

Santorum 'Throws Up' on JFK/Obama

Exclusive: Rick Santorum says he almost threw up reading John Kennedy's 1960 speech on religious tolerance, and the GOP presidential hopeful sees sinister intent in President Obama's plea that young Americans seek higher education. So, what would a Santorum America be like, asks Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

With Republican presidential front-runner Rick Santorum, it's hard to decide what is more alarming, his know-nothingism or his dishonesty. In recent days, he has put on displays of both, decrying President Barack Obama's advocacy for higher learning and distorting John F. Kennedy's 1960 appeal for religious tolerance.

Like many on the Right, Santorum also selectively disregards the founding principles of the United States, which include government neutrality on religion. In one speech, Santorum said he "almost threw up" when reading Kennedy's reiteration of that principle more than a half century ago when JFK was seeking to become the first Catholic president.

Instead of embracing Kennedy's support for the separation of church and state, which has spared America much of the religious violence that has marred other parts of the world, Santorum espouses a chip-on-the-shoulder notion that by not embracing the Bible as a governing philosophy the government is picking on fundamentalist Christians.

Of course, we've seen a version of this religious "victimhood" before, when Fox News and other right-wing media outlets concocted the absurd notion of a "War on Christmas" despite the annual extravagance of a month-long celebration in honor of the mythological birth of the baby Jesus, ending in the nation's only official religious holiday.

The reality is that Americans of all religious views while out buying their groceries or riding in elevators have no choice but to listen to Christmas carols. They watch their cities decked out in red-and-green Christmas colors. To state the obvious, there is no comparable celebration for Yom Kippur or Ramadan.

But fundamentalist Christians still detect a "war" in the renaming of public-school "Christmas concerts" as "winter concerts" and similar concessions to the fact that America also is home to Jews, Muslims, atheists and people of other religious persuasions.

What Santorum is now doing on the campaign trail is retrofitting the "war on

Christmas" into a more general "war on religion." In recent speeches, he has accused President Obama of following a "phony theology," i.e. "not a theology based on the Bible."

Santorum's argument plays on two levels first, raising fresh doubts that Obama is a real Christian (when many right-wing Christians still insist that he's a Muslim) and second, maintaining that Obama's promotion of environmentalism is somehow an assault on Christianity.

Santorum wants Americans to see legislation aimed at protecting the Earth and Nature as a violation of the Bible's granting Man dominion over the planet, as if God bestowed on Man the right to plunder the Earth to the point of making it uninhabitable for future generations.

Some of Santorum's reckless views on the environment fit with the fundamentalist Christian notion that the End Times are near and thus the Earth's resources can be used without regard to the future. (Note to the campaign press: before Santorum becomes the U.S. president, you might want to ask about his views on the End Times.)

No College For You

Santorum is contemptuous, too, of Obama's appeals to America's youth to seek higher education so they can fill the high-tech jobs of the 21st Century. Obama has asked "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training."

But Santorum sees in that a dark conspiracy to indoctrinate American youth away from "faith" as well as an example of Obama's elitism. Santorum told one campaign crowd, "President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob!"

In that advice from Obama about higher education, the former Pennsylvania senator detected a slight against "good, decent men and women who go out and work hard every day and put their skills to tests that aren't taught by some liberal college professor."

Santorum then advocated that Americans seek out other alternatives for upgrading their skills. "There's technical schools, there's additional training, vocational training," he said, although that would seem to be no different than Obama's frequent touting of community colleges that partner with companies on job training.

Except that when Obama makes these appeals like when he addresses students at the start of the school year and urges them to do their homework his agenda must

be to brainwash the children into some atheistic dystopia where true believers are hunted down by black helicopters and delivered to reeducation camps.

The more Santorum speaks the more it appears that his world view has been shaped by right-wing Christian paranoia that can be found in some fundamentalist novels rather than in the real world.

The truth is that the Americans most discriminated against for their religious views are probably atheists, perhaps even more so than Muslims and Jews. Despite the constitutional mandate in Article VI that “no religious Test shall ever be required” for any public office, it’s hard to find an avowed atheist in any elected government post anywhere.

Hard Times at Penn State

However, in Santorum World, the Christians are the persecuted ones. In an appearance on ABC-TV’s “This Week” on Sunday, Santorum was still recalling his victimhood several decades ago while attending Penn State.

“I went through it at Penn State,” Santorum told host George Stephanopoulos. “You talk to most kids who go to college who are conservatives, and you are singled out, you are ridiculed, you are I can tell you personally, I know that, you know, we I went through a process where I was docked for my conservative views. This is sort of a regular routine.

“You know the statistic that at least I was familiar with from a few years ago – I don’t know if it still holds true but I suspect it may even be worse that 62 percent of kids who enter college with some sort of faith commitment leave without it. This is not a neutral setting.”

But, of course, it may actually be “a neutral setting.” It may just be that some of the myths taught by religious fundamentalists don’t withstand objective scrutiny in an environment of factual learning and in different circumstances, most Americans would cheer that fact.

For instance, if Muslims trained in fundamentalist Islamist madrassas went to a cosmopolitan university and learned real history like, say, reading about the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust that presumably would be a good thing because it would increase tolerance and understanding.

Or, let’s say that Christian children who believe in Santa Claus attend a public school and learn from other children that there is no Santa Claus. We might feel sad about that development, but it would not mean the public school was not “a neutral setting.” The hard truth is there is no Santa Claus.

So, what would a President Santorum want? An American system of higher education that is the Christian equivalent of an Islamic fundamentalist madrassa, schools that indoctrinate American youth in the Faith and tell them to view Reason as the temptation of the Devil?

The Founders' Wisdom

The Christian world has seen this script before and it does not end well. Indeed, it is what motivated America's Founders to adopt the First Amendment's joint edict that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." The Founders were well aware of the dark side of official religions.

By enacting the First Amendment, James Madison and other constitutional framers were not prohibiting the involvement of religious people in the public square, but they were saying that the government must remain neutral on matters of religion.

That is what John F. Kennedy was recalling in his famous 1960 address pleading for religious tolerance toward Catholics, the speech that Santorum said made him almost vomit. On the campaign trail recently, Santorum noted that "earlier in my political career, I had the opportunity to read the speech, and I almost threw up. You should read the speech."

Asked by Stephanopoulos "why did it make you throw up," Santorum responded: "Because the first line, first substantive line in the speech says, 'I believe in America where the separation of church and state is absolute.' I don't believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.

"The idea that the church can have no influence or no involvement in the operation of the state is absolutely antithetical to the objectives and vision of our country. Kennedy for the first time articulated the vision saying, 'no, faith is not allowed in the public square. I will keep it separate.' Go on and read the speech.

"[Kennedy says] 'I will have nothing to do with faith. I won't consult with people of faith.' It was an absolutist doctrine that was abhorrent at the time of 1960. And I went down to Houston, Texas, 50 years almost to the day [after Kennedy's speech, which also was delivered in Houston], and gave a speech and talked about how important it is for everybody to feel welcome in the public square. "

Stephanopoulos: "You think you wanted to throw up?"

Santorum: "Well, yes, absolutely, to say that people of faith have no role in

the public square? You bet that makes you throw up. What kind of country do we live in that says only people of non-faith can come into the public square and make their case?

“That makes me throw up and it should make every American who is seen from the President [Obama], someone who is now trying to tell people of faith that you will do what the government says, we are going to impose our values on you, not that you can’t come to the public square and argue against it, but now we’re going to turn around and say we’re going to impose our values from the government on people of faith, which of course is the next logical step when people of faith, at least according to John Kennedy, have no role in the public square.”

Not True

Of course, Kennedy said no such thing in 1960. His speech did not declare that “people of faith have no role in the public square.” Kennedy himself was a practicing Catholic as is Santorum. Kennedy also collaborated with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., a person of faith who clearly operated in the public square. It’s odd, too, that Santorum, while speaking as a person of faith in the public square, would say that a person of faith can’t speak in the public square.

Indeed, there are countless examples of people of faith operating in America’s public square, both as advocates and officeholders. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, probably the Americans most excluded from the public square are atheists and other non-believers who generally are punished by voters for not having a religious faith.

What Kennedy was seeking in his speech on Sept. 12, 1960, was an acceptance by voters of candidates based on their character and positions, not their religion. Facing accusations that he might take orders from the Vatican, Kennedy asserted that he would strictly respect the founding American principle of separation of church and state.

In part, Kennedy said, “But because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected president, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured, perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in, for that should be important only to me, but what kind of America I believe in.

“I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute, where no Catholic prelate would tell the president (should he be Catholic) how

to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference; and where no man is denied public office merely because his religion differs from the president who might appoint him or the people who might elect him.

"I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials; and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all.

"For while this year it may be a Catholic against whom the finger of suspicion is pointed, in other years it has been, and may someday be again, a Jew, or a Quaker or a Unitarian or a Baptist. It was Virginia's harassment of Baptist preachers, for example, that helped lead to Jefferson's statute of religious freedom. Today I may be the victim, but tomorrow it may be you, until the whole fabric of our harmonious society is ripped at a time of great national peril.

"Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end; where all men and all churches are treated as equal; where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice; where there is no Catholic vote, no anti-Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind; and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood.

"That is the kind of America in which I believe. And it represents the kind of presidency in which I believe, a great office that must neither be humbled by making it the instrument of any one religious group, nor tarnished by arbitrarily withholding its occupancy from the members of any one religious group. I believe in a president whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation, or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office.

"I would not look with favor upon a president working to subvert the First Amendment's guarantees of religious liberty. Nor would our system of checks and balances permit him to do so. And neither do I look with favor upon those who would work to subvert Article VI of the Constitution by requiring a religious test, even by indirection, for it. If they disagree with that safeguard, they should be out openly working to repeal it.

"I want a chief executive whose public acts are responsible to all groups and obligated to none; who can attend any ceremony, service or dinner his office may appropriately require of him; and whose fulfillment of his presidential oath is not limited or conditioned by any religious oath, ritual or obligation.

"This is the kind of America I believe in, and this is the kind I fought for in the South Pacific, and the kind my brother died for in Europe. No one suggested then that we may have a 'divided loyalty,' that we did 'not believe in liberty,' or that we belonged to a disloyal group that threatened the 'freedoms for which our forefathers died.'

"And in fact ,this is the kind of America for which our forefathers died, when they fled here to escape religious test oaths that denied office to members of less favored churches; when they fought for the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom; and when they fought at the shrine I visited today, the Alamo. For side by side with Bowie and Crockett died McCafferty and Bailey and Carey. But no one knows whether they were Catholic or not, for there was no religious test at the Alamo.

"I ask you tonight to follow in that tradition, to judge me on the basis of my record of 14 years in Congress, on my declared stands against an ambassador to the Vatican, against unconstitutional aid to parochial schools, and against any boycott of the public schools (which I have attended myself), instead of judging me on the basis of these pamphlets and publications we all have seen that carefully select quotations out of context from the statements of Catholic church leaders, usually in other countries, frequently in other centuries, and always omitting, of course, the statement of the American Bishops in 1948, which strongly endorsed church-state separation, and which more nearly reflects the views of almost every American Catholic.

"I do not consider these other quotations binding upon my public acts. Why should you? But let me say, with respect to other countries, that I am wholly opposed to the state being used by any religious group, Catholic or Protestant, to compel, prohibit, or persecute the free exercise of any other religion.

"And I hope that you and I condemn with equal fervor those nations which deny their presidency to Protestants, and those which deny it to Catholics. And rather than cite the misdeeds of those who differ, I would cite the record of the Catholic Church in such nations as Ireland and France, and the independence of such statesmen as Adenauer and De Gaulle.

"But let me stress again that these are my views. For contrary to common newspaper usage, I am not the Catholic candidate for president. I am the Democratic Party's candidate for president, who happens also to be a Catholic. I

do not speak for my church on public matters, and the church does not speak for me.

“Whatever issue may come before me as president, on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject, I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise.

“But if the time should ever come, and I do not concede any conflict to be even remotely possible, when my office would require me to either violate my conscience or violate the national interest, then I would resign the office; and I hope any conscientious public servant would do the same.

“But I do not intend to apologize for these views to my critics of either Catholic or Protestant faith, nor do I intend to disavow either my views or my church in order to win this election.

“If I should lose on the real issues, I shall return to my seat in the Senate, satisfied that I had tried my best and was fairly judged. But if this election is decided on the basis that 40 million Americans lost their chance of being president on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser, in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.

“But if, on the other hand, I should win the election, then I shall devote every effort of mind and spirit to fulfilling the oath of the presidency, practically identical, I might add, to the oath I have taken for 14 years in the Congress. For without reservation, I can ‘solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution, so help me God.’”

So what does it say about one of the Republican presidential frontrunners that Kennedy’s speech from 1960 would make him almost throw up?

[For more on related topics, see Robert Parry’s *Lost History, Secrecy & Privilege* and *Neck Deep*, now available in a three-book set for the discount price of only \$29. For details, [click here.](#)]

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His latest book, *Neck Deep: The Disastrous Presidency of George W. Bush*, was written with two of his sons, Sam and Nat, and can be ordered at neckdeepbook.com. His two previous books, *Secrecy & Privilege: The Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq* and *Lost History: Contras,*

Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth' are also available there.

CNN Silences War-Skeptical Soldier

Exclusive: By obsessing over Iran gaining a nuclear weapon “capability” even with no actual bomb while ignoring Israel’s undeclared nuclear arsenal, the U.S. news media proves the point of its own bias. There’s also the usual hostility toward dissenting voices, as ex-CIA analyst Ray McGovern notes.

By Ray McGovern

When CNN interviews a U.S. Army corporal preparing for his third deployment to Afghanistan, should TV viewers be permitted to hear him out on a front-burner issue like Iran’s alleged threat to Israel? For those who might think so, watch what happens when 28-year-old Cpl. Jesse Thorsen touches a neuralgic nerve by suggesting that Israel can take care of itself.

It’s impossible to say exactly what happened to the remote feed that suddenly got lost in transmission back to CNN Central, but the minute-long video is truly worth a thousand words:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A7yTCPDgDgo&NR=1&feature=endscreen>

The interview, which dates back to Jan. 3 when the Iowa caucuses were the evening’s big news, is at least symbolic of how our Fawning Corporate Media treats dissident voices that clash with the prevailing pro-war-on-Iran bias. I missed the segment when it aired, but I think it still merits comment today as war clouds thicken, again.

In the aborted one-minute segment, Cpl. Thorsen is interviewed by CNN’s Dana Bash, who presumably picked him out for the live interview because he had a large tattoo on his neck about never forgetting 9/11. The tattoo plus two tours in Afghanistan behind him (and yet another in front of him) may have suggested to Bash and her CNN producers that Thorsen was unlikely to say anything to muddle or muffle the new drumbeat for war.

Based on Thorsen’s military appearance alone, the typical CNN viewer could almost settle back in an easy chair and anticipate some stirring patriotic bathos about America standing tall and the interview ending with the obligatory “thank you for your service,” which any right-thinking journalist utters to show that he or she is part of Team America.

But Bash got more than she bargained for when Thorsen turned out to be a well-informed and articulate young man who began endorsing Ron Paul's non-interventionist views on U.S. foreign policy, i.e. that the United States should go to war only when absolutely necessary to defend its vital national interests and shouldn't be picking a fight with Iran on behalf of Israel.

Such comments, of course, are almost literally heretical at places like CNN, which accepts unquestioningly the idea of "American exceptionalism" and abides by the neoconservative dogma that U.S. and Israeli security interests are one and the same.

That's why CNN and the rest of the FCM typically dismiss Ron Paul's views on foreign policy as dangerously "isolationist," if not laughably loony. "Can you believe it? He doesn't want to station American troops all around the world! He doesn't believe in preemptive wars to disarm our enemies of weapons that they may not have now but might someday in the future have the capability of building! Ha! Ha! What a nut!"

The FCM's dismissal of Paul's foreign-policy views was a key reason why comedian Jon Stewart once compared Paul to "the 13th floor" of a hotel, the level that often doesn't exist because customers consider the number unlucky. So, when the FCM would lavish attention on other Republican candidates, who finished both above and below Paul in some poll or in early balloting, the pundits would pass over Paul as if he didn't exist.

Going 'Off-Script'

So, what happened when Cpl. Thorsen veered "off script" so to speak and began reprising Ron Paulish views on the appropriate use of soldiers like himself? Well, CNN suddenly lost the feed. As Thorsen disappeared from the screen, CNN anchor Wolf Blitzer explained, "Sorry, we just lost our tech connection, unfortunately."

It's true that connections can be lost for any number of reasons and I can't say for sure that some alert CNN producer hit the "kill" switch as one might if Cpl. Thorsen had begun cursing uncontrollably but Blitzer and other CNN honchos didn't seem very eager to resume the interview, just as they generally don't book anti-war activists who disagree with the imperial orthodoxy.

You might remember, for instance, how CNN, like the other networks, stocked its pre-Iraq War "debates" with hawkish retired generals and admirals who would face only the mildest and most respectful questioning from Blitzer or some other anchor. In the rare moment when some war skeptic got on the air, he or she was treated with disdain, if not outright hostility, all the better for the network

to demonstrate its "patriotism."

Some cable networks devoted more time to American restaurants that were renaming French fries into "Freedom fries" than to the millions of people who took to the streets to protest the looming invasion of Iraq. After all, what could those "activists" know about Iraq hiding all those stockpiles of WMDs?

But why mention the case of Cpl. Thorsen now? Because this one-minute video-that-is-better-than-a-thousand-words could come in handy as at least a symbolic reminder of the bias at CNN and other parts of the FCM when it comes to allowing a full and fair discussion about going to war against some "designated enemy."

This reality is bound to assume increased importance next week when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu touches down in Washington to press his case for a preemptive war against Iran's nuclear program which has yet to produce a single nuclear bomb (and Iranian leaders say they don't intend to build one) while Israel has an undeclared nuclear arsenal of an estimated 200 to 300 bombs.

Just for fun, keep track of how many times Netanyahu and other war advocates get to weigh in on the unacceptable danger of an Iranian nuclear weapon "capability" compared to how many times they are asked why Israel has not signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty and why it won't let inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency into Israeli secret bases to examine Israel's actual nuclear weapons.

The FCM's latest drumming for war is likely to reach a crescendo during the first days of March, with Netanyahu crashing the cymbals loudly and the propaganda orchestra swelling in a martial symphony designed to stir the American people into another standing ovation for another preemptive war.

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