



As Americans gear up for the presidential election, it seems for many voters this has become more about who they are voting against than who they are voting for. I imagine, like me, you have heard numerous discussions about the presidential race where something is said along the lines of: “I’m just voting for the lesser of two evils”; or, “I don’t care for either one of them so I’m voting against the one I dislike most”. Of course, not all voters feel this way. Some are basing their vote on the belief we need to change and others are voting on the belief that now is not the time to change.

In our lead article, “Mitt, Mormons, and Evangelicals: The Elephant in the Room” we address a reason some choose to not vote for a candidate – their religious faith. Is this a legitimate reason? If not, does it still carry any inherent problems that Christians should be alert to when supporting a candidate of a different religion?

Related to this is a news story making the rounds recently concerning the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) removing information on its website that linked Mormonism as being a cult. Does this mean they no longer consider the Mormon Church a cult (based on their definition)? We looked into this and report our findings in “Does the BGEA Label Mormonism a Cult?”

Also, check out this issue’s “Culture Tracks” with two interesting polls about the election. The first contains the top fifteen strengths voters perceive in each of the presidential candidates (I think you’ll find it pretty revealing as to why some may be voting for each candidate). The second is how voters feel about the religion of each candidate and whether it matters when it comes to their vote.

No matter what your reason for voting, the important thing is that we do exercise this wonderful right and freedom we have to vote for the candidate of our choice, or that we dislike the least, as the case might be. May God grant the wisdom needed to move our nation forward, regardless of which candidate wins the election.

I’ll see you at the polls,

Bob Waldrep

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The Elephant in the Room

By Bob Waldrep



During the closing weeks of the 2012 presidential election both parties made a final push to win the hearts and, more importantly, the votes of the "undecided". Republicans were confident this segment that had been so strong for them in previous elections would help them carry the day. However, now that the votes have been cast and tallied and the president reelected, Republicans are left with trying to figure out how they lost an election that many thought should have been easily won.

The political pundits are now breaking down all the numbers and explaining how such a loss could have happened. Strategists are talking about what should have been done and what must be done in the future to ensure victory. Much of the discussion centers more upon demographics than upon message. And when message is a topic of discussion, it now rarely includes the role of faith in political elections – an issue that was largely ignored in this campaign.

An important conversation that conservatives should have had prior to the election was an honest discussion about Mormonism and how it would impact the election. Without question, many Evangelicals who identify as Republicans or independent conservatives who typically lean Republican, such as myself, saw Mr. Romney's Mormon

faith as a touchy subject. Many in this group found it difficult to vote for the incumbent; but, they also struggled with voting for a Mormon. Instead, this topic that should have been front and center in the discussion was virtually ignored (the "elephant in the room" you might say); perhaps, in hope it would just go away. It did not.

Having said this, let's be clear, the elephant in the room was not simply the fact that Mr. Romney is a prominent member of the Mormon Church, which is identified by many Christians as a religious cult. He could have been a Muslim or Hindu and presented the same challenge for Evangelicals

Should Christians Vote for a Mormon?

As with the Romney candidacy in 2008, I was often asked: "Do you think a Christian should vote for a Mormon for president"? You may also have been asked this question; or, maybe you asked it of others.

Personally, I don't think there is a right or wrong answer to this question when it comes to the collective Christian community. The bottom line is this is an issue of conscience that each of us must answer for ourselves. However, when discussing this we must also remember that no one is precluded from political office - even the presidency - based upon their religious persuasion.

Having said this, as Christians, I do not believe our vote should be cast at the expense of the gospel. As I expressed last year in the article, *Faith and Politics*:

"...being a Christian candidate does not guarantee one is the best candidate any more than the Christian surgeon is automatically the most gifted surgeon to operate on one's child, or the Christian dry cleaner is the best one to get the spot out of your new suit...The underlying concern then, as it is now, is not so much that Mr. Romney is a Mormon. It is the simple fact that, in promoting his candidacy, the essential beliefs of the Christian faith are being altered so a candidate can be presented as

Christian; regardless, of what he truly believes."

When I wrote those words, Romney had not yet won the Republican nomination and most evangelicals were solidly in the camp of one of the other Republican candidates. My concerns centered on misconceptions regarding Mormonism that were being caused by the Romney campaign when evangelicals and/or the press raised concerns about his Mormon faith. It was obvious his campaign strategy was to ignore the questions and attempt to posture the Mormon Church as Christian - a strategy long used by the Mormon Church in responding to its critics and one that was somewhat effective in his 2008 run. [One Romney campaign strategist contacted me after reading my article to try and convince me I was wrong about the Mormon Church. This person identified himself as Roman Catholic and told me the Mormon Church is just another strain of Christianity, like the Protestant Church.]

After Mr. Romney secured the Republican nomination, many who supported other candidates threw their support to his campaign. From personal experience, these supporters clearly understood his being a Mormon could be a negative. As such, some sought to minimize his Mormonism - a few going so far as to try and paint Mormons as being part of the Christian community of faith. It is one thing for Mormons to claim theirs is a Christian Church. I expect this of them. It is quite another when evangelicals, who know better, also try to portray it as Christian or try to qualify it with phrases such as: "somewhat", "similar to", "in the same camp with", etc., Christianity. Therein is the problem - the elephant in the room.

In over twenty years of researching, writing, and speaking on new religious movements and pseudo-Christian groups, such as the Mormon Church, I cannot ever recall a time when Christians - Evangelicals, in particular - were trying so hard to not call one

of these groups a cult, or as being outside the Christian faith. Perhaps this is best illustrated by the action taken by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA) in removing any reference from their website to the Mormon Church being a cult after Billy and Franklin Graham met with and endorsed Mr. Romney just prior to the election.

Is the Mormon Church a Cult?

Where it had once labeled the Mormon Church a cult, as the election approached the BGEA posed the question, "Can an Evangelical Vote for a Mormon?" The conclusion reached by the author, Franklin Graham, was yes. As I have previously pointed out, I do not disagree with his answer. However, I do think this is the wrong question to be asking. The more important question is, "In order to make a candidate more appealing, should an evangelical voting for a Mormon try to make the Mormon Church appear Christian, or more "Christian-like"; rather than identifying it as a cult, or as non-Christian?" [Editor's note: The BGEA has not said the Mormon Church is not a cult, they simply removed references to it being a cult from their website.]

Without question, some evangelical leaders became less outspoken in their concerns about Mormonism from fear

they may negatively impact Mr. Romney's chances of being elected. BGEA chief of staff, Ken Barun pretty much admitted this stating, "We removed the information from the website because we do not wish to participate in a theological debate about something that has become politicized during this campaign."

Interestingly, during the last presidential election, I don't recall any such concerns being expressed about "politicizing" Mr. Romney's faith when Evangelicals had other options in the Republican primary. During that cam-

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paign, Romney was regularly asked to comment on those beliefs held by his Church that many Christians believed put it outside the bounds of the Christian faith. (For example, then candidate, Mike Huckabee asked if Mr. Romney's Church was the one that taught Jesus and Satan were brothers.) When responding to such questions, the candidate and his campaign generally de-

flected them by asserting he is running for commander-in-chief, not chief theologian. Fair enough. I understand that, as a politician, he would not want to answer those questions.

However, once he became the nominee, I heard many of my fellow conservatives and evangelicals saying the same thing when questioned as to how they could vote for a Mormon, or in defending their support of Romney before a question was even raised. It typically went something like this, "I know he's a Mormon but I am not voting for a theologian-in-chief, I'm voting for a commander-in-chief". Sounds logical, right? Of course not.

How does a politician knowing and discussing what they believe about their own faith translate to their running for theologian-in-chief? The fact of the matter is many of our Presidents could clearly articulate the beliefs held by their Church. Not one of them is recognized in the recordings of history as holding the "mythical" office of Theologian-in-Chief. Obviously, the Romney campaign (as do many Christians) recognized the negatives his Mormonism held for Christians and wanted to avoid any discussion about its teachings. Let's just be honest about it.

The facts are: Mr. Romney is a life-long member of the Mormon Church



Voters' Comfort Level with 2012 Presidential Candidates' Religion (From Pew Research Polling, June 28-July 9, 2012)

When it comes to Obama's Religion

Comfortable with it:

- 45% all voters
- 27% Republicans/lean Republican
- 61% Democrats/lean Democrat

Uncomfortable with it:

- 19% all voters
- 36% Republicans/lean Republican
- 7% Democrats/lean Democrat

Doesn't Matter/No opinion:

- 5% all voters
- 5% Republicans/lean Republican
- 4% Democrats/lean Democrat

Don't know his religion:

- 31% all voters
- 33% Republicans/lean Republican
- 28% Democrats/lean Democrat

When it comes to Romney's Religion

Comfortable with it:

- 41% all voters
- 51% Republicans/lean Republican
- 35% Democrats/lean Democrat

Uncomfortable with it:

- 13% all voters
- 10% Republicans/lean Republican
- 16% Democrats/lean Democrat

Doesn't Matter/No opinion:

- 14% all voters
- 13% Republicans/lean Republican
- 4% Democrats/lean Democrat

Don't know his religion:

- 32% all voters
- 26% Republicans/lean Republican
- 34% Democrats/lean Democrat



who has served as a Mormon missionary, has fulfilled all the requirements to enter into the Mormon Temple (something the vast majority of Mormon Church members are not allowed to do) and has held several key leadership positions in the Church. Do we honestly think voters were expected to believe he did all this without learning anything about what the Mormon Church teaches?

I agree we were not electing him to be our country's theologian-in-chief, but I do expect him to be honest in answering questions about his faith, even if the answer truthfully is, "I don't know". More importantly, I think the general public expects Evangelicals, (whether we supported him, or not) to be just as open about what the Mormon Church teaches as we were prior to his winning the nomination.

We must be mindful that, in trying to diminish any negatives of Mr. Romney being a Mormon, we may have also been legitimizing the Mormon Church. Once that bell was rung it will be hard, if not impossible, to un-ring it. This is evidenced by the action taken by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association after the election, when Franklin Graham told CNN the article they removed from the BGEA website will never be posted again. Graham said, "I'm an evangelist and I want to reach as many people as I can. If I'm calling them names it doesn't

work."

Giving one's support to, or casting one's vote for a Mormon, should not mean we should no longer tell the truth about what the Mormon Church believes and teaches. It is never wrong to point out error, especially when it comes to a group that proclaims a false gospel. We would do well to learn from the Apostle Paul, who was also an evangelist, and said, "But, even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed." (Gal 1:8) Paul recognized that in sharing the true gospel we must also be alert to and give warning against those who proclaim a different gospel. This is an admonishment he makes several times in his letters.

A Shadow of Things to Come?

Here is the bottom line, this election may have been indicative of what we can expect in future races. It may be that the days of having a "Christian" option are becoming much rarer. As such, we may no longer have a "Christian" candidate as the default option. In such a case, our vote will have to center on common ground other than faith. This will be new territory for those who grew up with the Christian political movements that became popular in the 1970s and 80s. It was certainly new for us in this past election.

In such a new paradigm, we must

learn that we don't need to "Christianize" our candidate. Rather, we must promote him, or her, on the basis of the issues we hold in common, despite our religious differences. Support for Mr. Romney, should have been on the basis of why he is the best man for the job, not his being Christian, kind of Christian, or the closest thing to a Christian we could find. Then, when questioned about his faith, we could have been more open and honest about it; for, it is what it is.

As Christians, we know the governance of our nation is important; however, advancing the Kingdom of Christ should have much greater significance. As we select future candidates to support and as we cast our vote, let's do as conscience dictates, for the good of the nation. And, as we campaign, let's make sure we do no harm to the future advancement of the Kingdom.



Bob Waldrep is the President and Founder of Crosswinds Foundation. Bob has written numerous articles related to cultural apologetics, coauthored *The Truth Behind the Secret*, and is a contributing author to: *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* and *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook*.

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