

# "RELIGION IN POLITICS"

BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The newspapers of November 9, carried the following Associated Press dispatches:

Washington, November 8. — "Secretary Taft's religious faith is purely his own private concern and not a matter for general discussion and political discrimination," says President Roosevelt in a letter he made public tonight, in which he answers numerous correspondents. The president says he deferred the publication of the letter until now to avoid any agitation likely to influence the election. The letter follows:

"November 6, 1908.—My Dear Sir: I have received your letter, running in part as follows: 'While it is claimed almost universally that religion should not enter into politics, yet there is no denying that it does, and the mass of the voters that are not Catholics will not support a man for any office, especially for president of the United States, who is a Roman Catholic. Since Taft has been nominated for president by the republican party, it is being circulated and is constantly urged as a reason for not voting for Taft that he is an infidel (Unitarian), and his wife and brother Roman Catholics. \* \* \* If his feelings are in sympathy with the Roman Catholic church on account of his wife and brother being Catholics, that would be objectionable to a sufficient number of voters to defeat him. On the other hand if he is an infidel, that would be sure to mean defeat. \* \* \* I am writing this letter for the sole purpose of giving Mr. Taft an opportunity to let the world know what his religious belief is.'

"I received many such letters as yours during the campaign, expressing dissatisfaction with Mr. Taft on religious grounds; some of them on the ground that he was a Unitarian, and others on the ground that he was suspected to be in sympathy with Catholics. I did not answer any of these letters during the campaign because I regarded it as an outrage even to agitate such a question as a man's religious convictions, with the purpose of influencing a political election. But now that the campaign is over, when there is an opportunity for men calmly to consider whether such propositions as those you make in your letter would lead, I wish to invite you to consider them, and I have selected your letter to answer because you advance both the objections commonly urged against Mr. Taft, namely, that he is a Unitarian and also that he is suspected of sympathy with the Catholics.

"You ask that Mr. Taft shall 'let the world know what his religious belief is.' This is purely his own private concern, and it is a matter between him and his Maker, a matter for his own conscience and to require it to be made public under penalty of political discrimination is to negative the first principles of our government, which guarantee complete religious liberty, and the right to each man to act in religious affairs as his own conscience dictates.

"Mr. Taft never asked my advice in the matter, but if he had asked it, I should have emphatically advised him against thus stating publicly his religious belief. The demand for a statement of a candidate's religious belief can have no meaning except that there may be discrimination for or against him because of that belief. Discrimination against the holder of one faith means retaliatory discrimination against men of other faiths. The inevitable result of our real freedom of conscience and a reversion to the dreadful conditions of religious dissension which, in so many lands, have proved fatal to true liberty, to true religion and to all advance in civilization.

"To discriminate against a thoroughly upright citizen because he belongs to some particular church, or because, like Abraham Lincoln, he has not avowed his allegiance to any church, is an outrage against that liberty of conscience which is one of the foundations of American life. You are entitled to know whether a man seeking your suffrages is a man of clean and upright life, honorable in all his dealings with his fellows, and fit by qualification and purpose to do well in the great office for which he is a candidate, but you are not entitled to know matters which lie purely between himself and his Maker. If it is proper or legitimate to oppose a man for being a

Unitarian, as was John Quincy Adams, for instance, as is the Rev. Edward Everett Hale, at the present moment chaplain of the senate, and an American of whose life all good Americans are proud, then it would be equally proper to support or oppose a man because of his views on justification by faith, or the method of administering the sacrament, or the gospel of salvation by works. If you once enter on such a career there is absolutely no limit at which you can legitimately stop.

"So much for your objections to Mr. Taft because he is a Unitarian. Now, for your objections to him because you think his wife and brother to be Roman Catholics. As it happens, they are not, but if they were, or if he were a Roman Catholic himself, it ought not to affect in the slightest degree any man's supporting him for the position of president. You say that 'the mass of the voters that are not Catholics will not support a man for any office, especially for president of the United States, who is a Roman Catholic.' I believe that when you say this you foully slander your fellow countrymen. I do not for one moment believe that the mass of our fellow citizens, or that any considerable number of our fellow citizens, can be influenced by such narrow bigotry as to refuse to vote for any thoroughly upright and fit man because he happens to have a particular religious creed. Such a consideration should never be treated as a reason for either supporting or opposing a candidate for a political office. Are you aware that there are several states in this union where the majority of the people are now Catholics? I should reprobate in the severest terms the Catholics who in those states (or in any other states) who refuse to vote for the most fit man because he happened to be a Protestant, and my condemnation would be exactly as severe for Protestants who, under reversed circumstances, refused to vote for a Catholic. In public life I am happy to say that I have known many men who were elected and constantly re-elected to office in districts where the great majority of their constituents were of a different religious belief. I know Catholics who have for many years represented constituencies mainly Protestant, and Protestants who have for many years represented constituencies mainly Catholic, and among the congressmen whom I know particularly well was one man of Jewish faith who represented a district in which there were hardly any Jews at all. All of these men by their very existence in political life refute the slander you have uttered against your fellow Americans.

"I believe that this republic will endure for many centuries. If so there will doubtless be among its presidents Protestants and Catholics, and very probably at some time Jews. I have consistently tried, while president, to act in relation to my fellow Americans of Catholic faith as I hope that any future president who happens to be a Catholic will act towards his fellow Americans of Protestant faith. Had I followed any other course I should have felt that I was unfit to represent the American people.

"In my cabinet at the present moment there sit side by side Catholic and Protestant, Christian and Jew, each man chosen because, in my belief, he is particularly fit to exercise on behalf of all our people the duties of the office to which I have appointed him. In no case does the man's religious belief in any way influence his discharge of his duties, save as it makes him more eager to act justly and uprightly in his relation to all men. The same principles that have obtained in appointing the members of my cabinet, the highest officials under me, the officials to whom is entrusted the work of carrying out all the important policies of my administration, are the principles upon which all good Americans should act in choosing, whether by election or appointment, the men to fill any office from the highest to the lowest in the land.

THEODORE ROOSEVELT.

"Mr. J. C. Martin, Dayton, Ohio."

WHAT LEADING CHURCHMEN SAY

Baltimore, November 8.—Cardinal Gibbons, upon being shown a copy of President Roosevelt's letter relative to the religious belief of Mr. Taft, said: "I would like to say two

things about the letter: First, it is well worth reading and pondering; second, I knew it was coming out."

New York, November 8.—Commenting on the letter of President Roosevelt dealing with Mr. Taft's religious faith and with religious prejudice in general, Rabbi Joseph Silverman, of Temple Emanuel, said tonight: "I consider President Roosevelt's views on religion and politics as safe, sane and sound."

Rabbi Grossman offered the following comment: "This letter expresses the very gist of Americanism and should be classed with Washington's letter to the Jews of Newport and the emancipation proclamation of Lincoln."

Rabbi W. Harris, Temple Israel, in Harlem, said: "It seems to me that the views expressed by Mr. Roosevelt are so thoroughly sound from a common sense point of view, so broad from a religious point of view and so consistent from an American point of view that no right-minded citizen can possibly object to them."

## AT THE LINCOLN RECEPTION

Addressing his neighbors in the city of Lincoln on the evening before election, Mr. Bryan spoke as follows:

Ladies and Gentlemen: I shall not make a political speech tonight among my neighbors. As the recipient of such a generous welcome I shall speak to you as a man to those who live beside him. There are unpleasant features in public life, but its rewards far outweigh its unpleasant part, and nothing has occurred in my life that I appreciate more than the cordial reception that you have given me in my home city at the close of this campaign. To have lived among you with the publicity that attaches the presidential campaign, and then to have evidence of your good will, makes this night memorable in my life. While it has sometimes been humiliating to have it thrown up to me in other parts of the country that my city has never given me a majority—

Voices: We will give it to you this time.

Mr. Bryan: While, I repeat, it has been humiliating, yet as a matter of fact I have always had a large complimentary vote from the republicans of Lincoln. When I ran for congress in 1890 I was only defeated in this county by a little more than four hundred and when again I ran for congress in 1892 I was only defeated in this county a little more than three hundred and even in the heat of presidential campaigns I have always had a larger number of votes from men who were not connected with the political party of which I am a member; and if this fact were known there would not have been so much criticism because I have never carried this city with its large republican normal majority, and I want to thank the republicans who in the past have given me their votes. Without the votes of many republicans I would not have been elected in 1892 for my majority was only 140 and without that election I would not have been nominated for the presidency in 1896, and therefore I can feel grateful to the republicans who gave me my start and whose votes were absolutely necessary to my election on that occasion. And whatever the republicans of Lincoln may do in the future, they have done enough in the past by laying the foundation for my political career, to make me their debtor while I live.

My friends, I am at the end of my third presidential campaign. Tomorrow fifteen millions of voters will decide whether I am to occupy the seat that Washington and Jefferson and Jackson and Lincoln occupied. You will have your part in that victory or in that defeat. It may be that the election will turn on Nebraska and it may be that Nebraska will turn on votes so few in number that the city of Lincoln may decide my fate. If fate decrees that I shall be added to the list of presidents, and Nebraska added to the list of states that have furnished presidents, I shall rejoice with you. If, on the other hand, the election shall be against me I can feel that I have left nothing undone that I could have done to bring success to my cause. And, my friends, I shall find private life so full of joy that I shall not miss the presidency.

I have been the child of fortune from my birth. God gave me into the keeping of a Christian father and a Christian mother. They