

# Gov. Cuomo's Notre Dame Address: Religious Freedom in Peril in Abortion Debate

By Keith Picher  
Notre Dame (NC) — Gov. Mario Cuomo of New York warned Sept. 13 that at-

tempting to legislate an end to abortion in the current political climate would be an imposition of personal views, would not work and would endanger religious freedom.

In a talk at the University of Notre Dame, Cuomo said he was not opposed to the U.S. bishops speaking out on politics. "God does not insist on political neutrality," he said. But Cuomo warned that "it is not wise for prelates and politicians to be tied too closely together."

Cuomo said he agreed with the statement issued by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in August that it is not the bishops' place to support or oppose candidates.

The NCCB in Washington had no immediate response to Cuomo's speech. A spokesman said a new statement on moral principles and public policy might be issued later.

About 600 people attended the speech at Notre Dame, where about 20 protesters carried anti-Cuomo signs. Father Richard McBrien, chairman of the Notre Dame theology department, had invited Cuomo to speak before his selection as keynote speaker at the Democratic National Convention in July and before his well-publicized discussions on abortion and politics with Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York.

Cuomo, who has said he is personally opposed to abortion but must defend the constitutional guarantee of freedom of choice on the issue, earlier this year disputed a comment by Archbishop O'Connor, who had said he did not understand "how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion."

Cuomo said during the speech that as a result of the subsequent dialogue with Archbishop O'Connor his initial impression "that official church spokespeople would ask Catholics to vote for or against a specific candidate" on abortion "was not accurate."

Cuomo warned that attempting to legislate abortion policy might result later in a loss of religious freedom. "The price of seeking to force our beliefs on others is that they might someday force theirs on us," he said. "To assure our freedom we must allow others the same freedom, even if occasionally it produces conduct by them which we would hold to be sinful."

This freedom is the fundamental strength of American government, Cuomo said. "I protest my right to be a Catholic by preserving your right to believe as a Jew, a Protestant or non-believer, or as anything else you choose."

The process of government may be used to convince fellow citizens to take certain

ing our own lack of hypocrisy" is the ultimate solution. Approval or rejection of legal restrictions on abortion should not be the exclusive litmus test of Catholic loyalty, Cuomo said. He referred to Chicago Cardinal Joseph Bernardin's "seamless garment" formula and said that "our Christian responsibility doesn't end with any one law or amendment."

"Because it involves life and death, abortion will always be a central concern of Catholics," Cuomo continued. "But so will nuclear weapons. And hunger and homelessness and joblessness, all the forces diminishing human life and threatening to destroy it." He called for increasing funding for women who want to bring their children to term, improving education for men in the responsibilities of creating life and developing a stronger commitment to pre- and post-natal care.

## Candidate Misrepresenting Catholic Abortion Teaching, Archbishop O'Connor Says

New York (NC) -- Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro misstated Catholic teaching on abortion in a 1982 letter which said the church's position on the issue is "not monolithic." Archbishop John J. O'Connor said after talking with Ms. Ferraro Sept. 10.

Ms. Ferraro, in a statement issued the same day, said she had never made a "public statement describing or misrepresenting the teachings of my church."

Archbishop O'Connor and Ms. Ferraro, who is Catholic, spoke by telephone after statements Sept. 8 and Sept. 9 by the archbishop accusing the New York congresswoman of misstating church teaching. A spokesman for Ms. Ferraro said Sept. 10 that she had been referring to the personal beliefs of lay Catholics, not doctrine.

In a November 1982 letter prefacing the booklet "The Abortion Issue in the Political Process" Ms. Ferraro said the booklet, and the Sept. 30, 1982, briefing for Catholic legislators which preceded it, showed that "the Catholic position on abortion is not monolithic and that there can be a range of personal and political re-

sponses to the issue." The booklet and briefing were sponsored by Catholics for a Free Choice, which opposes church teaching on abortion.

Ms. Ferraro wrote a similar letter dated Sept. 30, 1982, to the Catholic members of Congress who attended the briefing. That letter also said "the Catholic position on abortion is not monolithic."

Archbishop O'Connor said Ms. Ferraro "simply, honestly and sincerely" forgot the letter and he said that he bore her "no ill will." But, he said after their telephone conversation, "I think that she has misrepresented the teaching of the Catholic Church."

Francis O'Brien, a spokesman for Ms. Ferraro, said that the candidate told the archbishop she was referring in the letter to the personal beliefs of lay members of the church, not to church teaching.

In her written statement issued to reporters after her conversation with Archbishop O'Connor, Ms. Ferraro said she explained to the archbishop that "I supported the right of everyone to speak out on the important issues of the day. When bishops speak out they are doing their duty as church officials."

When she speaks out, Ms. Ferraro said she told the archbishop, she is doing her duty as a public official.

"And my foremost duty as a public official is to uphold the United States Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion," she said. "I cannot fulfill that duty if I seek to impose my own religion on other American citizens."

In his remarks Sept. 9 Archbishop O'Connor said Ms. Ferraro had created an impression "that there are a variety of positions that can be held in consonance with Catholic teachings."

At the Pennsylvania Pro-Life Federation convention in Altoona, Pa., the day before, he accused Ms. Ferraro of having "said some things about abortion relative to Catholic teaching which are not true."

The archbishop said Ms. Ferraro had given the impression that "the Catholic teaching on abortion is not monolithic, that you can be a good Catholic and believe in abortion -- believe this about abortion, believe that about abortion -- that there is solid foundation for a variance in Catholic teaching on abortion. There is no variance, there is no flexibility, there is no leeway."

## Kennedy's Abortion Stand: Archbishop O'Connor Right ... But on the Other Hand

New York (NC) -- Saying that "people of faith should not invoke the power of the state to decide what everyone should believe," Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., Sept. 10 backed the right of the U.S. bishops to condemn abortion and the right of Catholic politicians to disagree with them.

Speaking in New York to a Democratic fund-raising dinner, Kennedy asserted that bishops such as Archbishop John J. O'Connor of New York and other religious leaders are obligated to address moral issues, "but this cannot mean that every moral command should be written into law."

A Catholic whose views on abortion and other issues have been attacked by anti-abortion and New Right groups, Kennedy also criticized President Reagan and said "the 1984 campaign is a race for the White House, not for the mandate of heaven."

"Archbishop O'Connor surely has every constitutional right, and according to his faith, a religious duty, to speak against abortion," the senator said. "And just as surely, Geraldine Ferraro and Mario Cuomo are equally right that faithful Catholics, serving in public office, can agree with his morality without seeking to impose it across the board."

Cuomo, governor of New York, and Ms. Ferraro, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, have clashed with Archbishop O'Connor because of their declarations that they personally agree with the church's opposition to abortion but cannot as elected officials impose their beliefs on others.

Kennedy quoted from the Aug. 9 statement of Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio, president of the U.S. bishops, which rejected the argument that politicians can refuse to let their personal beliefs affect their political decisions and the use of religion by political candidates to sway voters.

Kennedy also drew a distinction between

churchmen urging rejection of nuclear war and efforts to outlaw abortion. He said that on issues like abortion religion should try to influence people but not employ state-approved coercion.

Faith should not be silent and "in the face of ethical issues, church leaders have the obligation to speak out, for that is their vocation," Kennedy said. "But religion has no right to harness government to impose a single view in areas where government should not intervene at all."

"Where decisions are inherently individual ones or in cases where we are deeply divided about whether they are, people of faith should not invoke the power of the state to decide what everyone can believe or think or read or do," he said. "In such cases -- cases like abortion or prayer or prohibition or sexual identity -- the proper role of religion is to appeal to the free conscience of each person, not the coercive rule of secular law."


Kennedy noted criticism that some would promote church activism on issues like nuclear arms while denying the church the same activism on abortion.

But the nuclear war issue is "inherently public in nature," he said, and thus differs from abortion, an individual decision. "The church can persuade an individual not to have an abortion; but the church cannot persuade an individual to restrain the nuclear arms race," he said.

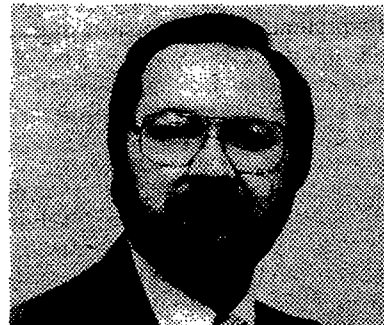
Referring to Bishop Malone's statement he cited "the objection, in a recent statement from the Catholic bishops, that it is 'not logically tenable' to separate 'personal morality and public policy.'"

"But this cannot mean that every moral command should be written into law -- that Catholics in America should seek to make birth control illegal, that Orthodox Jews should seek to ban business on the Sabbath, that fundamentalists should try to forbid the teaching of evolution in public schools," Kennedy added.

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