



**“A Charge to Revive the Role of Faith in the Public Square”
Speech by former Senator Rick Santorum (R-PA)
University of St. Thomas
Houston, TX
September 9, 2010**

Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Three pictures hung in the home of my devoutly Catholic immigrant grandparents when I was a boy and I remember them well – Jesus, Pope Paul VI and John F. Kennedy. The president was a source of great pride and a symbol to Catholics that all barriers had finally been broken. What my family and maybe even candidate Kennedy at the time didn’t realize was that in a key moment in that election of 1960 right here in Houston, Kennedy began the construction of another - even more threatening wall for our society – one that sealed off informed moral wisdom into a realm of non rational beliefs that have no legitimate role in political discourse.

Fifty years ago this Sunday JFK delivered a speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association to dispel suspicions about the role the papacy might play in the government of this country under his administration. Let’s make no mistake about it –Kennedy was addressing a real issue at the time – prejudice against Catholics threatened to cost him the election.

But on that day, Kennedy chose not just to dispel fear, he chose to expel faith.

Let me quote from the beginning of Kennedy’s speech:

I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute;

The idea of strict or absolute separation of church and state is not and never was the American model. It was a model used in countries like France and until recently Turkey, but it found little support in America until it was introduced into the public discourse by Justice Hugo Black in the case of Everson v. The Board of Education in 1947. (Black, by the way, was a Catholic-hating former member of the KKK who ironically enough advocated this strict separation doctrine to keep public funds from Catholic schools.)

While the “phrase separation of church and state” doesn’t appear in the Constitution, the concept of keeping the government apart from religion does.

The first part of the First Amendment prohibits the federal government from establishing a state church, such as existed in England and in some of the states in 1791, and from discriminating for or against particular faiths. The founders were determined to ensure that the new national government had no jurisdiction over matters of religion, in large part to insure that each American would be free to pursue the religion of their choice without state interference. Far from reflecting hostility toward religion, our founders, rooted in their own faith convictions, knew that faith was not just an essential element, but the essence of civilization and the inspiration of culture.

The second reference to religion in the First Amendment guaranteed the free exercise of religion and in conjunction with the prohibition of established churches, these two concepts were to work together to ensure that religion and people of faith had powerful constitutional protections of their right to not only worship as their

conscience dictated, but to be free to bring their religiously informed moral convictions into the public discourse.

The phrase “wall of separation” used by Black comes from a letter written by a founder who didn’t even attend the constitutional convention, Thomas Jefferson. After he was elected president he mentioned the phrase in a response to a letter written to him by the Danbury Baptists. The Baptists had expressed concern to him about the right of the government to interfere with the religious pursuits of the people, not the right of the people to engage their government with religiously informed moral judgments. Jefferson’s ‘wall of separation’ was describing how the First Amendment was designed to protect churches from the government and nothing more. Note that the Sunday following the day he wrote the letter, Jefferson attended religious services in the Capitol building - so much for the founders’ hostility or indifference to religion. But Kennedy’s misuse of the phrase constructed a high barrier that ultimately would keep religious convictions out of politics in a place where our founders had intended just the opposite.

Kennedy continued:

I believe in an America ... where no Catholic prelate would tell the President -- should he be Catholic -- how to act... where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.

Of course no religious body should "impose its will" on the public or public officials, but that was not the issue then or now. The issue is one that every diverse civilization like America has to deal with - how do we best live with our differences. Our founders’ vision, unlike the French, was to give every belief and every believer and non-believer a place at the table in the public square. Madison referred to this “equal and complete liberty” as the “true remedy.”

Admittedly our country hadn’t always lived up to that ideal - in particular with respect to Jews and Catholics, thus the legitimate reason for Kennedy’s speech. But what JFK advocated sounded more like Ataturk than Madison - that religious ideas and actors were not welcome in public policy debates.

Ultimately Kennedy’s attempt to reassure Protestants that the Catholic Church would not control the government and suborn its independence, advanced a philosophy of strict separation that would create a purely secular public square cleansed of all religious wisdom and the voice of religious people of all faiths. He laid the foundation for attacks on religious freedom and freedom of speech by the secular left and its political arms like the ACLU and the People for the American Way. This has and will continue to create dissension and division in this country as people of faith increasingly feel like second-class citizens.

Kennedy took words written to protect religion from the government and used them to protect the government from religion. It worked – in the years following this speech the concept of an absolute “separation of church and state” gained wider and wider acceptance due to its inculcation in the academy. When I was in the senate I used to question student groups by asking them which phrase was in the constitution “separation of church and state” or “the free exercise of religion?” Separation always won usually by a wide margin.

Another consequence is the debasement of our First Amendment right of religious freedom. Of all the great and necessary freedoms listed in the First Amendment, freedom to exercise religion (not just to believe, but to live out that belief) is the most important; before freedom of speech, before freedom of the press, before freedom of assembly, before freedom to petition the government for redress of grievances, before all others. This freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, is the trunk from which all other branches of freedom on our great tree of liberty get their life. Cut down the trunk and the tree of liberty will die and in its place will be only the barren earth of tyranny.

This first freedom has now been placed on the lowest rung of interests to be considered when weighing rights against one another. The fruits of this misguided idea are increasing evident – for example

- The ACLU is currently pushing HHS to force Catholic hospitals to perform abortions under the emergency care mandate of Obamacare.
- A University of Illinois professor hired to teach classes on Catholic doctrine was fired because he taught (well...) Catholic doctrine.
- Religious organizations are increasingly excluded from Public Universities unless they deny their deeply held religious beliefs. This year, the Supreme Court affirmed that The Christian Legal Society can be barred from the Hastings College of Law because they insist on holding their leaders accountable to Christian standards of sexual ethics.
- In 2006, Catholic Charities of Boston was forced to abandon adoptions due to a state law requiring that they assist homosexuals in adopting children.

Kennedy's error also unleashed a new form of censorship that would make vows to the Almighty a constitutional offense, rob clergy of their First Amendment rights and deprive our leaders and our country of their inspired wisdom and guidance.

When I served in the US Senate I often looked to the moral wisdom found in the writings of such religious figures as Augustine, Theresa of Avila, Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas More as well as from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Herschel.

Mother Teresa's speech at the National Prayer Breakfast, spoken with a humility that made her quiet voice a loud alarm in our hearts, moved me to take a leading role in an issue that pulled at the moral fabric of our country: partial birth abortion. And it was Pope John Paul II and other Christian leaders' call for the biblical concept of absolving debt at the Jubilee year of 2000 that motivated me to join Sen. Joe Biden to reduce third world debt. Should I have rejected the instructions from the clergy to relieve debt because it was inspired by the word of God? Did Kennedy reject desegregation because black ministers like the Rev. Martin Luther King arguing from a Biblical premise advocated it? Thank goodness he didn't.

There's a long list of Americans moved by faith who took on great causes for the nation they love - Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose novel Uncle Tom's Cabin shook a nation to war, Jeremiah Evarts who defended American Indian rights and Susan B. Anthony who was inspired by Jesus' radical view of women as equal to men. What would our nation look like had the spirit not moved in them?

If there were any doubts about Kennedy's intent to devalue faith's role in shaping public discourse his concluding words erased it:

Whatever issue should come before me as President, if I should be elected, on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject I will make my decision... in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be in the national interest and without regard to outside religious pressure or dictates.

So pressures or dictates from labor unions or environmental groups are smiled upon, and only the religious ones see a frown. To justify this suspicion toward the legitimate claims of faith, notice that Kennedy and his subsequent followers have invoked their conscience as their guide. All well and good. I too use my conscience as a guide, but you are not born with a competent conscience: it is formed and continues to be formed by something and reflects that formation. If faith in objective and eternal truths is no longer going to inform your conscience what moral code will? And where does that code come from? And what is the basis of its authority? Doesn't the public have a right to know? Yet Kennedy's followers never tell us.

What they do tell us is clear: that their consciences are **not** rooted in faith and as such they can be permitted to freely apply their ideas in making laws and deciding cases. On the other hand, consciences rooted in a belief in

God are free to apply their ideas to personal matters, but if your beliefs, in the words of my former senate colleague Chuck Schumer, are “deeply held beliefs” that impact your public positions - they must be excluded.

Writing in the nineteenth century whose conflicts were prelude to ours, John Henry Newman said: “Conscience has rights because it has duties; but in this age... it is the very right and freedom of conscience ...to be independent of unseen obligations. It becomes a license to take up any or no religion ...to boast of being above all religions and to be an impartial critic of each of them.” Without some objective moral touchstone, conscience is no more than self indulgence -- “I can do what I want simply because my conscience tells me to do it.”

A major political offshoot of Kennedy’s philosophy, sometimes referred to as the “privatization of faith,” was best illustrated by Mario Cuomo’s speech at Notre Dame in September 1984, There he espoused his nuanced position on abortion: that, as a result of his religious convictions he was personally opposed to abortion. But he then applies Kennedy’s thesis and refrains from imposing his values upon others whose views, because the truth is indiscernible, are equally valid. A virtual stampede of self-proclaimed Catholic politicians followed Cuomo into this seemingly safe harbor and remain there today. This political hand washing made it easier for Catholics to be in public life, but it also made it harder for Catholics to be Catholic in public life.

Cuomo's safe harbor is nothing more than a camouflage for the faint of heart - a cynical sanctuary for concealing true convictions from the public, and for rationalizing a reluctance to defend them.

Kennedy, Cuomo and their modern day disciples on the secular left would resolve any conflict between religion and politics by relegating faith to the closet. I see it as a healthy tension that Jesus dealt with directly when he said, “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s.” The early church under Pope Gelasius pronounced the two swords doctrine defining two realms, the realm of the sacred and the realm of the secular. Our founders understood that the secular realm of positive law would be at times unjust and that is why the more important sacred realm would arm people with, as one of our founder’s James Wilson put it, a “principle of revolution” to strive to set things right.

As a senator whenever I was confronted with an immoral law that was unjust or harmed society, I had an obligation to respect the law, but an equal obligation to work toward changing it to comport with what is moral. I agree with the founders that there is a natural law which can be known through the exercise of reason against which the positive or civil law must be measured and if needed amended.

Martin Luther King laid out his approach for ordinary citizens in a Letter from a Birmingham Jail, he wrote: "there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. ... How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law."

That said it’s important to exercise prudence in such matters, particularly concerning matters of private personal behavior. Not all immoral conduct should be illegal. There are many good reasons not to fight such behavior with the coercive tools of criminal law. With the common sense of his classical tradition, Thomas Aquinas said that law "does not forbid all the vices, from which upright men can keep away, but only those grave ones which the average man can avoid, and chiefly those which do harm to others and have to be stopped if human society is to be maintained, such as murder and theft and so forth."

So as long as this immoral behavior is not done in public or has significant public consequence it should stand outside civil sanctions. Aquinas was clear and practical: "The purpose of human law is to bring people to virtue, not suddenly, but step by step."

An illustration of this dichotomy is the issue of laws pertaining to certain sexual practices and what is called same sex marriage. In 2003 I expressed concern about the court’s decision in a case challenging a Texas

sodomy statute. I did so not because I would have voted for the Texas law, following St. Thomas' wisdom I would have opposed the Texas law.

I raised concerns about the consequences of the legal reasoning the court gave for invalidating the statute – they created a new constitutional “right” to consensual sexual conduct. I warned such a right would be used as a basis to create new a right that could have profound public consequences - same sex marriage.

I have been criticized in the media for daring to speak out on these sensitive moral issues. So be it. I've tried, not always successfully, to approach these issues with the appropriate passion for the important matter at hand, with respect for the other point of view, without malice toward my opponent and with the humility that my judgment in some cases may be in error.

As it has been pointed out to me on numerous occasions, there are moral issues where I have differed from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops and even the pope – welfare reform, the war in Afghanistan and Iraq, and some immigration policies. While all of these issues have profound moral underpinnings none of them involve moral absolutes. War is are not always unjust; government aid is not always just or loving. The bishops and I may disagree on such prudential matters, but as with all people of good will with whom I disagree, I have an obligation to them and my country to listen to their perspective and perform a healthy reexamination of my own position.

Let me be clear I am not arguing here that I have, or our country should, be governed on the basis of religious revelation - that we should for example have laws against murder, stealing, abortion and polygamy only because the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob decreed it so. I wholehearted agree with C.S. Lewis who said “I love God, but I detest theocracies.”

Obviously, not everyone shares the Judeo-Christian moral convictions, all of us have an obligation to justify our positions based upon something that is accessible to everyone irrespective of their religious beliefs. We owe the public arguments based upon reason grounded in truth.

In the Encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II wrote as his opening sentence:

“Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart the desire to know the truth — in a word, to know himself — so that by knowing and loving God, men and women can come to the fullness of the truth about themselves.”

The principle of the harmony of faith and reason is a crucial contribution that the Catholic Church brings to the debate. Those of us who are Catholic along with a majority of Protestants and Jews believe that God reveals himself through his creation and, as such, moral truths that should govern a just society are accessible to all – believers and non-believers alike.

At the same time, of course, we must hold fast to our convictions of what is right and what is wrong according to our faith, and not fall into the trap of idolizing our own intellects, or trying so hard not to offend that we succumb to a watery political correctness. It should not make us uncomfortable to call something evil if that's what it is.

Having convictions doesn't mean that we don't understand the complexity of the world – it means that we are able to prioritize the pursuit of truth and justice and call evil what it is.

Our American civilization has reflected a most healthy union of faith and reason. From long experience, we know that faith for its own sake, apart from love of truth is only a sentiment, and that reason for its own sake withers into rationalism. Neither is autonomous. If I have faith only in myself, I belong to a very small religion. And as for the right use of reason, let's remember what G. K. Chesterton said: “A madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason.”

In his Regensburg address, Pope Benedict XVI contrasted the Judeo-Christian revelation, with the concept of God held by some outside of the Judeo-Christian world as aloof from reason. He also discussed those societies which would attempt to live without God, as in secular Europe or Communist China. In the secular West, he said, "... the subjective "conscience" becomes the sole arbiter of what is ethical. In this way, though, ethics and religion lose their power to create a community and become a completely personal matter. This is a dangerous state of affairs for humanity, as we see from the disturbing pathologies of religion and reason which necessarily erupt when reason is so reduced that questions of religion and ethics no longer concern it."

The movement in our country to fly on "one wing," reason alone will ultimately undermine the very foundation of our country – freedom.

America is rooted in the founders' belief that free people, whose God-given rights are protected by a government that allows the individual to pursue their dreams and reap the fruits of their labor, would build the most just and prosperous society in the history of man. They were right; freedom was the key ingredient in the American experiment.

Our founders understood it was relatively easy to establish freedom in our Constitution, the harder task was to create a system that would maintain it against the corrosive force of time. The author Os Guinness describes how they accomplished this as the Golden Triangle of Freedom.

Freedom requires virtue, virtue requires faith and faith requires freedom and around again.

That freedom requires virtue was explained by the political philosopher Edmund Burke, who wrote "Men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites ... Society cannot exist, unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere; and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters."

Virtue requires faith because faith is the primary teacher of morality. That is not to say that one cannot be virtuous without faith, but for society as a whole faith is the indispensable agent of virtue.

Faith requires freedom. Why has America remained a deeply religious country averting the road to secularism traveled by our European brothers and sisters? Again Madison's "true remedy" the combination of "free exercise" and no religious state supported monopoly has created a vibrant market place of religions extolling everywhere the word of God to inspire people to fulfill His special plan for each of us.

Our founders' inspired brilliance created a paradigm that has given America the best chance of any civilization in the history of man to endure the test of time. Time, this time now in American history is putting that to the test.

I will conclude with a final consequence of what started here 50 years ago by bringing in one of the Catholic Church's foremost American advocates for religious freedom, John Courtney Murray. He advised us that the first two articles of the First Amendment are "not articles of faith, but articles of peace." What was Murray getting at?

E Pluribus Unum – out of many one. Our founders believed that if they fostered religion and the Judeo-Christian moral code we would achieve something that was never before seen in a country with so many competing faiths - a truly tolerant, democratic and harmonious public square.

On June 12, 1775, Congress' first act was to urge a national day of "public humiliation, fasting and prayer" for which it commissioned "ministers of the gospel of all denominations" to participate.

On the assigned day, Congress attended services at an Anglican Church in the morning and a Presbyterian meetinghouse in the afternoon. The following year they convened at Philadelphia's "Roman Chapel" and later

a Dutch Lutheran Church. This is the vision. A vibrant, fully clothed public square; a marketplace of believers and non-believers where truth could be proffered and reasoned, and differences civilly tolerated.

One of my favorite sayings is: We don't appreciate what we have until it's gone. For over 200 years we have been blessed with a country often described as a melting pot. The fire that helped to gently melt us together into a country where people of different faiths and cultures come together in our dynamic democracy to peaceably find common ground - is that first freedom – the true remedy.

What the movement spawned here 50 years ago seems to disregard is that repressing or banishing people of faith from having a say in government creates alienation which could lead to disaffection and conflict as we have seen in other countries around the world. Think about all of the people in this country from different cultures who if they lived in their native country would be sworn enemies. Yet when they come to America they are inoculated with something that enables them to work together on the school board and neighborhood associations – a key ingredient in that inoculation is the freedom of conscience that ameliorates the fear, frustration and mistrust that comes from repression.

Kennedy's speech was historic because it did offer a teachable moment. In the short term it accomplished a great good by helping to put an end to Catholic bigotry. Unfortunately, its lasting impact not only undermined the essential role that faith has successfully played in America, but it reduced religion to mere personal "belief" and helped launch a cultural revolution, proclaiming loudly that on matters of moral consequence, reason has no truths it can discern, nothing of moral significance it can claim to know, much less contribute to the public debate.

That's the "faith" that is being offered by those who want to change the time tested Golden Triangle of Freedom. You'll see it in the public square today, and it's popular because it pretends to impose nobody's values on anybody. Yet it's an illusion because it uses a cloak of 'neutrality', 'objectivity' and 'rationality' that results in the imposition of secular values, on everybody while marginalizing faith and those who believe as moralizing theocrats.

Kennedy concluded his Houston speech by saying he did not "intend to disavow either my views or my church in order to win this election." The sad fact is he could have stood by his beliefs and won, he chose not to. Instead he charted a course that has won many elections, but has put American civilization at risk.

I have always felt comfortable to be on the path our founders' took, the one that is now less traveled and invites the most criticism. I do so because I believe we all have an obligation to be good stewards of this great inheritance that generations of Americans created with their last full measure of devotion.

That's why we should feel so blessed to be here at a time when the land that God has so richly blessed is being put to the test. Many generations are never called to do great things, make great sacrifices to maintain liberty. We are the fortunate ones who have the opportunity not only preserve but build on the founder's vision of freedom supported by virtue which in turn is supported by a vibrant faith – a mutually strengthening interface of church and state that with our collective effort will keep America that beacon of hope that shining city on the hill.

Bless you and May God continue to bless America.