

CATHOLICISM EMERGES AS ISSUE IN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

For the first time in over four decades, Catholicism has emerged as a factor in a presidential campaign. In 1960, Massachusetts Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy had to overcome Protestant critics who objected to having any Catholic in the White House. Now another Roman Catholic JFK from Massachusetts is the source of controversy, namely John Forbes Kerry. Only this time the critics are coming from his own camp—practicing Roman Catholics.

Kerry, the presumptive Democratic nominee for president in 2004, differs from Kennedy in a couple of ways. Though there is an Irish county by the name Kerry, there is nothing Irish about John Kerry. He is an Austrian whose paternal grandfather was a Czech Jew named Kohn. Before coming to the U.S., Kohn not only converted to Catholicism, he changed his name to Kerry. More important, the issues facing Kerry today are not the ones that Kennedy faced in 1960.

In 1960, abortion was illegal; the birth control pill had just been made commercially available; stem cell research wasn't an issue; euthanasia was taboo; the idea of school choice—in the form of tax relief for parents who sent their children to parochial schools—was opposed by Protestants; and gay unions were unimaginable. Now abortion is legal; birth control is widely used; embryonic stem cell research is an issue; support for euthanasia, in the form of doctor-assisted suicide, is a subject that lawmakers must address; evangelical Protestants are now pro-school choice; and homosexuals want to get married.

For Kerry, these new issues are a problem. His voting record on abortion is the most radical of any senator in the nation—he votes with NARAL, the most extreme pro-abortion

organization in the U.S.—100 percent of the time. He supports all methods of birth control; he votes in favor of embryonic stem cell research; he supports doctor-assisted suicide in some cases; he opposes school vouchers; and he not only advocates civil unions for gays, he is one of only 14 senators who voted against the Defense of Marriage Act.

In his new book, Kerry calls himself a “practicing and believing Catholic.” Yet in every instance mentioned above he is at odds with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Currently, the bishops are not in agreement about what should be done. So stay tuned. This is one issue that is not going to go away.