

Below is a statement signed by 41 lay Catholic leaders in response to attacks made against the religious beliefs of presidential candidate Mitt Romney and an article on the statement in the Archdiocese of San Francisco's newspaper, Catholic San Francisco.



Leading Catholic laity urge civility in presidential run

November 9th, 2011

By George Raine

Forty-one prominent U.S. Catholic lay leaders have signed a statement in which they urge the 2012 major presidential candidates to conduct their campaigns with civility and to honor religious freedom.

The letter, sent to the candidates on Nov. 2, comes four weeks after a Baptist minister told reporters that former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's Mormon faith is a cult, a claim that, the lay leaders say, held Romney up for ridicule. ...

In San Francisco, George Wesolek, director of communications and of the Office of Public Policy and Social Concerns of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, while not a signatory, said, "It is important to see a statement about civil dialogue in the poisonous, partisan atmosphere of presidential campaigns. I hope this kind of thinking becomes more commonplace."

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A S t a t e m e n t o f L a y C a t h o l i c L e a d e r s

The Religious Question in American Presidential Elections November 2, 2011

Two hundred and twenty three years ago our Founding Fathers established through our Constitution, a high ideal for religious tolerance and understanding. We have found this to be a long arduous journey to go from where we were as a country in the late 1700s to the present day. Progress remains to be accomplished. In the past several decades Americans, of Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant faiths have been nominated to be a presidential or vice presidential candidate.

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Catholics are particularly sensitive to the history of anti-Catholic bias that first surfaced in the election of 1928 and in 1960. In the first case, the Catholic candidate, Al Smith, was not elected. There were certainly several reasons for it, but the shameful manifestation of religious bigotry throughout the country was not a valid reason or acceptable behavior in a Republic possessing the proclaimed ideals of these United States. There was less bigotry in 1960 when a Catholic candidate, John F. Kennedy, by a very narrow margin, was elected President. In the past several decades both Catholic and Jewish candidates were on the national political scene, and most Americans noted that there was less expression of religious bias or bigotry.

The recent expressions made from a Texas Pastor at a values conference in Washington D.C. bring to the forefront the unfortunate prospect that the discussion of a man's particular religious belief may become a major divisive political issue. While there is no question that a candidate's character, moral beliefs, and reputation for integrity should be subject to public review, there is significant danger to the goal of our forefathers; maintaining harmony and understanding among all faiths and rejecting bigoted questions and comments about personal religious beliefs. Article VI of the US Constitution states, "...no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

We the following, all Catholic citizens of different political persuasions, wish to cite our concern and our determination to assure that not only civility be maintained in the public discourse but that all inclinations to raise the issue of personal religious affiliation be avoided. As Catholics, we have felt the sting of bias in previous national elections. We share the concern of many of our citizens of all religious faiths that allowing the question of a candidate's religion to be subject to public ridicule is a grave regression from what we have accomplished in our forward movement as Americans since the establishment of our Republic.

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Signature

Thomas P. Melady

Alfred E. Smith IV

Timothy J. May*

Lawrence DeNardis

Lawrence Pressler

Robert L. Livingston

Hugh Dempsey

Stephen F. Schneck, Ph. D.

Francis Graham Lee

Frank Fahrenkopf

Raymond F. Flynn

Identification

Thomas Patrick Melady
Former U.S. Ambassador to
Burundi, Uganda and the Holy See
President Emeritus,
Sacred Heart University

Great Grandson of Former Governor
of New York and 1928 Democratic
Candidate for President, Al Smith

Partner
Patton Boggs LLP
Senior Member of President
Kennedy Administration

President Emeritus,
University of New Haven
Connecticut
and Former US Congressman

Former US Senator

President, Livingston Group Inc.,
Former US Congressman

Vice President,
Holy Land Ecumenical Foundation

Director
Institute for Policy Research &
Catholic Studies
The Catholic University of America

Professor of Political Science
St. Joseph's University

Former Chairman,
Republican National Committee

Former US Ambassador to Holy See,
Former Mayor, City of Boston, MA.

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Corinne C. Boggs	Former US Ambassador to Holy See Former US Congresswoman
Jeffrey D. Ludwig	Chancellor, Sacred Military Constantinian Order of St. George
Paul Russo	Former US Ambassador to Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean
Aldona Wos M.D.	Former US Ambassador to Republic of Estonia
Burton Gerber	Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University
Dr. Rocco L. Martino	Chair and CEO, CyberFone Technologies, Inc.
William Vanden Heuvel	Founder and Chair Emeritus, The Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute.
Fred Rotondaro	Chairman, Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good
Martha M. Kendrick	Partner Patton Boggs, LLP
Sidney D. Spencer	Retired Financial Executive, General Electric Company
Margaret B. Melady, Ph. D.	Former President American University of Rome
Sally Novetzke	Former US Ambassador to the Republic of Malta Former Chairman, Republican State Party of Iowa
Dr. Frank McQuade	Professor of Law Emeritus Seton Hall University

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James Worsley	Counsel Ober, Kaler, Grimes and Shriver
James Gallagher	President Emeritus, Philadelphia University
Dennis M. Lucey	Past National Chair, Support Our Aging Religious (SOAR)
John J. Hurley	President, Canisius College
Douglas Kmiec	Former US Ambassador to the Republic of Malta, Caruso Family Chair in Law, Pepperdine University
Brennan O'Donnell	President, Manhattan College
David M. Klocek	Professor of Political Science, Institute of World Politics
James Towey	President of Ave Maria University, Naples, Florida and Former Director White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives
Mary J. Meehan, Ph. D.	President, Alverno College
Thomas H. Powell	President, Mount St. Mary's University
John Butler	President and CEO, Human Resource Learning Center
Joseph G. Metz, Ph. D.	Adjunct Professor, Molloy College
Owen Smith	Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Institute of World Politics
Christina Cox	Founder and President The National Museum of Catholic Art and Library

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Alvernia University

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Dean Emeritus and Professor of Law
Duquesne University School of Law

Patrick Whelan MD PhD

President, Catholic Democrats
Asst. Professor of Pediatrics,
USC Keck School of Medicine,
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Steven A. Krueger

National Director,
Catholic Democrats

*Timothy May played a major role in drafting this statement. He passed away on October 19, 2011.