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Progress Is Our Most Important Product

GENERAL  ELECTRIC

Can a Catholic become Vice-President?



Mayor Robert F. Wagner of New York City, shown here with Francis Cardinal Spellman, has been frequently mentioned as a possible vice-presidential candidate.

Democratic leaders are debunking the "Al Smith myth." They feel that

their party can win a presidential election with a Catholic on the ticket, maybe even this year

By FLETCHER KNEBEL

LOOK WASHINGTON BUREAU

AMONG THE SCORE of men under consideration for the Democratic vice-presidential nomination in August are a half-dozen adherents of the Roman Catholic faith. Some have fairly wide backing for second place on the Democratic ticket. Others, for a variety of political factors, are long shots.

Only once in American history has a major party convention selected a Catholic for either

the presidential or vice-presidential nomination. That occurred in 1928 when the Democratic convention at Houston, Texas, nominated Gov. Alfred E. Smith of New York for President on the first ballot.

Al Smith's bid for the presidency met disaster. Smith lost to Herbert Hoover by more than 6,000,000 votes, dropped four states in the traditionally Solid South and finished with only 87 electoral votes. In the abyss of defeat, Democrats accepted the results as clear evidence that a Catholic could not be elected to national office in the United States.

Today, they're thinking differently.

Because of the conflicting forces that will collide at the Democratic national convention in Chicago, even the most reliable of prophets would need a horseshoe in his pocket to name the Democratic vice-presidential candidate in advance. But this much is clear:

In the preconvention jockeying, three Catholics have received active support for the second-place nomination. They are: Sen. John F. Kennedy, 39, of Massachusetts; Gov. Frank J. Lausche, 60, of Ohio; Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr., 46, of New York City. Other Catholics

continued

The Democratic party wants to try to regain Catholic voters it lost in 1952



Al Smith, shown being invested as a papal chamberlain by Cardinal Hayes in 1938, suffered defeat 10 years earlier when he ran as the only Catholic presidential candidate ever nominated by a major party.

mentioned by political leaders as possibilities: Sen. Mike Mansfield, 53, of Montana; House Democratic Leader John W. McCormack, 64, winner of the Massachusetts primary, and Gov. Edmund Muskie, 42, of Maine.

All these have proved themselves able vote getters in key Northern states which both parties are anxious to win. All are vigorous men. Most show degrees of independence attractive to modern voters, who appear to have less and less respect for party labels. Each presents a "new face" for voters outside his own state. All have good official records. None has been seared by scandal.

What has happened since 1928 to change a Catholic's chances?

In the years that followed, a number of political analysts attacked what they called the "Al Smith myth." They argued that Smith's Catholicism was a minor factor in his defeat. Still, the Al Smith myth lived, and neither party seriously proposed the nomination of a Catholic in the six succeeding national-election years.

The Democratic party has given recognition to the huge numbers of Catholic voters within its folds by allotting the chairmanship of the national committee, highest political post in party machinery, to a Catholic. From Roosevelt's James A. Farley to the present-day Paul M. Butler, there have been nine Democratic national chairmen, every one a Catholic. Similarly, it has become the custom for a Protestant candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination to pick a Catholic as his campaign manager. This year, both Adlai Stevenson and Sen. Estes Kefauver are managed by Catholics—Stevenson by James A. Finnegan and Kefauver by F. Joseph (Jiggs) Donohue.

Beyond these concessions, though, stood an unwritten but precise rule: A Catholic's place was as the man behind the throne, never as the occupant of it. The formula appeared to

work beautifully. The Democrats won an unbroken string of five national victories, always with substantial majorities among Catholics.

Then came Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1952, and Catholics, disturbed by the Communist issue, left the old Democratic alliance in droves to vote for him.

Democratic leaders now keenly feel the loss of large numbers of Catholic voters and the need to regain them. Instead of the question, "Is a Catholic a liability on the ticket?", many Democrats have begun to ask, "Would a Catholic on the ticket be an asset?"

Circulating privately among Democratic politicians is a 16-page statistical summary of a dozen polls and surveys. It was prepared by staffers of a Democratic leader who believes the party has failed to recognize the importance of Catholic voters in past Democratic triumphs. In effect, it answers the second question with a thumping "Yes." Here are the high lights of its findings:

1. Democrats must regain a large number of Catholic voters to win the 1956 election.

2. Protestants who say they'll vote against a Catholic because he is a Catholic are not numerous. Their number has shrunk markedly in the last 15 years. In the big Northern pivotal states, their vote is insignificant.

3. Catholics tend to exercise their voting rights more than Protestants. As a sample, says the summary, Catholics form 24 per cent of the adult population of Michigan, but 30 per cent of the major-party voters. In Pennsylvania, Catholics form 29 per cent of the adult population, but 38 per cent of the major-party vote.

4. Although Catholics constitute only slightly more than 20 per cent of the voters, their vote in many states is concentrated in cities where Eisenhower made heavy inroads on the normal Democratic vote in 1952. The summary lists 18 cities in 12 key states where the percentage of Catholic voters of the two-

party vote ranges upward from 30 in Minneapolis-St. Paul to 62 in Buffalo.

"The Catholic voters in each of the cities," says the summary, "can usually determine the size of the Democratic margin in those cities. The size of the Democratic margin in those cities usually determines whether these states go Democratic. Whether the states go Democratic usually determines whether the Democrats win the election."

5. Catholic voters are attracted to a Catholic candidate. Thus, a Catholic on the Democratic ticket would lend strength. Instead being a political liability, he would be an asset.

The private document presents a telling array of statistics to buttress this final point. Polls showed that, outside the South, 1952 Democratic congressional candidates ran only slightly better than Stevenson. The average candidate ran approximately one per cent better. But Catholic candidates for Congress ran far better than Stevenson, in many cases spectacularly so.

The tabulation compares the vote received by 35 Catholic candidates for Congress with the votes obtained by Stevenson in the 35 districts or states. In Youngstown, Ohio, the summary, Rep. Michael J. Kirwan ran per cent ahead of Stevenson. In Cleveland, Rep. Michael A. Feighan ran 25 per cent better. In Massachusetts, Senator Kennedy ran 12 per cent better. In Rhode Island, Sen. John O. Pastore did 12 per cent better. In Milwaukee, W. Rep. Clement J. Zablocki ran 33 per cent better. In St. Paul, Minn., Rep. Eugene J. McCarthy ran 12 per cent better, and in Montana, Sen. Mike Mansfield ran 21 per cent better.

The document concedes that a Catholic on the national ticket probably would lose votes in the Protestant South, but it contends that such losses would be small and would not affect the national outcome.

Southern Opposition Is Mixed

On this point, LOOK made an independent poll of Democratic party officials in 13 Southern states to check Dixie sentiment on the issue. Three questions were asked. Thirty-one officials replied. Here are the results:

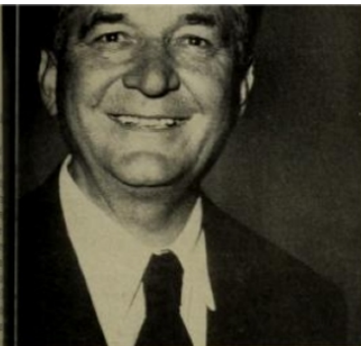
"Would you object to the nomination of Catholic as Vice-President on the Democratic ticket this year?" No—23. Yes—8.

"What national political effect would Catholic on the Democratic ticket have?" Asset—4. Liability—18. No difference—9.

"What political effect would the presence of a Catholic on the ticket have in your state?" Asset—3. Liability—18. No difference—10.

Some of those who answered indicated they believed a Catholic candidate would be a liability for the Democrats in the South this year because of the Negro question. Several members of the Catholic hierarchy in the South have insisted on integration of whites and Negroes in the Church. In general, the Catholic Church in the South has been more closely identified with integration than have the Protestant sects.

The poll shows definitely that Southern Democratic party officials still consider a Catholic a political liability on the national ticket. On the other hand, three of the Southern Dem-



Gov. Frank J. Lausche of Ohio is also one who may dispel "Al Smith myth." Elected governor five times, he has shown great strength in the rural Protestant areas as well as in the Catholic industrial centers of state.



Sen. John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, who comes from a Catholic family of wealth and political tradition, bucked the 1952 GOP sweep. While Ike was carrying the state, Kennedy won Senate seat by 70,000 votes.

ocrats who thought a Catholic would be a liability made an exception of Governor Lausche.

Perhaps no Catholic in public life may do more to dispel the Al Smith myth than Frank Lausche. Five times, he has been elected governor of Ohio, on occasions by striking majorities. Ohio has an estimated 20 per cent Catholic population, but Lausche has always showed great strength in the Protestant rural areas as well. What is more, if adherence to a minority religious faith in America were indeed a political handicap, Lausche labored against a double obstacle—for his Catholicism frequently became the target of a two-way controversy. Lausche's foes sought to defeat him by charging that he was a "left-handed" Catholic because he had married a Protestant outside the Church and because, they said, he had denied the sacraments of the Church.

Lausche believes himself a Catholic, lists his religious affiliation as such and attends mass in Columbus. At any rate, it is clear that Ohio voters have paid scant attention to Lausche's religious status.

Of far more concern to Democratic politicians is Lausche's lack of party regularity. It is his strain of Republicanism, far more than his Catholicism, they feel, that will militate against his nomination.

Both Senator Kennedy and Mayor Wagner of New York City were eyed by the Stevenson forces as possible vice-presidential candidates early this year. Both men announced early for Stevenson. Wagner's statement created a stir because it was assumed he would stay locked to the candidacy of Gov. Averell Harriman of his home state of New York. Kennedy spoke up for Stevenson the week before the New Hampshire primary. Kefauver won the state in a breeze, but Stevenson remains a strong factor in the convention, and Kennedy and Wagner remain possibilities for the vice-presidential nomination.

They Still Remember Al

Of course, in the turmoil into which the Democratic convention threatens to descend, all these early allegiances may be swept into the discard. The point is that, in its present mood, the Democratic party is ready to consider Kennedy and Wagner on their merits, without regard to religion.

Some Democratic leaders, although impressed with arguments that a Catholic on the ticket might win back votes lost to Eisenhower last time, aren't entirely convinced. They say that, in a year of obvious Eisenhower popularity and a probable Democratic split in the South, this is no time to take a chance. They hark back to the Al Smith debacle.

Those who urge nomination of a Catholic vice-presidential candidate retort that Al Smith, although he lost in four Southern states, gave the Democratic party a tremendous shot in the arm in the North.

In balance, those Northern Democratic leaders who oppose nomination of a Catholic on religious grounds alone are in a diminishing minority. And most leaders, whether or not they agree that a Catholic would add strength to the ticket, are inclined to believe that a Catholic would not be a drag on Democratic chances.

It may not happen this year, they say, but they are sure that it won't be long before the Democratic party nominates—and the country elects—a Catholic Vice-President. END