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The punctuation is better here. If you need it without the photos, let me know and I'll get rid of them

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Full Court Press

Media critic Charles Kaiser on CIA torture tapes and Mitt Romney's misplaced faith

By Charles Kaiser

Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?

A leading candidate for president makes one of the most offensive political speeches of modern times-and most of the nation shrugs.

Thursday night, ABC's *World News Tonight* did not even mention what made **Mitt Romney's** paeon to Christianity so disturbing. Morally bankrupt pundits like **Bill Bennett** and **Pat Buchanan** rushed to praise it, while **David Brooks**

[reported](#) that all the "serious religious thinkers" he had spoken to were "enthusiastic about the speech, some of them wildly so."



A MORMON AND A CATHOLIC WALK INTO AN ELECTION Romney defends his faith, à la John Kennedy in 1960

This was supposed to be Mitt Romney's version of **Jack Kennedy's** great speech about tolerance, delivered two months before Kennedy defeated **Richard Nixon** in 1960. The comparison between the two speeches is useful- but only as a measure of the collapse of public discourse in America in the years since Kennedy shattered an ancient glass ceiling of bigotry by becoming our first Catholic president.

This was a crucial passage of Kennedy's appeal to America's better self:

"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."

"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."

This was Kennedy at his very best-an ode to inclusiveness that explicitly included believers and nonbelievers alike. His speech was the prologue to a decades-long battle against all kinds of intolerance, hypocrisy, and exclusivity-a campaign that gradually transformed the way women and black people and gay people were treated in America.



CHANNELING NIXON? Romney

Compare Kennedy's words with the crucial lines from Romney's speech last week:

"Freedom requires religion just as religion requires freedom. Freedom opens the windows of the soul so that man can discover his most profound beliefs and commune with God. Freedom and religion endure together, or perish alone."

"In recent years, the notion of the separation of church and state has been

taken by some well beyond its original meaning. They seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgment of God. Religion is seen as merely a private affair with no place in public life. It is as if they are intent on establishing a new religion in America the religion of secularism. They are wrong."

"Any believer in religious freedom, any person who has knelt in prayer to the Almighty, has a friend and ally in me."

So, if you're God-fearing like me, fear not; if you're anything else, you're something less than a real American.



NOT A BELIEVER Maureen Dowd

[Maureen Dowd](#) grasped the essential differences between the two politicians: Romney "did not give a brave speech, but a pandering one. Disguised as a courageous, Kennedy-esque statement of principle, the talk was really just an attempt to compete with the evolution-disdaining, religion-baiting **Huckabee** and get Baptists to concede that Mormons are Christians." **Jon Krakauer** told Dowd: "JFK's speech was to reassure Americans that he wasn't a religious fanatic. Mitt's was to tell Evangelical Christians, 'I'm a religious fanatic just like you.'"

Richard Nixon is the cunning candidate Romney most resembles. Although he is dumber, richer, better looking, and possessed of many fewer core principles than his Quaker predecessor, Romney shares all of Nixon's inauthenticity. And here's the big advantage of not actually believing in *anything*: It frees Romney to pander to whomever he is speaking to at the moment. So it came as no surprise that *Newsweek* editor **Jon Meacham** was able to [extract](#) a modified limited retraction from Romney just hours after his speech was delivered.

Meacham told Romney that he was "struck that you did not explicitly extend the definition of religious liberty to those who believe nothing at all ..."

"I don't think I defined religious liberty," Romney replied. "I think it spoke for itself ... but of course it includes all, all forms of personal conviction."

"Or the lack thereof?"

"Yeah, the lack ... ," Romney paused. "But, well, the people who don't have a particular faith have a personal conviction. I said all forms of personal conviction. And personal conviction includes a sense of right and wrong and any host of beliefs someone might have. Obviously in this nation our religious liberty includes the ability to believe or not believe."

Meacham decided that "Romney's failure to make a noble public stand for the rights of atheists and skeptics is tactically understandable if intellectually disappointing." It fell to **Sally Quinn**-coincidentally the co-moderator with Meacham of a religious blog called [On Faith](#)-to explain to Meacham on the **Charlie Rose** show exactly why Romney's speech was so much worse than the way Meacham described it:

"I was absolutely stunned by how exclusive it was," said Quinn. "Certainly the line about you have a friend in me if you're on your knees praying was stunning. But the line that I was absolutely shocked by was when he said freedom requires religion just as religion required freedom. And then went on to say

freedom and religion endure together or perish alone. He was basically recommending a theocracy. He was excluding anybody who might be a doubter, an agnostic, an atheist, free thinker-even a seeker. It was as though he were saying if you believe in God then that's the American way. And it seems to me that it was exactly the opposite of the American way. Which is, we are all Americans, whether we are believers or not."

Amen.

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Charles Kaiser

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