

RELIGION ON THE STUMP: POLITICS AND FAITH IN AMERICA

Two politicians explore the interplay between personal religious convictions and politics



THE PEW
FORUM
ON RELIGION
& PUBLIC LIFE

Former New York Governor Mario Cuomo and Indiana Representative Mark Souder came together in October 2002 for a discussion of how their respective religious convictions have both shaped and been reflected in their careers as public servants in a pluralistic society. Sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, the conversation began with prepared comments by each speaker, followed by questions from members of the Forum's advisory board. The discussion was moderated by Forum co-chairs E. J. Dionne, Jr., Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, and Jean Bethke Elshtain, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago.

MELISSA ROGERS: Good morning. Welcome to Religion on the Stump: Politics and Faith in America. I'm Melissa Rogers, executive director of the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The Forum serves as a town hall and a clearinghouse of information on issues at the intersection of religion and public affairs. It's supported by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts, and we're very grateful for that support.

I also want to express my deep gratitude to Governor Mario Cuomo and Representative Mark Souder, who will lead the discussion today on religion and politics.

These issues have been with us since before our country's founding. Before the Bill of Rights was added to the Constitution, the Constitution mentioned religion only once, and it was in the context

of religion in politics. As you recall, Article VI of the Constitution states that officeholders must pledge to support the Constitution, "but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust" in the United States.

Today, as then, many candidates have religious convictions, and, for some, introducing themselves to voters naturally includes introducing voters to their religious ideals and identities. In our last presidential campaign, for example, religion may have been discussed more widely and often than it had been in any recent presidential campaign. We recall when then-candidate George W. Bush replied to a question in a debate by saying that his favorite political philosopher was Jesus Christ, "because he changed my heart." His opponent, Al Gore, embraced the motto, "What would Jesus do," while his running mate, Joe Lieberman, often talked of religion and

connected ideas like his position on medical care for seniors with the biblical commandment to “honor thy father and mother.”

These statements raise questions such as: How can a candidate reveal particular religious commitments in ways that tend to support, rather than cast doubt upon, that candidate’s commitment to uphold the Constitution’s direction of equal religious liberty for

all, including those who have no religious faith? How can a candidate connect faith and policy in a manner that is authentic and yet, at the same time, doesn’t suggest that there’s only one straight line from, as they say, the Bible to the ballot box? We hope to address these issues, as well as many others, including the rights and responsibilities of religious citizens in the political process.

MARIO CUOMO

E.J. DIONNE: It’s a great pleasure to introduce Mario Cuomo. I met the governor 25 years ago this fall, when he was running for mayor of New York City. He had a slogan in that campaign that was always one of my favorites: “Put your anger to work.”

That’s an intriguing idea, and it’s a good way to look at politics, although many years later, the governor gave a speech attacking anger in politics. I called him up and asked, “But, Governor, weren’t you the guy who ran on the slogan, ‘Put your anger to work?’” And he replied, “Yeah, but who won that election?”

Let me just read a quotation. “The purpose of government is to make love real in a sinful world.” Now that sounds positively Niebuhrian, but it’s actually something Mario Cuomo said a very long time ago. And I think that is a reflection of Governor Cuomo’s deep knowledge of this subject and the fact that he’s been thinking about it for a very long time.

On the other hand, I don’t want to make Governor Cuomo look too pious. He also understands the practicalities of the subject we are dealing with today. He once gave a sermon at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, which is the Episcopal Cathedral in New York, and he got up and looked at all those Episcopalians and said, “I knew I was not in a Catholic Church because there was no second collection.”

You are all familiar with Governor Cuomo’s record. He was secretary of state in New York. He was

elected lieutenant governor in 1978. He was elected governor in 1982. And he was reelected by very large margins in 1986 and 1990.

Any journalist who has covered Governor Cuomo knows about those late-night or early morning phone calls that come if he takes issue with anything you write about him. I had written a favorable column about a proposal Governor Cuomo had made during his 1994 campaign to have a referendum on the death penalty. He proposed a referendum in which one of the alternatives would be life without parole, which has been Governor Cuomo’s position all his life. I had one line in the piece that said that perhaps Governor Cuomo was doing this, in part, for political reasons. So my phone rang and I picked it up, and before I had a chance to say anything, there was this voice on the other end of the phone that said, “What do you mean I did it for political reasons?” And, of course, it was Mario Cuomo. And we went on, and I said, “But, Governor, has anyone else written positively about this idea of yours?” And he said, “Of course not; that’s why I called you.” And I realized that Governor Cuomo was saying thank you. And that was his way of doing so.

What I want to say is thank you, Governor Cuomo, for joining us today. We are very blessed to have you.

MARIO CUOMO: Thank you very much, Melissa, Jean, E.J.

The question put to me for today was as follows: Will you share with us your reflections upon the experience of elected officials who try to reconcile personal religious conviction while serving a pluralistic American constituency?

In discussing the matter, let's make it clear that I don't pretend to be a theologian or a philosopher. I speak only as a former elected official and as a Catholic who was baptized and raised in a pre-Vatican II Church, attached to the Church first by birth and then by decision.

And I speak mindful of the fact that time constraints threaten to make my attempt at simplifying this subject, which I'm going to try to do, an exercise in simplistics. That's a very slippery slope, and I'll do my best to avoid that, but I will try to keep it plain.

Catholicism is a religion of the head as well as of the heart, and to be a Catholic is to commit to dogmas that distinguish our faith from others; and, like most religions, it also requires a lifelong struggle to practice the faith day to day. The practice can be difficult. Today's America, as we all know, is a consumer-driven society filled with endless distractions and temptations for people struggling to live by spiritual as well as material impulses.

Catholics who also happen to hold political office in this pluralistic democracy, and therefore commit to serving Jews and Muslims and Buddhists and atheists and Protestants, as well as Catholics, undertake an additional responsibility. They have to try to create conditions under which all citizens can live with a reasonable degree of freedom to practice their own competing religious beliefs, like the right to divorce, to use birth control, to choose abortion, to withdraw stem cells from embryos or even to fight the belief in a God.

Like all other public officials, Catholics take an oath to preserve the Constitution that guarantees this freedom. And they do so gladly, not because they love what others do with their freedom, but because they realize that in guaranteeing freedom for others, they guarantee their own right to live their personal lives as Catholics, with the right to reject birth con-

trol devices, to reject abortions and to refuse to participate in or contribute to removing stem cells from embryos, if they believe their religion requires them to.

This freedom is perhaps the greatest strength of our uniquely successful experiment in government, and so it must be a dominant concern of every public official. There are other general legal principles which affect the official's decisions operating at the same time. The First Amendment, of course, which forbids the official preference of one religion over others, also affirms one's legal right to argue his or her religious belief, and to argue that it would serve well as an article of our universal public morality, that it is not just parochial or narrowly sectarian, but that it fulfills a human desire for order or peace or justice or kindness or love or all of those things – values most of us agree are desirable, even apart from their specific religious priority.

So I can, if I choose, argue as an official that the state should not fund the use of contraceptive devices, not because the pope or my bishop demands it, but because I think that for the good of the whole community we should not sever sex from an openness to the creation of life. And surely I can, if I'm so inclined, demand some kind of law to prevent abortions, to prevent stem-cell retrieval from embryos, not just because my bishops say it's wrong, but because I think that the whole community, regardless of its religious beliefs, should agree on the importance of protecting life, including life in the womb, which is, at the very least, potentially human and should not be extinguished casually. I have the right to do all of that.

But again, and crucially, the Constitution that guarantees your right not to have to practice my religion, guarantees my right to try to convince you to adopt my religion's tenet as public law whenever that opportunity is presented, and it's presented often.

The question for the religious public official becomes, Should I try? Or would the effort not be helpful? Would it produce harmony and understanding, or might it instead be divisive in a way that weakens our ability to function as a pluralistic community?

For me, as a Catholic former official, the question created by my oath, by my Constitution and by my personal inclinations was, When should I argue to make my religious value your morality, my rule of conduct your limitation? As I understood my own religion, it required me to accept the restraints it imposed in my own life, but it did not require that I seek to impose all of them on all New Yorkers, Catholic or not, whatever the circumstances of the moment.

Having heard the pope renew the Church's ban on birth-control devices, I was not required to veto the funding of contraceptive programs for non-Catholics or dissenting Catholics in my state if I did not believe that to be in the interest of the whole pluralistic community I was sworn to serve.

My Church understands that. My Church understands that our public morality depends on a consensus view of right and wrong. Our religious values will not be accepted as part of the public morality unless they are shared by the pluralistic community at large. The plausibility of achieving that consensus is a relevant consideration in deciding whether or not to make the effort.

Catholics have lived with these truths of our democratic society fairly comfortably over the years. There is an American Catholic tradition of political realism. The Catholic Church has always made prudential, practical judgments with respect to their attempts to interpolate Catholic principles into the civil law. That was true of slavery in the late 19th century. It's true of contraceptives today. And it certainly appears to be true of stem-cell retrieval.

I haven't heard any proposal from either the Church or President Bush, who took such a hard stance on this subject, that there should be a law condemning stem-cell retrieval as murder. As I understood the president's position, we can't take stem cells from embryos because that's human life, which is essentially, I guess, the Catholic position as well. That's not being argued any more than the position on contraceptives is being argued, any more than the question of slavery was argued in the 19th century.

I conclude that religious convictions, at least mine, are not a serious impediment to efficient and proper service by a public official in today's America. In fact, I'm convinced that some of the fundamental propositions common to all of our religious convictions actually enrich, instead of inhibit, public service, and they make public service especially inviting to people who are trying to be religious.

Religion's place in our government is obviously an elusive topic. The legal precedents and social attitudes that attend it are complex, shifting, sometimes plainly contradictory. Even trying to define the basic words can be an adventure. Most non-lawyers, maybe even most lawyers, would assume that the word religion necessarily implies a belief in a god, perhaps even monotheism. Not so. The word religion has been defined by the Supreme Court quite clearly to include belief systems like secular humanism, Buddhism, ethical culture — belief systems, which, by and large, reject the notion of God. God is an even more difficult word. Try finding it in *Black's Law Dictionary*. They don't even attempt a definition of the word God.

And some authorities say that God is just too big a reality to be literally embodied. The word God is endless, and you're talking about an infinite power, infinitely powerful and effectual. And we are a couple of hundred thousand years old, perhaps still within reach of our animal forebears, just learning to reflect, learning the meaning of civility with tiny, tiny intellects. It's no surprise that people would conclude that it's too big a reality to be literally embodied, and maybe that's why it appears nowhere in the law of the land, the Constitution. Maybe that's one of the reasons they didn't use the word God. And in the Declaration of Independence, which was not a law and therefore wouldn't be subjected to rigorous interpretation and enforcement, the word appears only in the context of the natural law. The reference is to the laws of nature and nature's God. It has always seemed to me that language deserves more attention than it has received, especially now.

As I understand it, natural law is roughly a law derived from our nature and from human reason

without the benefit of revelation or a willing suspension of disbelief. It's the law, as I perceive it, that would occur to us if we were only 500,000 people on an island without books, without education, without rabbis or priests or history, and we had to figure out who and what we were.

We can figure out two of the most basic principles of natural law just by looking around at our world. We see that some creatures are similar in the way we behave, but we are different from the fish and the trees the rocks and the other things that live. And we seem to talk and be able to communicate. And we call ourselves human. That's the first part. The second would be: We don't know where we came from, what we are and what we should do with this relationship we have of similarity, but we should probably try to make the place as convenient as we can make it, and as useful and as good.

Those would be natural law principles.

These two most basic principles are shared by most if not all of our nation's religions, whether they include God or not. Look at the earliest of our monotheistic religions, Judaism. Two of Judaism's basic principles, as I understand it, are *tzedakkah* and *tikkun olam*. *Tzedakkah* is the obligation of righteousness and common sense that binds all human beings to treat one another charitably and with respect and dignity. Of course. What else would you conclude if you're on a desert island, and you saw other like kinds, and you knew you had to protect yourself against the beasts, and you knew that you had to raise children, and you knew that you had to produce crops so that you could eat? You would say that we should treat one another with respect. You wouldn't need a whole lot of influence from on high or anywhere else to conclude that.

And the second principle is *tikkun olam*, the principle that says, now having accepted the notion that we should treat one another with respect and dignity, we come together as human beings in comity and cooperation to repair and improve the world around us.

Tikkun olam. Well, that's also the essence of Christianity, founded by a Jew, built on precisely those principles. His words, approximately, were, "Love one another as you love yourself, for the love of me. And I am Truth. And the truth is, God made the world but did not complete it, and you are to be collaborators in creation."

That's the message. That, in a lot of places, in the old books and the new books, is described as the whole law. And it's described in Judaism as the whole law, without need of ornamentation or elaboration. And on a desert island, it would work. Incidentally, it would work on this island, the globe, before we make it a desert.

All the great religions that I'm aware of share those two principles. The Koran, I'm informed, honors that principle. It seems to me, as it did to de Tocqueville and to many others, that these two basic religious principles are a great benefit to our nation, and can be even more beneficial if focused on and stressed.

Wouldn't it be nice to find a way simply to announce at once to the whole place that before we argue about the things that we differ on, why don't we concentrate on the two things we all believe in? We're supposed to love one another, and we're supposed to work actively together to improve this mess we're in, because that wasn't done for us. That was the mission that was left to us. I can't think of any better guidance.

Nor do I think it's terribly difficult to nail down these two grand natural law religious principles to the procrustean bed of reality of day-to-day affairs. I don't really believe that I've slid all the way into simplistics yet on this point. I don't think it's so tough to do it in a complicated world like ours, politically and otherwise.

I think Abraham Lincoln provides the simplest and most useful instruction in how to reconcile the two virtues that seem to compete when you talk about religion. And what are the two virtues that compete? Individuality and community. If you were

looking for a simple but not simplistic way to break down politics, it comes pretty much down to individuality, personal responsibility, et cetera, et cetera and community.

Well, how do you reconcile those? Here's how Lincoln did it. He said we should collaborate in creation; the coming together of people through government, to do for one another collectively what they could not do as well or at all individually and privately. Perfect. That's the end of the discussion. Don't ask me if I'm a conservative, if I'm a liberal; that is the law. And now all I have to do is apply it to each individual set of facts as they occur, and that's not hard. We can argue about it, we'll differ about it, we might even fight about it, but it is not complicated intellectually.

Education? You want to do it all privately? Terrific. We did that for a long time. I don't think it works. I think we need to do it collectively, because some people won't be able to pay, and we have to educate everybody. That's why we have free public schools.

Healthcare? It wasn't until 1965 that we had Medicare and Medicaid, and so before that we had decided, according to Lincoln's prescription, that we didn't need collectivity here.

Unemployment insurance? Worker's compensation? When my mother and father came from Italy and ran into a Depression and lost their youngest child, there were none of these things. And so the decision we made for the first 100 years or so was, we don't need any, we're fine. Not complicated. Maybe primitively stupid, but not complicated, and it's still not.

Should we be in the stem-cell business or shouldn't we? Do we need government for this or don't we? I won't quarrel about it. How much government do we need? That's easy. There's no problem in reconciling these two things, or at least that's the way I see it. So all we have to do is apply the simple test of the facts of a changing world as they confront us.

What our religious principles urge upon us comes down to this: We need to love one another, to come together to create a good society and use that

mutuality discretely in order to gain the benefits of community without sacrificing the importance of individual freedom and responsibility. In these concededly broad terms, that would be good government. It's also, frankly, inviting to people who think of themselves, or want to think of themselves, as religious, who want to believe in something bigger than they are, which is the basis of all of this. I know I do; I know I do desperately want to believe in something better than I am. If all there is is me in this society, then I've wasted an awful lot of time, because I'm not worth it.

I'm going to quit now before I proceed any further down that slippery slope.

E.J. DIONNE: Is Mario Cuomo a theologian and canon lawyer disguised as a politician? Who knows? Thank you for that talk.

Since Representative Souder is delayed getting here by votes on the Hill, we will start with a question for the governor from my co-chair and friend Jean Elshtain.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: Thank you, Governor Cuomo, for your eloquent remarks. In the course of your presentation you noted concerns about making an individual's religious faith the value of the wider community, and you also indicated that in attempting to do that, rather than creating or sustaining civic harmony, it might do quite the opposite.

Do you believe there are times when a public official, who is also a deeply committed person of faith, should deepen divisions that may exist in the community for the sake of furthering values that may be religiously based? When is it your job to deepen that debate and to extend the debate in a direction that is consistent both with your religious values and with what you hope will be the values of the wider community at some point?

MARIO CUOMO: I think what you are asking comes down to: Give us some examples, or tell us under what circumstances, you would risk rejection, et cetera, for a greater good. I don't think that's a

question that you should limit to religious issues. That is a question that occurs all the time.

My position on the death penalty, for example, confuses a lot of people. In debating it against Ed Koch, which I did for years and years, he loved to get up and say, “Well, Mario is against the death penalty because he thinks it’s a sin,” which was a kind of deprecating way to characterize my position. I have been against the death penalty all of my adult life. For most of my adult life the Catholic Church did not express an opinion against the death penalty. Notwithstanding, I wrote to the Vatican when I was governor and said, “Please, please, please speak on this subject.”

I spoke against the death penalty, never once suggesting that I was doing it as a moral issue. Everybody I know – super intelligent people like Nino Scalia – will say morality is over here and over there, and so I don’t know exactly what morality means to him, and therefore I seldom talk in terms of “moral” issues. I will occasionally talk about religious issues; I don’t talk about morality. And I never talk about the death penalty as being a moral issue. I said, “I am against the death penalty because I think it is bad and unfair for society. I think it is debasing. I think it is degenerate. I think it kills innocent people. I think it eclipses other more significant issues that you should be addressing when you’re talking about murder and how to do away with it, et cetera.”

And so my point was made on the basis of reasons that you could fairly say were not religious, not questions of morality; they were questions that are perfectly appropriate in this pluralistic society, what’s good for you, what’s fair, what’s reasonable, what works, what doesn’t work. And I made a very, very strong case, and I got, pardon me, “murdered,” especially in 1994 when the exit polls showed that I lost 7.5 percent of the votes because of my position on the death penalty. And considering I only lost the election by 2.5 or 3 points, that was a lot. I did that because I believed it was better to make the point as loudly and insistently as I could than to walk away from it.

Why? Because it was an issue that went way beyond executing somebody at Sing Sing. I pushed it because I believed it went far beyond the death penalty itself. It was a question of how you viewed human beings. It was a question of how you dealt with your own anger. My understanding of why people were for it was because they were angry and because they wanted revenge. There wasn’t any other reason that I could find for most people, and I thought that was corrosive, that was bad and it had to be objected to, and so I did.

So when do you take a potentially unpopular stand for a greater good? When you think you should.

Should you do it with stem cells now? Should we now, as Catholics, be arguing that there should be a law that declares that anybody who withdraws a stem cell from an embryo is a murderer? Should you forbid it? Should you make it part of the penal law? That is the logic of those who object, isn’t it? That’s the logic of it with abortion too, isn’t it? If you’re going to say it’s a human and it’s a person, well then you should say that there should be a law punishing it as murder. No, I don’t think so. Why? I think that would be divisive. I think it doesn’t work. I think people wouldn’t understand it, and I think you wouldn’t make your point.

I tried to make the point at Notre Dame in 1984 as a Catholic. I said, “Look, if we want to convince people that our position on abortion demonstrates a respect for life that would be good for all of us, let us start by example.” And at that point, the statistics available to us were that Catholics were having abortions to the same extent that everybody else was. And how can we expect to convert this community to our point of view unless we lead the way by example and with love?

So it’s not an easy question, but it goes way beyond religion. It goes to all your positions. One of my unhappinesses with the Democratic Party at the moment is that while it often talks in terms of “morality,” on both Iraq, until recently, and the tax cut issue, the Democratic Party has basically taken a pass.

The tax cut was passed when you thought you had the largest surplus in American history. That was a tax cut that was passed with the rationale: "We don't need the money." That's an exact quote. It was passed on the assumption: "We don't need the money; they gave us the money, we should give it back." And so most of it will go back to the rich people, because they gave us most of it. Over the next few years, you will have \$500 billion going to 1,120,000 taxpayers, more or less. They are the richest people in America who will get \$500 billion. This is with deficits threatening the states and local government. You know what that means? That means increases in real estate taxes, property taxes. You know what they are? Regressive taxes. You know whom they hurt most? Yes, the working people and the poor people.

Now, with all of that, with the lack of money for prescription drugs, with a war looming that they say will cost \$200 billion, with the Social Security money being used up in this process, should you go forward with a \$500 billion distribution of money to people who are so rich they can't reasonably be said to need it, when it wouldn't even be invested in the economy?

If you want to invest it in the economy, if you're going to switch your rationale now to say, "Well, we had a great surplus then. We had a powerful economy then when we first passed it. Now we have a lousy economy. Now we want the tax cut because it's good to stimulate," then don't give it to me and my clients at Willkie, Farr and Gallagher. We're not going to buy automobiles or anything with it; we're going to invest it. Give it the way you gave the \$600, give it the way you gave the \$300; give it to people who are going to spend it right away. So take \$250 billion of the \$500 billion and give temporary revenue sharing to avoid those tax increases that are inevitable next year at the state and local level for poor people. Tell the rich people to wait four years.

Tell me why that isn't a totally "moral" position and fairer than our current position, which is, "We dare not talk about it because if we do they'll say we're raising the taxes and we'll lose an election."

Well, why did we take a pass? Why did we take a pass?

Look at Iraq. If you imagine Iraq without 9/11, now just for a moment try to imagine there was, if only it could be so, no 9/11. And so a year and a half or so into the presidency, without 9/11, the president suddenly announces we're going to attack Iraq. What would have happened? Well, after the laughter stopped, people would have said, "You have to be kidding, right? Make the case. You didn't say this in the campaign in 2000. You haven't said it for a year and a half. Why are you saying it now? What happened now? Did you learn something? Maybe you know something that you can tell us, you found something, the Israelis found something, because they're better at finding things than you are."

No. So what happened is this issue was shoved into the draft created by 9/11 and that great surging current of emotion, and we didn't even ask about Iraq. But now we're beginning to come to our senses, and now we're beginning to ask questions like, "Look, he's a bad guy. He's Adolf Hitler. We want to get rid of him. We understand that. But isn't there a way to do it without sending the 200,000, 300,000 people there, some of whom will be killed, and without killing lots of innocent people? Isn't there another way to do it?"

Why aren't we making that argument the way we should? I think we're not making it because a lot of politicians have said, "No, they won't understand. The polls are against us." It's the sanctification of popularity.

Now, isn't that a good example of when to go forward and when you decide not to go forward? It doesn't have to be a big religious issue. It could be something that you don't think of as a religious issue. Don't even call it a moral issue. There are some things you believe in your heart are absolutely wrong, but you don't say anything about it. Why? Because you want to stick around in public service you tell yourself, "Look, it's more important that I serve here, because in the long run I will do many good things that are heavier in weight than the good thing I might accomplish here," or, "I can't

accomplish anything good here; I'm doomed, and so as a matter of prudence and pragmatism, I decide to sit back and not make the point."

Is it a sin to do that? Well, the God I trust in, I hope, is more supple than that. I'm not sure I'd call it a sin. But the question comes up all the time, and you have to decide it by your own lights.

MARK SOUDER

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: Thank you, Governor. We want to welcome Representative Mark Souder, who is a congressman from Indiana, first elected in 1994. Representative Souder's great, great-grandfather was one of the first Amish settlers in Allen County in 1846. That's the particular background that he emerges out of and brings to bear. Representative Souder's district's long tradition of social conservatism begins in the large Amish communities to the northwest, which are not overtly politically active, but both form and reflect the area's traditional values.

That probably is a rather simple way to put a very complex set of issues and to characterize someone's background, but Representative Souder himself has been quoted as saying, "If you scratch behind any of my positions, you find my religious beliefs."

So with that, let me turn the podium over to Representative Mark Souder.

MARK SOUDER: First, let me acknowledge that I'm no orator like Governor Cuomo. It's an honor to be present at this forum with someone of his stature. It's clear we absolutely agree on one thing, and that is that most views are moral issues. If taxes are a moral debate, it's clear we have a pretty wide berth here to talk about how our moral views impact our life. And I also think that we are, to many degrees, products of our background. I'm obviously not from New York. I'm from rural Indiana. And that doesn't mean there isn't diversity in each of our areas, but you do tend to reflect the beliefs of your area, if you share those beliefs, as I do.

I'd like to lay out a little bit of the background that would shape a conservative Christian's view on how to approach public life.

I want to begin with a quotation from John Adams, an assumption quote for conservatives: "Our Constitution was made for a moral and religious people; it is wholly inadequate to the government of any other." That didn't used to be a controversial statement. It's a little more controversial today.

Faith institutions are the key to developing a moral foundation. The government may foster it, encourage it, nurture it, or it may discriminate against it, harass it or undermine it, but it is not the job of the government, nor should it be, to replace the church and its people as the primary moral agent of society. The Founding Fathers clearly wanted no part of sectarian religion.

But a moment of silence in the classroom, posting the Ten Commandments, as long as other expressions are also posted, or a Bible on a teacher's desk is not state-sponsored religion. Quite frankly, I believe the extrapolations some people are making are downright ridiculous, particularly when anchored in this so-called "wall of separation" argument, which comes from a court opinion about evangelical revivalists not wanting to pay for Virginia's state church, not from the Founding Fathers' opinion; it wasn't about moral views in society.

Conservative faiths, even sects within these different faiths, differ on how involved the City of God should be with the City of Man. But this much is true: Conservative Christians as individuals do not separate ourselves into a private and a public life.

Let me give you another quote: "Things have come to a pretty pass when religion is allowed to invade public life." That's what Lord Melbourne said in opposing the abolition of the slave trade when

William Wilberforce and others tried to argue against slavery. They said religion should not come into the public arena.

Devoutly religious individuals have led almost every major social reform. Why?

Chuck Colson and Nancy Pearcey in their important book, *How Now Shall We Live*, clarify a key basis of the Christian worldview: “Creation, Fall, Redemption. There is no Salvation if there is no Fall. There is no Fall if there is no intelligent design. Those who believe in intelligent design and order, rather than some sort of random chaos and the survival of the fittest, have a fundamentally different view of the world.”

Listen to what famous evangelist John Wesley wrote to William Wilberforce after he had his second defeat or third defeat on the slavery argument: “Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God? Oh, be not weary of well doing. Go on in the name of God and in the power of His might, till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it, that He has created you from your youth that you may continue strengthening in this and all things.”

If you believe you are specifically designed, if you believe, in fact, that you are not part of some random, inevitable progression of life, then you believe not only that you can change things, you believe that you have an obligation to change things.

When you serve in government, as I do, every day, every hour you make moral decisions, new laws to restrict cheaters like Enron execs. Why? It’s a moral decision. Why restrict cheating? That’s a moral premise we have. When we deal with laws against rape, for child support enforcement, war, how to assist juveniles in trouble with the law, why not let them just fight it out and the strongest survive? It’s a moral premise that we have in our country. Even national parks – I serve on the National Parks Committee – why preserve them? Why do we say

preserve our heritage? Because we believe we’re trying to create and pass it on, and so there’s a logical order and a moral order to what we should preserve.

What I find is that as a concerned Christian, it seems okay when I speak out on national parks, and it’s okay when I speak out on spouse abuse, but when I speak out on homosexual marriage, pornography, abortion, gambling, evolution across species, then we are supposed to check our personal religious views at the public door. It’s okay in some moral views, but not other views. No matter how deeply I hold these and other views, no matter how vital these views are to our fundamental faiths, somehow they’re different.

To again quote Colson and Pearcey, “Genuine Christianity is more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing in a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending all reality. It is a worldview.”

To ask me to check my Christian beliefs at the public door is to ask me to expel the Holy Spirit from my life when I serve as a congressman, and that I will not do. Either I am a Christian or I am not. Either I reflect His glory or I do not.

Some time ago, a trendy evangelical expression was WWJD – What Would Jesus Do? A better question, given that we are not God, would be: To the best of my limited capability to understand, what do I believe Jesus would have me, as a humble sinner, do? That is a legitimate question.

All this said – and you can hear my passion – how do you implement this in a pluralistic society? It is not easy. Some of this is how to handle defeat in the public arena. Do you resort to violence, or do you take up civil disobedience or do you work to elect different people? Do you respect those with whom you disagree deeply? Can there be a civil debate on abortion or not?

Few decisions were ever as hard for me as voting against three counts of impeachment of Bill Clinton, the only conservative in Congress to do so. I found his moral behavior abominable. I cannot tell you how disgusted I was at a personal level. But I also swore to uphold the Constitution. Based on how I interpreted the Constitution, having studied all the arguments looking for a way to vote yes, I concluded I couldn't do that on three of the counts. Now Chuck Colson did not agree with my position, but he told me the night before I voted that I took an oath to uphold that Constitution, and if I didn't vote my conscience, if I felt the political pressure coming from my base in my district, then I would be committing perjury, just like the allegation against Clinton. So I had a choice either to resign or vote my conscience.

The only more difficult question than that is war. As you heard, I come from an Anabaptist background. The Book of Romans, however, clearly states that individual Christians have a responsibility for peace; it is the job of government to punish the evildoers. That is why many Anabaptists do not work in government, but there are some roles that are different for individuals and for government. But, that said, a vote even for a necessary and just war will never, ever be easy for me, because of my fundamental beliefs. I believe it should be exercised with grave caution.

Let me wind down here with another story. Sometimes we behave as though being a minority whose views did not triumph is terrible, especially for children. The church in which I grew up did not believe in attending movies. I did not grow up in the Amish faith; I grew up in another fundamental faith. One year, my school decided to attend *The Sound of Music*. They knew what my moral views were, what my church's views were, and they did not adjust the majority view because of my personal minority view. I got to go sit in a classroom all by myself. The ACLU did not come in to defend me.

On this and other issues the school did not adjust around the minority view within that school or try to accommodate my moral view. For that matter, they still don't around many conservative minority views.

Mind you, I wasn't persecuted, I wasn't intimidated. In fact, at the time, it didn't even particularly bother me. But what bothers me in the public arena today is that if I am offended, I have to leave. If a liberal objects or someone of a different view than a conservative Christian objects, then we're supposed to stop the action. There's not the same representation on minority views.

For example, regarding evolution, a liberal may argue that these are not debates about facts; they're debates that are religious. They are not. They are fundamentally different scientific viewpoints of the world, anchored in your view of how the world came to be and your worldview. It is not science versus religion. That is insulting to those of us who have different worldviews. It's one thing to say that we're going to have a debate, but it's an unfair debate for some to assume that their moral views are above reproach and above debate and that other people's moral views are merely their personal views.

I believe our society discriminates against the moral views of dissenting conservatives as opposed to liberals. In my case it had a side benefit. Without a doubt, it built the character that enabled me to stand up and be able to dissent. That is one of the benefits that you get from learning to defend your belief.

I want to wind up here by, first, saying these kinds of forums help us to understand each other's points of view, and that the point of view I represent often is not heard in Washington. And part of this viewpoint is that the diversity of our country is clearly increasing, in my district as well as elsewhere. We're getting more religions, and we're getting more people in those religions. It's more complicated in the schools, and that presents huge problems. But it also has an additional challenge to leadership. A significant percentage of this country is evangelical, charismatic, fundamentalist or conservative Catholic or conservative Lutheran or Orthodox Jewish or fundamentalist Muslim, and we hold passionate views that are essential to our very being. We will not, and it is unfair to ask us, to check those beliefs at the public door. It's not going to happen.

So how are we going to work this through? Diversity has increased. Our challenge is how to continue to allow personal religious freedom in America, as guaranteed by our Constitution, and how to work through the differences in the public arena in a fair manner. In a republic, disagreements are decided in the public arena. At different times in American history, different moral views may prevail. Abortion may be legal in some periods and illegal in other periods. Will dissenters resort to violence or to protest or to the ballot box? Sex with minors: moral view. Marijuana use: moral view. Date rape: moral view. Spanking of children: moral view. All moral judgments. The worldview that's in charge of the legislature, the worldview that's in charge of the presidency, the worldview that's in charge of the courts will decide those moral judgments.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: Thank you very much. I'm going to extend to E.J. the courtesy he extended to me and ask him to put the first question to Representative Souder.

E.J. DIONNE: I want to focus on what you said about a worldview that is a minority worldview. I think one of the confusions in this argument is that non-Christian Americans look at Christianity in general as the majority faith, and they are therefore fearful of the injection of this majority faith into not just the public square – I think, personally, there should be no argument about the right of people to bring religious arguments to the public square – but in public policy. Many times, these fights actually do break down along the lines where not only secularists, but also members of minority communities, worry very much about the injection of Christianity into public policy. On the other hand, your perspective is actually potentially very helpful because you are defining a group of Christians – broadly speaking, evangelical Christians – as part of yet another minority in the society.

Could you talk about the extent to which you see this as an adequate description of your view, and about what I think are the legitimate fears of non-Christian religious minorities that their rights could be violated?

CONGRESSMAN MARK SOUDER: That's a good and complex question, but it does get to the heart of one of the fundamental reasons that liberals and conservatives pass each other, and it also highlights some differences inside what would be called Christianity or even conservative Christianity.

Let me first deal with the idea that some maintain that America was a Christian nation. To the degree that you use that term, in the nation's founding or still, you're using a broader definition than the way I defined it. I was very precise in saying conservative Catholics and Lutherans or traditionalist Catholics, conservative Lutherans, charismatics. If you define America or another country as a Christian nation, you pretty well define the word out of existence, because Christian is so broad in its interpretation and so broad in its application that, as we've dealt particularly with the faith-based issues, it doesn't really have meaning. Yet for those who don't consider themselves Christians, they view the Christian movement as monolithic, and, therefore, they see a danger of the majority uniting.

I grew up in a very fundamentalist church. Let's just say that many people in my denomination felt that when John Kennedy got elected, there would be a red phone to the pope, and they thought that the Catholic Church was monolithic and every Catholic was alike. When I went to graduate school at Notre Dame, what I found were no two Catholics that agreed on anything. There were Sunday Catholics, daily mass Catholics, holiday Catholics, Catholics who believe in the Trinity and those who don't. The idea that they were going to somehow unite and crush us was absurd, and that's the way many Christians feel when we hear others say we're all going to unite.

Shoot, we've killed each other in history. I remember – this was jocular; don't take it literally – one time in Dan Coats's office, where I was a staffer, we were arguing about whether to fund drug-free school programs. And one of our staffers who is Calvinist in background told me I was advocating these programs because I was one of these dissenting, free-will Pelagian types who believed that

people could be changed. And I argued that, in fact, people could be changed. And he said, “And that’s why my people killed your people 500 years ago.”

The idea that we’re going to unite on a church-state type of thing is just not even on our horizon.

DISCUSSION

E.J. DIONNE: And now for questions from the floor.

MARGARET O’BRIEN STEINFELS (Editor, *Commonweal Magazine*): The Catholic Church has apparently never provided, as part of its insurance coverage for its employees or for people who get insurance from Catholic companies, contraceptive coverage. This year, the New York legislature voted to require all insurance companies in the state, including Catholic ones, to provide contraceptive coverage.

One could make a case that violating the conscience of a religious institution by requiring it to do something that was against its stricture did merit some discussion and further thought.

MARIO CUOMO: The question is, How far we will go to accommodate religious liberty? There are Catholic hospitals that won’t do abortions, and we allow them the privilege of not providing abortion services, even as we give them a whole range of government services that we give to other hospitals, and we don’t insist that they surrender their reluctance to do abortions.

The question is, To what extent would you accommodate the Catholics’ reluctance to cooperate materially in the distribution of contraceptives? And I don’t see that that would be terribly punishing to the rest of society to allow them that exemption and to allow them that conscience clause. In that case, I, personally, wouldn’t see a problem.

What the courts would do with that is an entirely different subject. And on this whole question of to what extent you will give people exemptions so that they can practice their religious liberty, as you

know, the law is very far from being clear, and the decision in *City of Boerne, Texas v. Flores* didn’t help a whole lot in that area either. I’m not sure there’s a whole lot of logic to it at the Supreme Court level. It’s a matter of how you feel about that subject at the time, and sometimes they’ve been more willing to give room to the religious groups.

CONGRESSMAN MARK SOUDER: If it were purely private, there would, I believe, be little dispute. The problem comes as public money moves in, and with the question of the dependence on public money, it moves more in the realm of public debate.

I believe there should be a conscience clause, and I believe there are plenty of options for people, and that since it’s a voluntary association, and there are, in fact, choices in hospitals, particularly in big cities. But it is a much more difficult question if there’s only one choice of a hospital or one choice of a healthcare plan and government funds pay for a portion of that.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: I would note that, Governor, when you talked about Catholic hospitals being allowed the privilege of not performing abortions, of course, there are others who would cast that in a different political language and say they have a right, not that we’re going to allow them the privilege, but they have a right not to do that, as part of religious liberty, as part of free exercise. So I think you’re going to get a slightly different way that that issue is refracted, depending upon your rhetorical choices.

WILLIAM GALSTON (Director, Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy, the University of

Maryland): Standing before you as a Jew, I have to say that I've witnessed a miracle this morning: The greatest thinker in my tradition, Moses Maimonides, worked all of his life to reduce 613 commandments to 13 articles of faith. The governor of New York, without working too hard, has taken that 13 down further to two. With more work, we can probably take it down to a single unitary article of faith, but, in a way, that leads to the question that I want to pose.

The question before the house, as I understood it, was how to reconcile personal religious views with the practice of politics in a pluralist democracy. And before Congressman Souder came in, Governor Cuomo gave a very interesting and, I think, clear answer to that question: The God who ought to enter the public realm of a pluralist constitutional democracy is nature's God, and the religious arguments that ought to enter the discourse of a pluralist constitutional democracy are the religious arguments that are the common property, not only of all religions, but of all mankind, a classic, natural law argument.

To put it very simply, that portion of religion, according to Governor Cuomo, that ought to enter the public realm is that portion of religion that is accessible to the natural reason of mankind.

My question to Congressman Souder is whether you agree with that formulation, and if you don't, what portion of faith that is not accessible to the common reason of mankind has a legitimate role in the public realm?

RON SIDER (Founder and President, Evangelicals for Social Action): I want to add to the natural law discussion. It would seem that simply taking the two principles, especially the second, working to repair and improve the common society, simply doesn't work at all because you've got secular humanists and a certain kind of fundamentalist with very different worldviews and very, very different public policies that flow from those different worldviews, views about the nature of persons, et cetera, et cetera, that propose fundamentally contradictory public policies, and they both claim to be working to improve society.

So that general principle, it seems to me, is simply so general and innocuous that it's virtually useless, so you've got to move somehow to a lot more specific content, which is what Mark Souder does. But then the problem on the other side is that, yes, we have the right to bring our full-blown religious views into the public debate, but then we've got to convince a much broader range of people. And that need forces us to use some common language, which pushes us back somehow in the direction of something like the governor's position.

CONGRESSMAN MARK SOUDER: I

attempted to answer the question, as Ron more or less alluded to, by saying that I believe that this notion of a natural law of things common to all religions is, in fact, a moral worldview that is a different moral view and worldview than a Christian worldview and is unacceptable to me.

So the question is, How do I reconcile that view with my Christian view in the public arena, since I believe that the Holy Trinity is nature's God, since I believe the Trinity is the God who created nature? I can't relate to the idea of a generic natural law God. My God is a particularly Christian God.

If you say, What's common to all religions? Well, what if child abuse is? What if some religions allow date rape? What if some religions allow 12-year-olds to have sex with adults? Does it have to be common to all, or just major ones? And what if major ones disagree on the role of women? What is nature's God and what natural law can mean – these are hotly debated subjects. I don't believe there is a common denominator that's workable in the American political system.

Part of this comes down to: How do we respect one another? How do we work to resolve those differences? In other words, what's built in the City of God realm and what's in the City of Man realm? But that's what we work through in the public arena.

MARIO CUOMO: If I heard you correctly, you said that the natural law principle that says we're all in this together is too general to be useful. Well,

that's, of course, true of the American Constitution as well, right? We have the Articles of Confederation, 13 states, and they decided this doesn't work because we're interconnected and interdependent and we ought to come together to *tikkun olam*, to repair this situation. And they created a Constitution that has soaring general language about "for the common welfare," "to create a more perfect union." Talk about generalizations.

But it's the first principle: Do you believe in the wake of 9/11, dealing with hate from all over the planet, that suggesting a principle that says, "Look, let's start with the proposition that we're interconnected and interdependent, and they're part of our world," as the congressman just said, wouldn't be useful?

I was heartened to read in one place that the president's new strategy for defense said, "I acknowledge the importance of dealing with poverty in parts of the world where there is apparently hostility to us, and that until we help them to rid themselves of the problem of oppression and poverty, we will continue to have a problem." I think that is specifically a recognition of interdependent interconnectedness.

Those, of course, were Gorbachev's greatest words. They were Vaclav Havel's greatest words. They were the contribution they made, that we're all in this thing together. It's the difference between isolationism and getting involved.

And, no, I don't think it's too general at all, any more than the Constitution is too general. The Constitution said get together for the sake of the whole place, and you states give up some of your power, throw it into the pot so that we have a commonality here. We've worked it out for a couple of hundred years, as I pointed out earlier. The first hundred years we didn't do a whole lot of the commonality aspect of it, and we were believers in rugged individualism, then we moved into a new phase, thanks to the Depression.

Too general? I don't think so. I think it is the heart of the matter. Two principles. We're supposed to treat one another with dignity. That means that

people in Africa who are dying from AIDS are just like the people here who are dying from AIDS. We don't treat them that way, not nearly. We're not doing anything like what we would do for them if they were in our family. That's a violation of the principle that I'm announcing. You have to apply it from moment to moment, as the congressman says, and, in the end, it's always a matter of fashioning it to meet the practical situation.

But too general? It's the whole game. It is the whole game. Unless the United States particularly understands that, we're finished. We're talking about now changing the accounting irregularity rules to make it accounting regularity, and we have Sarbanes-Oxley and we have the SEC and we have all sorts of specific rules.

Unless you go the European Union, which is going to have 380 million people and its own set of accounting principles by 2005, unless we put our new regulations and improved system here with their principles in 2005, we're going to chill the growing globalization in financing that's so important to them, and so important to us. That's a simple principle. They're too general? No, of course not. You work with the principle and you apply it to the situation, but in all cases, you work to cooperate.

If you took it – I hate to say evolution, but if you took it from an evolutionary point of view, we're going from the slime to the sublime. We're going from a big bang to gas to liquid to fish to humans, who reflect, who get brighter and brighter and increasing civility. When you finally have perfect civility, then we're home, and the key to that is integration not disintegration, not fragmentation.

Maybe it's too general for you but it works very nicely for me.

ROBERT EDGAR (General Secretary, National Council of Churches in Christ): My question has to do with a concern that is growing in me as a former congressperson, as someone who has watched as capitalism has become, in a sense, a religion that has been lifted up high and honored, particularly by the conservative tradition.

I look at the fact that 80 percent of the world's population lives in substandard housing, that 70 percent of the world's population can't read or write and that 50 percent of the world's population will go to bed tonight hungry, and I see the rise in children being placed in factories, particularly offshore, to produce products that we profit from in our society, and I wondered, given both of your perspectives on your faith statement, how might our faith statements critique capitalism in a constructive way so that an economic system can be shaped for the future that's not based on having a percentage of our population poor? And as I understand it, all of our religious traditions fundamentally care about the least of these, our brothers and sisters.

AZIZAH AL-HIBRI (Professor of Law, University of Richmond): As I listened to you, I noticed a very rudimentary knowledge of Islam and the Muslim community. I'm speaking as a Muslim. And I'll give you some examples. In some cases, I think Islam could have been included in describing positive attitudes in this country, and it wasn't because we just don't know enough. And in other cases, assumptions were made about Muslims that are inaccurate. I'll pick one of those simply to show that just like minorities fall into the trap of talking about Christians as one lump, the same is true of minorities, that we cannot talk about all of them as one lump; there are differences between the various minorities.

For example, in talking about bringing religion to the public square, it's often assumed that minorities do not like that, because they will be the losers. In fact, Representative Souder, I wrote an article, and Jean knows it because we published in the same book, where I said that Muslims would rather live in a Christian state than a godless state. So that might come as a surprise to you, but it was after a lot of discussion with a lot of Muslims in my community. These are good things to say about Muslims.

My concern is that since we are very concerned about people bringing their faith to the public square, we have noticed that since 9/11 some of us have been left in the class alone. In fact, a lot has been said about Muslims which renders them powerless and voiceless.

If you bring religion to the public square, is there a responsibility on the part of people that we view as a majority to stand up, to make sure that certain minorities, even in the most difficult of times, are not rendered voiceless and are not being condemned in unfair ways?

JOANNA ADAMS (Co-pastor, Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago): I will ask one brief question with two parts. Do our panelists sense a growing religiosity in the United States, or is the United States becoming increasingly secular in its values? And secondly, if the conclusion is that we're becoming increasingly religious, clearly we are becoming increasingly religiously diverse. Is this diversity a hair shirt, a problem that we must bear up under and figure out how to respond to, because it is a negative, or is it, in fact, a blessing, I would use that word, a great opportunity for our democracy?

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN: Governor Cuomo? You can pick and choose emphases in your response.

MARIO CUOMO: About the religiosity, this is a truly intriguing question and a very good one. What I've seen over my span is an increasing desire to be able to engage this world in spiritual terms, as distinguished from material terms. And I think, without making it too complicated, that's not always religion qua religion. It is a growing desire to find an explanation that goes beyond yourself.

And this has always been true of humanity. You've always wanted to find an explanation that goes beyond your own me-ness and that is larger and more beautiful and will sustain you in all the confusion of this place, especially after things like 9/11, where the biggest question that you're left with is not why did your religion fail, why did your intelligence fail, but why did any good God allow this to happen. And that's the question of the Holocaust and that's the question when a child dies in the crib without explanation, and it's the question that troubles religious people most. And you read Rabbi Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, et cetera, and it's never enough, no matter what you read.

And most people conclude at one point that the only thing I'm sure of is the value of the next breath I'm going to draw, the value of my life and making more of my life. And then they fall back to either two possibilities: One, you see yourself as a basket of appetites and you're going to run around filling up your basket as fast as you can because you know you're liable to be extinguished at any moment; that's what 9/11 reminds you of, and so you do sex or food or power, whatever it is.

But I think a larger number of people know that that's foolish, because you get older and the basket falls apart, and you look for something really meaningful. And what is it? It's the people you love and the people who love you. It's your children, your home.

So the short answer: Spirituality, yes, a great desire for spirituality, but the sophistication, and I'm using it as a negative now, that comes with a lot of education, et cetera, makes it a little bit harder to keep the religious tradition and making it a religious commitment, because more and more of the people think they're wise enough to challenge it: "I can't prove it, I don't understand it, and so I'm going to reject that." And if you give them any provocation to give up on their so-called faith, they'll lapse; they'll say, "Well, I'm spiritual."

So if you get a population that's trying more and more to be spiritual, more and more to find some truth, that's what the natural law is. It's a truth that appeals to your reason, that doesn't have the benefit of bureaucracy and carefully etched, specific rules for specific situations, but that has the fundamental principles that make you believe in something bigger than yourself, and what's bigger than myself is the world that I'm part of and the contribution I can make is making it a little bit better. Now, I'm not smart enough to figure out anything else. I'm not smart enough to figure out Heaven and Hell and why any good God would burn you eternally for making you vulnerable, and all of that – this is not me; this is the people that we're talking about who are spiritual but not religious. That I detect, and that's a very good thing, people looking for something more to believe in. That's what religion is supposed to do for you.

Is it good? Bad? I think it's good because I think what we desperately need is something to express a willingness to be a community, because we are going from the slime to sublime, and the only way you get there is through integration, and that means we've got to learn better than we know now how to come together. So I think it's good.

CONGRESSMAN MARK SOUDER: I'll give a couple fast answers to the questions, and then I want to zero in on the two related to the Muslims. I have some agreements and some disagreements about the religiosity question. I believe, in fact, we're losing a lot of the middle, that we're simultaneously moving to traditional faiths, and those are growing, and more people are moving away from any organized religion at all in the sense of church attendance, or a rule that mandates something other than their own will.

I agree that 9/11, particularly, sparked people looking for something bigger than themselves. But, often, if there's not a standard that has a tradition, it merely becomes looking for something that enables me to do what I want, or it becomes really arbitrary, like a diamond crystal or how the stars align or something. I believe the purpose of religion, at least in Christianity, is, Do you accept Jesus Christ as your Savior? Because without Him, you would be lost in Hell forever. And then you honor and obey Him. Other religious faiths would have variations of that, but to me, that would be what religion is, not what our personal desires are, and how to cope with it. It's how to honor the Creator.

The poverty question is difficult. I'm more of a neo-con than libertarian. However, all conservatives are really fusionists in the political arena, because that's how we get elected. I have more faith in the free market than many others would have, but I have always believed that corporations have a responsibility to be active in their communities. I am as angered by Enron as any liberal, because I believe they are a shame to capitalism, hiding things off the books. I believe in openness and honesty. They shook confidence in the whole capitalist system, the system that I believe helps the poor the most.

That said, we'll never eliminate the poor because it's a relative term. What we want to do is make sure that there is opportunity to move and a decent standard of living for the poor. Eliminate not relative poverty but absolute poverty, as Nicholas Eberstadt at AEI says, where there are certain decent standards in your country. I believe we have, and that's why I supported my former boss Dan Coats and Frank Wolf and Tony Hall and Food to the World. While I might have different solutions than Ron Sider would advocate in the evangelical movement, I think he has helped call attention in the evangelical movement that we often get into too much "me want now, my little fingernail is more important than anything else in the rest of the world." And we have obligations to that as Christians.

I'm an American. I'm proud. I think this is a beacon to the world. But I also think we're part of an international community, and I believe, ultimately, Christ talked more about the poor than he did about the rich, and that we'll be measured by how we help those who are hurting, not how we help those who are powerful. In the public arena, however, that means we can differ over capital gains cuts and how capital gains cuts will impact the poor.

With regard to the question of diversity, which will tie into the question about Muslims, I have a far more diverse base than establishment liberals or Democrats do. My campaign chairman is Armenian. I have a large Asian Indian community in my district that actively supports me. I have never in any sub-poll pulled less than 67 percent of any minority sub-group, including African-American or Asian or Hispanic, and it's partly because by my nature, I'm non-discriminatory. That's because I believe I have strong views, but I respect other people's strong views, and they sense that.

For instance, I'm a very strong supporter of Israel. That, however, does not mean that I believe that somehow Palestinians or Arabs or Muslims are sub-human, or that I have a disrespect, or do not want to try to work out the complexities, both international and domestic, with the Muslim faith.

And it's not that I don't understand the diversity of the Muslim community in my district. We have 200 Iraqis in my district. In meeting with them recently, we discussed this issue. About half of them came in before Saddam. About half of them are Shi'i Arabs from the southern part of the country, and the other half are Sunni, Kurds basically. That Christians or others, particularly at this time, do not try to understand the complexities and the differences in the Muslim community is wrong.

The bad news for the Muslim community is that the potential war in Iraq and the terrorism question has exposed them to more vulnerabilities for prejudice and discrimination in our society.

The good news for the Muslim community is that people are trying to understand Islam and to learn how many Muslims are in America, in our communities. Americans are also learning that Muslims aren't all one. Just like I said about the Catholic Church, it's clear there's a wide diversity in the Muslim community. For instance, the Iraqi Shi'i pointed out that the Iranian Shi'i aren't Arabs, but they are Muslims and they are part of the Shi'i Muslim community. But still most Americans, including many in our government, don't necessarily understand the distinctions inside the community.

Now, understanding the differences and common traditions is going to be slower, and there are still substantive differences. But how we work through those is important. The ultimate question is, Do I think that the diversity will strengthen or weaken America? It depends on how we react. In fact, we've absorbed one wave after another of immigrants, and each wave of immigrants has felt some form of discrimination: Asians did; Irish did; Germans did; Mexicans do currently. And the question is, How do we assimilate? And that goes both directions: How much does American society expand to tolerate and understand the new people who have come in and what things can't be assimilated in the public arena? And how much do those who assimilate accept the values of America in the public arena?

So assimilation can take a while, but there still has to be assimilation of certain values that you came

to America for. The fundamental challenge, and this comes back to the fact that we at least had a rubric of a Judeo-Christian framework, loosely defined: As we absorb Asian religions and the Muslim religions in larger numbers than we have before, how in the public arena do we accommodate a legal system and an ethical system that's anchored in those traditions? And how much are the people who are coming in going to assimilate the Judeo-Christian framework, and how much do we have to change that? And to do that, I fundamentally agree with

your point, we have to be far more understanding of the differences to work out how those differences and changes are going to work in the public arena.

E.J. DIONNE: When Governor Cuomo used the phrase “from the slime to the sublime,” I thought he was contrasting the average political campaign with the kind of thoughtful and civil dialogue that he and the congressman had today. We are very, very grateful to them.

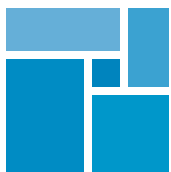
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