



Kennedy and the Cuban Missile Crisis: The Power of Morality and Moral Perception

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Establishing Civil Religion: Kennedy's Inaugural Speech

- ▶ “Unwillingness to witness or permit... the undoing of human rights.”
- ▶ “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, [and] oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty.”
- ▶ This endeavor of the nation to work towards “a more fruitful life for mankind” through collective cooperation and sacrifice would not only “light the country and those who serve it... [but also] the glow from that fire [could] truly light the world.”
- ▶ “no promise from God that... [their] greatness will endure... [The nation has] been allowed by Him to seek greatness with the sweat of [their] hands and the strength of [their] spirit.”
- ▶ “here on earth God's work must truly be our own,”

The President Who Happened to be a Catholic-and its Implications

- ▶ “concerned not to let it appear his faith was determining his policies”
- ▶ Under great scrutiny as the first Catholic president
- ▶ This caused Jack to have a hyper-vigilance for religion, his own and others
- ▶ Emphasized the importance of the separation of church and state
- ▶ “no Catholic prelate would tell the president... how to act, and no protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote.”



Discovery of Offensive Weapons: Behind Closed Doors

- ▶ The first eight days, Executive Committee meets and debates
- ▶ Decision not to immediately tell Congress
- ▶ Soviets had consciously deceived them and built up armaments in hopes to bargain for Berlin and/or disgrace the US on a global stage
- ▶ Jack understands them to an extent due to Jupiter Missiles

A Call to Castro?

The note:

- ▶ States that "obviously" the weapon bases were for nuclear intention, and are "clearly" offensive in nature.
- ▶ connects the grave issues the US and Western Hemisphere faces with the grave issues Cuba faces with Soviet militarism
- ▶ Moral plea versus religious plea
- ▶ No reference to God or Catholicism
- ▶ Moral pragmatism

Who Are We, If Not Our Ideals?

- ▶ surprise air strike, an invasion, or a blockade?
- ▶ Pearl Harbor analogy against surprise attack helped sway the group toward seeking peaceful solutions before escalating to armed conflict.
- ▶ Dillon stated the US had "**fought World War Two for ideals and we should not change now.**"

Kennedy Reveals the Looming Crisis

- ▶ Unifying and uplifting civil religion
- ▶ Points out malpractices and deception of USSR
- ▶ quarantine as “most consistent with our character and courage as a nation and our commitments around the world. The cost of freedom is always high-and Americans have always paid it. And one path we will never choose... [is the] path of surrender and submission.”

Kennedy Reveals the Looming Crisis Cont.

Cuba:

- ▶ mutual "aspiration for liberty and justice for all"
- ▶ free: from foreign domination, to choose own leaders, to own their own land, to speak and write and worship without fear and degradation
- ▶ "greatest danger of all would be to do nothing"
- ▶ **"goal is not victory of might but vindication of right"**

Public Reaction and the Impact of Civil Religion

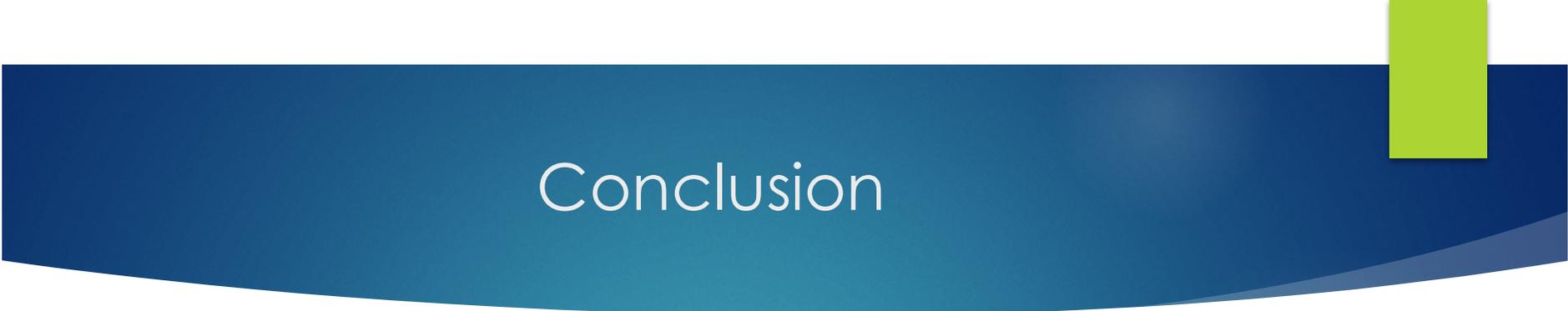
NYT Letters to the Editor

- ▶ Some angry, some terrified
- ▶ "speech to the nation has deserved and received bipartisan approval of a united country."
- ▶ nation's precedent of having military bases across the world in times of peace, whereas this was never a strategy for the USSR, therefore aggressive
- ▶ the government's actions should be "applauded [because] for the first time in many years... [the US] enunciated a clear warning to the Soviet Union of... [the nation's] intentions rather than our capability."

Ending the Crisis: A Perceptive Ploy

Irreligiosity of the USSR did not mean that JFK did not incorporate morality, and Soviet perception of US officials' morality when dealing with them

- ▶ Russian diplomat Dobrynin completely misunderstood US military zeal.
- ▶ RFK meets with Dobrynin privately, lies that JFK is unaware
- ▶ Dobrynin reported back to USSR that the “Kennedy brothers were personally affronted” and determined to confront soviet ships



Conclusion

- ▶ The contemplation of a moral call to Castro shows the role morality played according to Kennedy.
- ▶ The moral debates of a surprise attack were incredibly potent in Ex Comm.
- ▶ When Kennedy revealed the crisis to the public, he was able to formulate his civil religion in an empowering and unifying way, thus ensuring majority support from the country.
- ▶ If it weren't for his ability to perceive Soviet perception and use it to the advantage of the US by sending his brother, the situation could have been greatly exacerbated instead of rectified.
- ▶ **Kennedy's construction, implementation, and perception of morality proved imperative in ensuring American victory in the Crisis.**