

# REFLECTIONS

## Ten commandments for campaigns

The 2016 election season began in March when Senator Ted Cruz, R-Texas, announced his candidacy for president of the United States at Liberty University's convocation in Lynchburg, Virginia.

The rollout was carefully orchestrated to appeal to conservative Christians: Liberty is the largest Christian university in the world, it's in a critical purple state — Virginia, and it guaranteed a large audience — convocations are mandatory at Liberty.

Much of the relatively short speech was biographical and testimonial. Religious themes were pervasive. Sen. Cruz mentioned God five times and Jesus Christ twice. This was not improper; candidates for office do not check their faith at the door when they run for or serve in public office. When properly done, candidates' talk about their faith can help us know who they are, learn what makes them tick and examine their moral core.

Some of what the senator said I agree with, such as his assertion that religious liberty comes from the hand of Almighty God, not the state. I disagree with other things that he put forth, like his applauding of vouchers for parochial schools and accusing the federal government of “wag[ing] an assault on our religious liberty.” But, Sen. Cruz has every right to disclose his Christian faith and discuss what his faith means to him in his speeches and public rhetoric.

That said, danger always lurks when we meld religion and politics. And, now is a propitious time to start thinking again about how we combine the two with subtlety and integrity while keeping an eye to the constitutional ban on religious tests for public office (Article VI, U.S. Constitution). Yes, that provision technically only bans legal religious qualifications for office imposed by government, but, as I have often argued, we should make every effort, as good citizens, to live up to the *spirit* as well as the letter of the religious test ban.

Although religion is at home in the American public square and is certainly relevant to the political conversation, it's wrong to impose a rigorous religious litmus test in how we conduct our politics and the way we decide whom to trust to lead our nation.

Several years ago my friend — and now Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom — Rabbi David Saperstein put forth “Ten Commandments for a Proper Relationship Between Religion & Politics.” We would do well

to heed this decalogue (slightly modified by me) over the upcoming 18 months:

### For candidates:

1. Thou shalt offer an explanation to the electorate about how your religious beliefs shape your views on the issues, but never justify policy only on religious beliefs.
2. Thou shalt discuss your views on policy and legal issues that directly affect religion and religious liberty.
3. Thou shalt feel free to use religious language to explain how your beliefs would affect your ability to perform in elected office.
4. Thou shalt feel free to discuss the role religion plays in shaping your values, character and worldview.
5. Thou shalt minimize the use of divisive and exclusive religious language.

### For political campaigns and parties:

6. Thou shalt not seek to organize partisan supporters in houses of worship, but should respect their sacred spaces.

### For religious groups and leaders:

7. Thou shalt not use religious authority, threats or discipline to coerce the political decisions of candidates and American citizens.

### For voters:

8. Thou shalt not base your votes on a candidate's religious beliefs or practices.
9. Thou shalt not blame candidates for isolated, out-of-context statements of their pastors and spiritual advisers.

### For everyone:

10. Thou shalt never, explicitly or implicitly, suggest that there is a religious test for holding office.

These are wise injunctions for all campaigns — the presidency and otherwise — for the 2016 elections to follow. They are good for us voters to heed, too. They will help us acknowledge the pertinence of religion to public life while affirming the prohibition on even *de facto* religious tests for public office.



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