ELECTION 2000

Bush

pearance at a former Catholic church now used as a community center in the Pittsburgh suburb of Perrysville. Taking questions from an audience of about 150 people. Bush received the most sustained applause of the morning when he spoke against abortion.
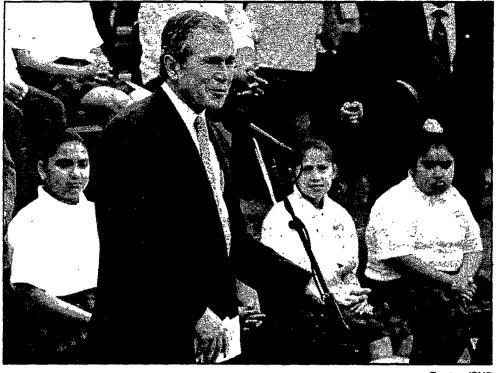
"One of the things I do in my speeches," Bush said in the subsequent interview, "and one I do as president is to talk about the culture of life, the need for a welcoming society, the need for Americans – no matter what their personal view is on the life issue – we can do better as a society." He said that this also included opposition to assisted suicide.

"I recognize that until we have a culture of life there's going to be a lot of folks who disagree with my pro-life position," he said. But that's not going to stop me from setting the goal that the born and the unborn ought to be welcomed in life and protected by law."

Specifically, Bush pledged to sign a partial-birth abortion ban as president, said he supported parental notification before a minor's abortion and spoke against the use of tax money to fund abortions.

Another example of the need to instill a culture of life, Bush said, was shown in the tragedy at Columbine High School in Colorado and similar situations "where young people have their hearts so filled with hate that they don't think in terms of the preciousness of life."

But the Republican candidate said his commitment to the culture of life does not extend to capital punishment, which he supports and the Catholic Church opposes. The state of Texas leads the country in the number of executions since 1976, with 231, and Bush has kept up the pace since becoming governor in 1994, with 35 executions in Texas in 1999 and 33 as of mid-October.

It's "the difference between innocence and guilt," he said. "In an abortion, the baby is innocent. The death penalty is a case of a person being guilty."

Bush said he has spoken with Catholic leaders, "some of the really finest Americans I've ever met," about the issue and "I heartily respect their point of view."

"I make the case to them, though, that I believe when the death penalty is administered surely, swiftly and justly it saves lives, it sends a chilling signal throughout our society that we will not tolerate ... the ultimate violent act of taking somebody's life," he

Reuters/CNS

Texas Gov. George W. Bush, Republican candidate for president, addresses students at Ascension School in Los Angeles Sept. 27. Bush brought his campaign to the Catholic school, he said, to emphasize public-private sector community partnerships like one Ascension has with a neighboring public school.

Bob Roller/CNS

Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush listens to a question posed during an interview with Catholic News Service and Our Sunday Visitor aboard his campaign plane Sept. 20 on his way to an event in Philadelphia.

He also touted his education policy as one of the key initiatives that would attract Hispanic voters to the Republican ticket this year. In addition, he cited his support for small business entrepreneurs, his respect for Latino culture and his national reading initiative "that's going to teach these Latino youngsters how to read in English. To think in English. So they can succeed."

Asked how he would appeal to Catholic voters, Bush said he had a "universal message" – that he would "restore honor and dignity to the White House."

"The Catholic mom or dad is just as offended by the behavior at the White House as any other religious person – or nonreligious for that matter," he said.

Bush also said he would "talk about how I respect faith, the power of faith in our lives." Saying that the Bible "clearly talks about different avenues to heaven," he said he had an "interesting family" in that respect.

"My parents are Episcopal, I'm Methodist, my brother Jeb's a Catholic," he said. "It's a religious blend of diversity, and I respect the religious nature of our country."

Bush discussed a number of faith-based programs that have succeeded in Texas and which he would like to take nationwide, such as maternity group homes for teen mothers and the InnerChange Freedom initiative that seeks to reduce prison recidivism through Bible studies and assistance from faith-based groups after inmates leave prison.

"If you change a person's heart, you change their behavior," Bush said. "And the whole premise of this interfaith effort of changing hearts is confirming the lessons of the Bible. Or the lessons of whatever other faith you subscribe to. So it's not just a program within the walls of a prison. It's a program that somebody's out there to help you after the walk from the prison."

He said he would create an Office of Faith-Based Action in the White House which would "recruit and encourage faith-based programs to become involved" but would also be charged with informing other government offices that "we don't expect bureaucrats to create rules and regulations that will prevent (faith-based groups) from exercising their call."

Bush cited the case of Teen Challenge, a drug and alcohol treatment program in Texas, whose officials faced so many rules and regulations that they "were getting thwarted and frustrated and didn't want to be involved with government."

He praised Mary Jo Copeland of Sharing and Caring Hands ministry in Minneapolis as one of "the brave soldiers in the army of compassion ... who exist not because of government but because of love." The U.S. government "must not fear these little units in the army of compassion," he said. "We must encourage them."

In response to the last question of the interview, Bush had a surprising choice for his favorite Bible passage of the moment.

The New American Bible translation of the verse he chose, the Gospel of Matthew 7:3, reads: "Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?"

The chapter continues: "How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove that splinter from your eye,' while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye."

"To unite this nation and lead this nation and bring people together for a common cause requires a leader who understands his own fallibility, someone who's humble," Bush said. "After all, our faith is based upon the most ultimate humble man of all time, Christ, and I think humility is very important in the political process.

"I think one can be a very strong, forceful leader and be humble at the same time," he added. "All of us are sinners, all of us. And in my case I sought redemption and found it."

St. Thomas More to become patron saint of politicians

VATICAN CITY (CNS) – The Vatican announced that Pope John Paul II was scheduled to declare St. Thomas More patron of politicians and government officials Oct. 31.

The English martyr "has been recognized as a symbol of integrity and a hero of conscience by people regardless of their nations or beliefs," said an Oct. 26 Vatican announcement of the pope's decision.

Thomas More served as lord chancellor of England under King Henry VIII and was beheaded in 1535 on charges of treason. He refused to defy the pope by recognizing the king's second marriage.

Former Italian President Francesco Cos-

siga said support for the proclamation included letters from hundreds of government officials, but none from politicians in the United States or Canada.

Cossiga described St. Thomas More as "an extraordinarily modern saint – a layman, who perhaps better than any other, lived to the full the vocation of the layperson later described by the Second Vatican Council."

Britain's Lord David Alton, a Catholic member of the House of Lords, said naming St. Thomas More patron of politicians is a reminder that politicians should not leave their faith or consciences at home when they enter the halls of power.

added. "But I completely understand the position of the Catholic leadership and I respect them for it."

Bush also spoke against the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which the Catholic bishops had urged the U.S. Senate to ratify. Although he pledged to keep in place the current U.S. moratorium on nuclear testing, Bush said the treaty as currently written "will not keep in check nations that want to acquire weapons of mass destruction" because it is "not verifiable."

On health care issues, Bush said he supported "restoration of many of the Medicare cuts" that resulted from the Balanced Budget Act of 1997. "I'm mindful of the pinch on hospitals," he said. "I'm mindful of what the balanced budget amendment did, and the cuts are beginning to be restored."

Bush also spoke of his meeting in July with Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston and Catholic health leaders, the first of what the Catholic Health Association hopes will be a series of meetings with major presidential candidates. Bush has been the only candidate to hold such a meeting.

On education Bush said he supported giving federal education money directly to parents if local schools failed to educate their children.

"If schools cannot teach and will not change, the portion of the money for that disadvantaged child from the federal government ought to go to the parents, with the parents able to make a different choice for that child, including religious schools if he or she chooses," he said.