "We have some cold-hearted Black millionaires who are probably going to hell, and they ought to vote Republican."⁶¹ Among those whom Young may have been referring to were individuals who were supporting Reagan on religious grounds. Muhammed Ali, the retired pugilist, lent his endorsement to Reagan. "He's keeping God in schools and that's enough," observed the long-term boxing champion.⁶² Another former Black athlete, Roosevelt Grier, who had become a minister after retiring from professional football, was also voting Republican because of the school prayer issue.⁶³

Columnist Carl Rowan remarked that the campaign was

producing what he called "unnatural" alliances. "I am astonished," wrote Rowan, that "assorted Catholic bishops would crawl into bed politically" with the fundamentalists of the Religious Right.⁶⁴ He then quoted a prominent fundamentalist preacher who referred to Catholicism as "false religion."

Rowan wondered if the bishops, in their assault upon Geraldine Ferraro, realized what sort of people they were aligning themselves with.⁶⁵ Another unlikely pairing was the creation of a "new Black-Jewish coalition." The coalition was headed by the once militant Black Panther, Eldridge Cleaver, who had since been "born again" and eventually joined the Mormon Church, and Irving Rubin of the Jewish Defense League, an organization whose main concern was the welfare of Israel. Together they denounced the Democratic Party and asked both Blacks and Jews to vote for the Republicans. The duo was especially vehement in attacking Jesse Jackson. Cleaver referred to the latter as an "Ayatollah."⁶⁶ Perhaps equally "unnatural" was Ali's endorsement of Reagan. Ali, a Muslim,⁶⁷ apparently found no reason to fear the passage of a constitutional amendment sanctioning school prayer.

Many of the nation's largest religious groups declined to take sides in the controversy between the parties, but virtually all of them made statements on what they considered to be the proper roles of religion and politics. The Episcopal House of Bishops issued a pastoral letter which encouraged members of that church to speak out on political matters. "The moral imperatives of our faith compel us to address the pressing issues of the day," said the bishops.⁶⁸ The letter also stated that both religion and politics would be impoverished if they

were to become totally separated.⁶⁹ In spite of the earlier activities of several Catholic bishops, the United States Catholic Conference affirmed that it would not endorse either candidate. The Conference, though, made the assertion that "religious and moral values can't be separated from political life."⁷⁰ The president of the Unitarian Universalist Association in North America also defended the involvement of religious persons in the presidential campaign.⁷¹

Other religious leaders were less positive about the part religion had taken in the campaign. Representatives of the National Council of Churches and the Synagogue Council of America deplored attempts to "breach the wall of separation between church and state."⁷² The head of the Lutheran Church in America warned that the political debate surrounding religion could engender "sectarian violence,"⁷³ while the Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in the Americas criticized both Reagan and Mondale for dragging religion into the political process.⁷⁴ One minister endeavored to keep politics out of his church by turning off the lights and public address system when a guest speaker, Ralph Nader, began to criticize one of the presidential candidates. "We did not want him to use our church to put one party down," said the pastor.⁷⁵

In handing out endorsements, secular groups also made mention of the religious issues which had become so prominent in the campaign. A few days before the election an advertisement appeared in the New York Times. It had been placed there by "Scholars Against the Escalating Danger of the Far Right." The signatories, numbering several hundred, castigated Reagan and the Religious Right for "eroding the demarcation between

church and state." "There is a scent of fascism in the air," the scholars warned.⁷⁶ On the same day Walter Mondale said that he feared an "orgy of intolerance" would be unleashed if his opponent was to win.⁷⁷

Election day mercifully arrived the first Tuesday in November. Even as the ballots were being counted the religious tension began to subside. Perhaps those issues, or others like them, would surface in future presidential campaigns. But for 1984, at least, religion as a campaign issue had run its course.

NOTES

CHAPTER IV

¹Linda Medcalf and Kenneth Dolbeare, Neopolitics: American Political Ideas in the 1980's (New York, 1985), pp. 165-82.

²Kenneth Woodward, "Playing Politics at Church," Newsweek, vol. 104, no. 2 (9 July 1984), p. 52.

³Mark Starr, "The North Carolina Crusade," Newsweek, vol. 104, no. 12 (17 September 1984), p. 28.

⁴Joseph O'Hare, "Of Many Things," America, vol. 150, no. 11 (24 March 1984), p. 200.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Lear wrote several letters to President Reagan and received personal replies to each. The letters and replies were reprinted in Harper's, vol. 269, no. 1613 (October 1984), pp. 15-19.

⁷Ibid., p. 15.

⁸Los Angeles Times, 16 July 1984, p. I, 6.

⁹Elizabeth Drew, "A Political Journal," New Yorker, vol. 60, no. 26 (13 August 1984), p. 43.

¹⁰George Church, "A Break with Tradition," Time, vol. 124, no. 4 (23 July 1984), p. 15.

¹¹David Broder, "The Old Time Values Ticket," Los Angeles Times, 17 July 1984, p. II, 5.

¹²William R. Doerner, "The Gipper Strikes Back," Time, vol. 124, no. 6 (6 August 1984), p. 17.

¹³Los Angeles Times, 17 July 1984, p. I, 4.

¹⁴Drew, "A Political Journal," (13 August 1984), pp. 50-9.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Staff editorial, "Providential Politics," Los Angeles Times, 19 July 1984, p. II, 6.

¹⁷New York Times, 3 August 1984, p. B2.

¹⁸Ibid., 24 August 1984, p. 11.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Washington Post, 27 August 1984, p. A5.

²²Haynes Johnson, "Faith," Washington Post, 27 August 1984, p. A2.

²³Washington Post, 6 September 1984, p. A21.

²⁴Elizabeth Drew, "A Political Journal," New Yorker, vol. 60, no. 30 (10 September 1984), p. 110.

²⁵Kenneth M. Pierce, "God and the Ballot Box," Time, vol. 124, no. 12 (17 September 1984), p. 26.

²⁶Drew, "A Political Journal," (10 September 1984), pp. 111-12.

²⁷Ibid., p. 112.

²⁸Los Angeles Times, 22 August 1984, p. 1.

²⁹Washington Post, 1 September 1984, p. A7.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Denver Post, 30 September 1984, p. 7C.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵George J. Church, "Mondale's Whipping Boy," Time, vol. 124, no. 17 (22 October 1984), p. 28.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Washington Post, 15 September 1984, p. A6.

³⁹Times Arrow, vol. 5, no. 5 (October 1984), p. 20.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹The entire transcript of the Louisville Debate can be found in the New York Times, 9 October 1984, pp. 14-15.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Reagan was chided several times for his absence from Sunday worship. Some examples would include: Joseph O'Hare, "Of Many Things," America, vol. 150, no. 11 (24 March 1984), p. 200; Sandy Grady, "Mixing Politics and Morality," Denver Post, 10 September 1984, p. 10A; Joseph Kraft, "Elmer Gantry Time." Washington Post, 6 October 1984, p. A21.

⁴⁴New York Times, 9 October 1984, pp. 14-15.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Transcript of Philadelphia Debate found in the Washington Post, 12 October 1984, pp. A16-17.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Transcript of the Kansas City Debate found in the New York Times, 23 October 1984, p. 13.

- ⁵¹Washington Post, 24 October 1984, p. A6.
- ⁵²New York Times, 24 October 1984, p. 13.
- ⁵³Washington Post, 20 October 1984, p. C10.
- ⁵⁴Ibid., 3 November 1984, p. D10.
- ⁵⁵Ibid., 13 July 1984, p. A3.
- ⁵⁶Ibid., 30 August 1984, p. A12.
- ⁵⁷New York Times, 30 October 1984, p. 11.
- ⁵⁸Meshulam Riklis, "Can It Happen Here?: A Time For Soul Searching," New York Times, 16 October 1984, p. 9.
- ⁵⁹Washington Post, 6 September 1984, pp. A16-17.
- ⁶⁰Ibid., 17 September 1984, p. A7.
- ⁶¹Ibid., 28 October 1984, p. A8.
- ⁶²New York Times, 3 October 1984, p. A24.
- ⁶³Drew, "A Political Journal," (10 September 1984), p. 116.
- ⁶⁴Carl T. Rowan, "An Unnatural Alliance," Washington Post, 16 September 1984, p. B8.
- ⁶⁵Ibid.
- ⁶⁶Los Angeles Times, 24 October 1984, p. I, 3.
- ⁶⁷New York Times, 5 July 1984, p. A10.
- ⁶⁸Ibid., 6 October 1984, p. 8.
- ⁶⁹Ibid.
- ⁷⁰Washington Post, 15 October 1984, p. A3.
- ⁷¹New York Times, 16 October 1984, p. 12.

⁷²Ibid., 31 October 1984, p. 12.

⁷³Ibid., 4 October 1984, p. B16.

⁷⁴Denver Post, 18 October 1984, p. 10A.

⁷⁵Kansas City Times, 11 September 1984, p. A2.

⁷⁶"Scholars Against the Escalating Danger of the Far Right," New York Times, 2 November 1984, p. A23.

⁷⁷Los Angeles Times, 2 November 1984, pp. 1, 15.

CHAPTER V

VOTING RELIGIOUSLY

The weight of an issue is best measured by its impact upon the electorate. The religious issues of 1984, though energetically debated and emotionally charged, were not the decisive issues for a majority of voters. Post-election polls indicated that Americans were most concerned with Government spending, the Federal budget deficit, international relations, and nuclear arms control.¹ It was Ronald Reagan's approach to these issues which provided him with the winning margin in 1984.² The multiplicity of religious issues, however, coupled with the heightened involvement of religious groups, did add some interesting footnotes to the 1984 vote.

The voter registration drives conducted by both the Black and fundamentalist churches was probably the most direct religious influence upon the political process. Both groups registered voters in large numbers, especially in the South.³ For instance, in Alabama, the number of Black voters was up 27 percent from 1980. In Maryland and Mississippi the turnout was up 19 percent, while North Carolina showed an increase of 16 percent. Other areas also showed a stronger Black voter turnout. New Jersey had 37 percent more Black voters and California recorded a gain of 16 percent.⁴ While the registration of Black

voters was not the exclusive domain of the Black churches, those churches, nevertheless, played a central role in registering voters. Reverend T.J. Jemison, head of the National Baptist Convention, a Black religious body, indicated that his church had registered over two million voters. He made that statement in September. Jemison then predicted that by November, a million more voters would be registered through the efforts of his church.⁵

Beyond registration, the Black churches carried considerable weight when it came to influencing the voting habits of Black Americans. One survey conducted during the campaign found that 28 percent of Blacks frequently heard political issues discussed from the pulpit, a figure several times higher than those outside of the Black community.⁶ Regarding the act of voting itself, one Union Baptist Church congregant remarked: "My minister would beat me up if I didn't vote. The reverend is very good about voting and getting us to the polls."⁷

After the election, the statistics showed that Blacks, comprising 10 percent of the total electorate, cast 90 percent of their votes for the Democratic ticket.⁸ The lopsided nature of the Black vote was not extraordinary in light of the fact that Blacks traditionally voted Democratic.⁹ To be sure, Blacks had other than religious reasons for voting the way they did. Overall, they perceived Reagan as being hostile to the needs of their race.¹⁰

The fundamentalist churches were quite as energetic and politically involved as those in the Black community. Perhaps the only significant difference was that the fundamentalists voted overwhelmingly Republican. During one voter registration

drive Jerry Falwell declared: "Today, this very day, 102,000 Bible-believing churches, representing 30 million Americans, are registering voters all across the nation!"¹¹ Fundamentalist efforts to register voters were further buoyed by a number of leading television evangelists who joined together to form the American Coalition for Traditional Values. This group was quite active in rounding up potential voters.¹² At the polls Reagan received 80 percent of the fundamentalist vote.¹³ In effect, the fundamentalist and Black votes tended to neutralize each other. The 8.5 million-vote margin accrued by Reagan among fundamentalists was roughly comparable to 90 percent of the Black vote.¹⁴

Among Jews a similar phenomenon occurred. The issue stemming from Jackson's remarks was easily balanced by Jewish distaste for Jerry Falwell and the Religious Right. Thus, an issue which might have given the Republicans more of the Jewish vote was negated.¹⁵ In the end, the Democrats received a somewhat traditional two-thirds of the Jewish vote.¹⁶

The abortion issue was of special concern to American Catholics. The principal antagonists in the political argument were all members of that faith. Surveys established that about one-tenth of Catholic voters considered abortion to be the decisive issue when choosing a candidate. That number, though, equalled nearly three percent of the entire electorate. While a majority of Catholics favored Reagan for a variety of reasons, the abortion issue gained him close to three percent of the popular vote.¹⁷

Perhaps the most curious statistic collected by the pollsters in 1984 dealt with the personality of Ronald Reagan.

In one survey, a number of those who had voted for him were asked the following question: "What's the one characteristic that best describes your candidate?" The leading response was the belief that Reagan was "proreligion."¹⁸ It is difficult to assess how much this perception helped Reagan. There is little chance that he could have won by exhibiting this quality alone. Nevertheless, several observers agreed that Reagan's personal appeal was a point which weighed heavily in his favor on election day in 1984. However tenuous, religion was a factor which contributed to his personal charisma.¹⁹

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, most Americans did not view religion as the primary issue in 1984. Further, religious diversity tended to dilute the influence of those issues involving religion. The effect might have been greater if all the religious issues had worked to the advantage of one party. In such a case, though, the problems might have also been much more complex.

NOTES

CHAPTER V

¹Gerald Pomper, *The Election of 1984: Reports and Interpretations* (Chatham, New Jersey, 1984), p. 96.

²Ibid., pp. 91-101.

³Washington Post, 30 September 1984, pp. A1, 16.

⁴Denver Post, 11 November 1984, p. 7I.

⁵Washington Post, 6 September 1984, p. A17.

⁶USA Today, 25 October 1984, p. 6A.

⁷Washington Post, 30 October 1984, p. A6.

⁸New York Times, 8 November 1984, p. A19.

⁹Wall Street Journal, 7 November 1984, p. 1.

¹⁰USA Today, 25 October 1984, p. 6A.

¹¹Washington Post, 27 September 1984, p. D14.

¹²Ibid., 30 September 1984, p. A16.

¹³A. James Reichley, "Religion and Political Realignment," Brookings Review, vol. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1984), p. 31.

¹⁴New York Times, 25 November 1984, p. 2E.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Reichley, "Religion and Political Realignment," pp. 32-3.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 31-2.

¹⁸U.S. News and World Report, vol. 97, no. 21 (19 November 1984), p. 35.

¹⁹New York Times, 8 November 1984, pp. A1, 19.

EPILOGUE

There was a time when theocracies were in vogue. Indeed, a handful of them continue to thrive in various parts of the world. But in American politics, religious bodies have had to settle for a niche in the pantheon of special interest groups. During the presidential campaign of 1984 a large number of special interest groups felt compelled to enter the political forum. This number included a multitude of labor unions, feminist groups, anti-nuclear groups, and even the Ku Klux Klan.¹ There were, of course, the usual endorsements given by many of the nation's leading newspapers.² In addition, troupes of movie stars, musicians, scholars, and comic strip characters tendered their perspectives on political matters.³

The political involvement of religious groups in 1984 is best viewed in the same light. Though defrocked in terms of special privileges, religious leaders and followers are sometimes compelled to address political issues which touch upon doctrines and articles of faith. As it turned out, 1984 was a year when an unusually large number of religious groups set foot in the political arena.

^vThe tension which accompanied the religious issues of 1984 was disquieting to many Americans. Some feared that the heightened religious input would give way to sectarian violence. Others voiced concern over the possibility of government sanctioned

religious intolerance. Fortunately, neither situation materialized.

Actually, the most distressing feature of the 1984 election had nothing to do with religion. When the ballots were counted it became known that only 52 percent of America's eligible voters managed to cast a vote. This statistic landed the United States at the bottom of the world's voter turnout list.⁴ The leading European nations averaged 30 percentage points higher in their own general elections.⁵ Apathy is quite probably a more serious threat to democracy than a thousand preachers on the campaign trail.

Worldwide, 1984 was a year when several nations witnessed a surge of religious involvement in political affairs. India's prime minister was assassinated by members of a particular religious sect.⁶ The body of a Catholic priest, murdered by government agents, was pulled from an icy reservoir in Poland.⁷ The Archbishop of Canterbury strongly denounced the economic policies pursued by England's chief of state.⁸ The 1984 Nobel Peace Prize was received by an Anglican bishop, Desmond Tutu, who was leading the struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Tutu also came to America urging voters to defeat Ronald Reagan.⁹

The events of 1984 indicate that religious involvement in politics is a phenomenon which is likely to continue for some time. When religion again becomes an issue in American presidential politics the campaign of 1984 will be recalled. Perhaps many of the same arguments will be debated on that occasion. New issues, though, are certain to arise. Hopefully, Americans will be able to deal with those issues peacefully, regardless of differences in creed or conviction. And may this work be of

some value to those who undertake the task of writing the next story of crusaders on campaign.

NOTES

EPILOGUE

¹Nearly a hundred labor unions issued endorsements. The two most powerful unions (the Teamsters and the AFL-CIO) were among them. The National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers also gave formal endorsements. These endorsements are listed in the Kansas City Times, 1 September 1984, p. A4. Feminist groups exerted pressure, especially upon Mondale, to choose a female running mate; Elizabeth Drew, "A Political Journal," New Yorker, vol. 60, no. 26 (13 August 1984), pp. 38-41. Common Cause Magazine, addressing a number of issues ranging from nuclear weaponry to civil rights, published a "voting guide" for its readers: Common Cause Magazine, vol. 10, no. 5 (September/October 1984), pp. 38-50. The Ku Klux Klan endorsed Ronald Reagan. The endorsement, though, was rejected: New York Times, 2 May 1984, p. D26.

²Several newspaper endorsements are cited in the New York Times, 29 October 1984, p. 11.

³Celebrities of various kinds lent political support to the candidates of their choice: USA Today, 29 October 1984, p. 2D. The efforts of "Scholars Against the Escalating Danger of the Far Right" were discussed in Chapter Four: New York Times, 2 November 1984, p. A23. Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" was removed from a number of newspapers during the campaign. The cartoons were drawing criticism for their partisan attacks upon one of the candidates: USA Today, 29 October 1984, p. 1D.

⁴Andrew E. Manatos, "U.S. Voter Turnout: Now World's Worst," New York Times, 1 December 1984, p. 23.

⁵Flora Lewis, "The Pride of a Vote," New York Times, 9 October 1984, p. 35.

⁶Indira Gandhi's assassination was followed by bloody retribution upon members of the Sikh religion: Russell Watson,

"After Indira," Newsweek, vol. 104, no. 20 (12 November 1984), pp. 42-55.

⁷ USA Today, 31 October 1984, p. 9A.

⁸ New York Times, 9 October 1984, p. A3.

⁹ USA Today, 29 October 1984, p. 3A.

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