

Kennedy Rips Bigotry in Church Issue

KENNEDY RIPS BIGOTRY OVER CHURCH ISSUE

Refuses Switch to No. 2 Spot

BY WILLARD EDWARDS

(Chicago Tribune Press Service)

Washington, April 21 — Sen. John F. Kennedy (D., Mass.) spurned suggestions Thursday that he drop his White House ambitions because of his Catholic religion and accept the Vice Presidential nomination on the Democratic ticket.

Indignation sharpened his reply to injection of the religious issue into American politics. He concluded with this challenge:

"If there is bigotry in the country, then so be it—there is bigotry. If that bigotry is too great to permit the fair consideration of a Catholic for President who has made clear his complete independence and his complete dedication to separation of church and state, then we ought to know it. I do not believe this is the case."

No Questions Asked

Kennedy addressed the American Society of Newspaper Editors' annual convention. His bold and forthright discussion of a sensitive subject brought prolonged applause. At the end, when questions were called for, no editor had a query.

The Massachusetts senator had originally been sched-

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Sen. John Kennedy

Sen. Kennedy Flays Bigotry in Religion Issue

He Spurs No. 2

Spot to Balk Revolt

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pled to talk about international affairs but decided to plunge into the religious question after brief campaigning in West Virginia against Sen. Hubert Humphrey [D., Minn.] convinced him that his religion was being made the main issue in that state.

Humphrey, who addressed the editors later, also interpolated a long statement on the religious issue, asserting that he didn't want to be President if it meant his party would be split on the question.

Slaps at Newspapers

Kennedy suggested that the press might be responsible for what he regarded as overemphasis of his religion. He noted that the newspaper coverage of his Wisconsin campaign dwelt mainly upon his Catholicism instead of upon the subjects he discussed, such as farm legislation, foreign policy, and other issues.

"In West Virginia it is the same story," he asserted. "The great bulk of West Virginians paid very little attention to my religion until they read in the nation's press that this was the decisive issue in West Virginia. There are many serious problems in that state but religion is not one of them.

"I do not think that religion is the decisive issue in any state. I do not think it should be."

Only Legitimate Question

Kennedy said he had been answering questions about his religious views for months. The only legitimate question on the subject, he said, was:

"Would you, as President of the United States, be responsive in any way to ecclesiastical pressures or obligations of any kind that might in any fashion influence or interfere with your conduct of that office in the national interest?"

His answer, many times, he said, has been "no." He cited also the fact that he had opposed federal assistance to parochial schools and voted against it and was opposed to appointment of an ambassador to the Vatican.

He said the prospects of any President ever receiving for his signature a bill providing foreign aid funds for birth control were remote. He would deal with such a bill, he said, on the basis of the public interest, without regard to his private religious views. He said he would take the same attitude with regard to bills dealing with censorship, divorce, relations with Spain, and similar subjects.

He asked with a show of anger, why were such ques-

country or some other, in this century or the last."

Kennedy said it had been suggested that he withdraw as a Presidential candidate to avoid "a dangerous religious controversy" and accept the Vice Presidential nomination to "placate the so-called Catholic vote."

He said he found this "highly distasteful," carrying the assumption that Catholics are "a pawn on the political chess board," to be bought off with the No. 2 place on the ticket.

"Are we to admit to the world that one-third of our population is from birth barred to the White House?" he asked.

The other suggested alternative was to proceed with the primaries, the convention and the election and let the people decide the question, he said.

Doesn't Expect Revolt

"I have never suggested that the Democratic party is required to nominate me or face a Catholic revolt in November," he said. "I do not believe that to be true. I cannot believe that our convention would act on such a premise and I do believe that a majority of Americans of every faith will support the Democratic nominee, whoever he is."

Humphrey, speaking before the same audience several hours later, said he would not want to pursue his campaign "if it were to create deep and dangerous divisions among Americans on the issue of religion."

"I would not want to be President if it meant that my own party might be torn apart on this extraneous issue," he continued. "I would not want to receive the vote of any American because my opponent worships in a particular church nor receive the vote of any American simply because he is of the same faith as I."

Sen. Stuart Symington [D.,

Mo.], a third announced candidate for the Democratic Presidential nomination, addressed the editors on the "Future Course for America."

The President is not elected to be protector of the faith or guardian of the public morals. His attendance at church should be his business alone, not a showcase for the nation.

Recalls Catholic Justices

"The President cannot ignore the Congress, or the voters, or the courts. And our highest courts incidentally have a long history of Catholic justices, including two chief justices, none of whom, so far as I know, was ever challenged on the fairness of his rulings on sensitive church-state issues."

Kennedy said he was growing weary of being called the Catholic candidate for president.

"I do not speak for the Catholic church on issues of public policy and no one in that church speaks for me," he said. "My record on some issues may have displeased some prominent Catholic clergymen and organizations; and it has been approved by others. The Catholic church is not a monolith—it is committed in this country to the principles of individual liberty. It has no claim over my conduct as a public officer sworn to the public interest."

Hopes to See End of It

"So I hope we can see the beginning of the end of references to me as a Catholic candidate for President. Do not expect me to explain or defend every act or statement of every pope or priest in this

tions directed only at him, not at the other candidates? His rivals for the Democratic nomination did not vote against aid to parochial schools, he noted, remarking wryly:

"Nevertheless, I have not yet charged any opponents with taking orders from Rome."

"Not British Crown"

Kennedy said he thought the voters of Wisconsin and West Virginia had a right to be resentful when categorized simply as Catholics or Protestants or Jews in analyzing their political choices.

"Voters are more than Catholics, Protestants or Jews," he said. "They make up their minds for many reasons, good and bad. To submit the candidates to a religious test is bad enough—to apply it to the voters themselves is divisive, degrading and wholly unwarranted."

"What is there about the Presidency that justifies this constant drumbeat upon a candidate's religion and that of his supporters? The Presidency is not the British crown, serving a dual capacity in both church and state."