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## Political Reason

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## POLITICAL REASON

LESLIE GRIFFIN\*

Illinois Senator and presidential candidate Barack Obama describes his religious upbringing and his vision of the proper relationship between religion and politics in his campaign book, *The Audacity of Hope*. Obama was not raised in a religious family; he describes his skeptical mother and his Muslim-turned-atheist father.<sup>1</sup> It was as an adult that Obama was drawn to the African American religious tradition and was baptized into the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago.

Obama expresses frustration with the comments about his faith made by his Republican opponent, Alan Keyes, during their Senate campaign. According to Keyes, for example, “Christ would not vote for Barack Obama . . . because Barack Obama has voted to behave in a way that it is inconceivable for Christ to have behaved.”<sup>2</sup> “Mr. Obama says he’s a Christian . . . and yet he supports a [homosexual] lifestyle that the Bible calls an abomination . . . he supports the destruction of innocent and sacred life.”<sup>3</sup>

Obama struggled with the appropriate response to such comments. “What could I say? That a literal reading of the Bible was folly? That Mr. Keyes, a Roman Catholic, should disregard the Pope’s teachings? Unwilling to go there, I answered with the usual liberal response in such debates—that we live in a pluralistic society, that I can’t impose my religious views on another, that I was running to be a U.S. senator from Illinois and not the minister of Illinois. But even as I answered, I was mindful of Mr. Keyes’s implicit accusation—that I remained

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<sup>1</sup> BARACK OBAMA, *THE AUDACITY OF HOPE: THOUGHTS ON RECLAIMING THE AMERICAN DREAM* 203-04 (Crown Publishers 2006).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 209.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 212.

steeped in doubt, that my faith was adulterated, that I was not a true Christian.”<sup>4</sup>

Now, as a presidential candidate, Obama criticizes the liberal “strategies of avoidance” that led earlier candidates (for example, President John F. Kennedy) to avoid the conversation about religion on separationist grounds, or to dismiss religion as irrational and therefore not an appropriate subject of political discourse. The Senator criticizes secularists who ask believers “to leave religion at the door”; not only is this unfair to believers, it is also bad politics. The strategies of avoidance have kept progressives from discussing issues in moral terms and led them to “forfeit [the] imagery and terminology” of Abraham Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s I Have a Dream speech. Nonprogressive candidates have stepped into the moral vacuum left by the secularists and kept progressive candidates from governance.

Although Senator Obama wants some religion in public life, he does not advocate an unlimited role for it. In the most succinct summary of his position, he writes:

What our deliberative, pluralistic democracy does demand is that the religiously motivated translate their concerns into universal, rather than religion-specific, values. It requires that their proposals must be subject to argument and amenable to reason. If I am opposed to abortion for religious reasons and seek to pass a law banning the practice, I cannot simply point to the teachings of my church or invoke God’s will and expect that argument to carry the day. If I want others to listen to me, then I have to explain why abortion violates some principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all.<sup>5</sup>

The Senator acknowledges that some religious groups will always oppose translation, viewing it as a capitulation to secularism. Nonetheless, he insists that “in a pluralistic democracy, we have no choice” but to use reason, not faith, as the form of argumentation, because politics, the realm of compromise, must be based on common values.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 219.

Obama's proposal appears to be consistent with the ideals of many liberal theorists who have argued that appeals to religion in politics should be "publicly accessible" or "publicly justifiable," stated in terms of "public reason" or "secular reason," in the language of universal values instead of sectarian beliefs.<sup>6</sup>

In later pages, however, *The Audacity of Hope* demonstrates the difficulty of the translation enterprise, even for liberal candidates. After the Senator expressed his disapproval of gay marriage, for example, a lesbian supporter called to explain her disappointment that he had referred to his religious beliefs in order to explain his opposition to gay marriage but not civil unions. The woman's comment oddly led Obama to reflect more deeply, not on common values, but about his Christian faith. He speculated that his interpretation of the Bible could be wrong, "that Jesus' call to love one another might demand a different conclusion," that good Christians were allowed to be uncertain about their tradition's teaching on gay marriage, but that he remained opposed to it.<sup>7</sup> Thus, when pressed on a hard question, the Senator did not immediately "translate his concern into universal, rather than religion-specific, values," nor did he invoke some "principle that is accessible to people of all faiths, including those with no faith at all." He turned for insight to the teaching of his own faith about a contested moral and legal question.

Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee also opposes gay marriage. As governor of Arkansas, he signed legislation outlawing same-sex marriage; he also supports a federal constitutional ban on the practice. Before entering politics, Huckabee attended Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, and worked as a Baptist minister in numerous congregations. He was the youngest President of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention, which he led from 1989-

<sup>6</sup> See generally JOHN RAWLS, *POLITICAL LIBERALISM* (Columbia University Press 1993); ROBERT AUDI, *RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND SECULAR REASON* (Cambridge University Press 2000); KENT GREENAWALT, *PRIVATE CONSCIENCES AND PUBLIC REASONS* (Oxford University Press 1995); KENT GREENAWALT, *RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS AND POLITICAL CHOICE* (Oxford University Press 1988); MICHAEL J. PERRY, *LOVE AND POWER: THE ROLE OF RELIGION AND MORALITY IN AMERICAN POLITICS* (Oxford University Press 1991); CHRISTOPHER J. EBERLE, *RELIGIOUS CONVICTION IN LIBERAL POLITICS* (Cambridge University Press 2002) (providing a summary and critique of these positions).

<sup>7</sup> OBAMA, *supra* note 1, at 222-24.

1991.<sup>8</sup> According to Huckabee, “I didn’t get into politics because I thought government had a better answer. I got into politics because I knew government didn’t have the real answers, that the real answers lie in accepting Jesus Christ into our lives.”<sup>9</sup> The Governor believes that if politicians’ faith is authentic, they will rely upon it in making their political and policy choices. On Meet the Press, Huckabee told host Tim Russert: “I’m appalled, Tim, when someone says, ‘Tell me about your faith,’ and they say, ‘Oh, my faith doesn’t influence my public policy.’ Because when someone says that, it’s as if they’re saying, ‘My faith isn’t significant, it’s not authentic, it’s not so consequential that it affects me.’ Well, truthfully my faith does affect me.”<sup>10</sup> It is because of his faith, for example, that the Governor is broadly pro-life, not only opposing abortion but also supporting medical insurance, good schools, safe neighborhoods and affordable housing. Responsibility toward the environment, he believes, arises from respect for the world created by God.<sup>11</sup>

The following extended quotation from Governor Huckabee’s address to the Conservative Political Action Conference illustrates both the candidate’s theoretical understanding of the relationship between religion and politics, and his stance on gay marriage. Unlike Senator Obama, the Governor sees no need to translate his biblical values into universal language; he believes that his biblical values are already consistent with the text of the U.S. Constitution:

And, frankly, I’m a little troubled when I hear people say, “Well, I hate abortion, but I don’t believe that we ought to regulate it.” Or here’s one I hear quite a bit—when people say, “I hate abortion, but I support the right for people to go ahead and do it.”

Let me just tell you, it would be like a Hindu friend of mine saying that, “I really don’t care for the slaughter of beef, but I’m going to buy a steak house.” Now, something is just irreconcilable in that very concept.

<sup>8</sup> See generally Michael Scherer, *Can Mike Huckabee Out-charm the GOP Big Three?* (Mar. 5, 2007), <http://www.salon.com/news/feature/2007/03/05/huckabee/print.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Ark., on Meet the Press, MSNBC, (Jan. 28, 2007), available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16785556/>.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> *Id.*

It's wrong for us to say that somehow we can tinker with that definition, just as I would believe that it is inconsistent with the conservative movement to somehow believe that we can redefine marriage to mean anything other than what it has always meant for all of the over 5,000 years of recorded human history. And until Moses himself comes down with two tablets of stone postmarked Brokeback Mountain telling us the rules have changed, marriage ought to mean what it always has meant, nothing else and nothing but.

I hear people say that, "Well, we shouldn't redefine it in a federal marriage amendment, because we shouldn't tinker with something so sacred as the Constitution."

My dear friend, let me remind you, our Constitution—the genius of it is that it can be amended. And that's why we have a First and Second and a Third and a Fourth and all the other amendments which have helped to redefine and maybe clarify those basic rights in the Constitution.

Here's what I don't understand. For those who say we shouldn't amend the Constitution, they seem to be more than willing to amend the Holy Bible, the Koran, as well as the Talmud. I'm not sure why we would take a sacred Biblical text and amend it and not be willing to amend the Constitution to be consistent with the very texts upon which that Constitution was based.<sup>12</sup>

What shall we make of the disagreement between the two candidates' approach to religion and politics, yet their agreement on gay marriage? There are several possible interpretations:

First, Obama's response reminds us that it can be difficult to meet the liberal standard. Are individuals capable of separating their religious beliefs from their political commitments? Does the translation model violate the candidate's integrity by asking him to divide his deepest commitments from his political life? Or does the Senator just need to work harder at translating his religious convictions into public reason?<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Mike Huckabee, former Governor of Ark., Address at the Conservative Political Action Conference (Mar. 2, 2007) (transcript available at [http://www.conservative.org/pressroom/2007/speech\\_huckabee.asp](http://www.conservative.org/pressroom/2007/speech_huckabee.asp)).

<sup>13</sup> See RAWLS, *supra* note 6; PERRY, *supra* note 6.

Second, the turn to faith on the subject of gay marriage implies that religion is a valuable source of insight for contested political questions. Both men's responses suggest that religious people may justifiably rely on religious belief to form and express their political opinions when a persuasive public argument is unavailable.<sup>14</sup>

Third, Obama is shrewd to speak about his faith because it will appeal to voters; Democrats have lost too many elections by avoiding the language of moral values. Huckabee is smart to appeal to the Republican evangelical base through reference to the Bible. Appealing to religion is the best way to win office in the United States in 2008. Indeed, there is some evidence that the Democrats won control of Congress in 2006 because their candidates employed the language of faith. Professor John Green observed that there was a "revival" of the religious left in 2006 for two reasons. Democratic politicians picked up some votes by appealing more openly to their religious faith,<sup>15</sup> and two types of liberal voters became more active in politics: "People who use a very liberal theology politically, and others who are conservative or traditional in their religious beliefs but choose to emphasize progressive issues such as the economy or the environment."<sup>16</sup>

Fourth, the responses demonstrate the futility or dishonesty of the translation enterprise. If both men oppose gay marriage because it violates Christian or biblical principles, what is gained by asking politicians to translate their convictions into public arguments? Why should Huckabee translate his religious beliefs into non-Christian words if the source of his argument is the Bible? If he has decided to govern according to religious principles, should we praise him if he never mentions them but instead devises a method to state his biblical principles in secular language? If Obama eventually changes his theology of gay marriage, as he suggests above is possible, and finds that his new position is easier to translate into secular language, are not

<sup>14</sup> See EBERLE, *supra* note 6.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with John Green, of the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, on The Roundtable on Religion & Social Welfare Policy (Nov. 14, 2006), available at <http://www.religionandsocialpolicy.org/interviews/interview.cfm?id=131&pageMode=general>; see RAY SUAREZ, THE HOLY VOTE: THE POLITICS OF FAITH IN AMERICA (Rayo 2006) (noting the success of Tim Kaine in the Virginia governor's race because he explained his faith).

<sup>16</sup> Green, *supra* note 15.

citizens still governed by Christian faith instead of political principle?

Fifth, and my own position, both men have violated the standard of political reason. Despite their other political differences (Obama supports civil unions for gays but Huckabee does not) and their dissimilar interpretations of the translation requirement, both men are faith-based politicians. Obama wonders how to prove he has faith when candidates like Keyes attack him, and how to attract a faith-based vote. Huckabee questions whether candidates who pledge to put their faith aside really have authentic belief. Perhaps these concerns about faith confirm the observation of another Republican presidential candidate, former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney, who has stated that “the American people want to see a person of faith lead the nation, and I don’t think the American people care very deeply about which brand of faith that is.”<sup>17</sup>

Romney’s brand of faith is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This Mormon’s candidacy has raised the question whether voters, especially Evangelical Christians, will support a candidate of an unfamiliar, minority religion that some Christians view as a cult.<sup>18</sup> In response to frequent questions about the relevance of Mormonism to his presidency, Romney has replied that “it is not his job as a presidential candidate to educate people about his church. ‘I’m running for a secular position,’ he said in an interview. ‘I subscribe to what Abraham Lincoln called America’s political religion. The Constitution and the rule of law are the highest promises I would make in taking the oath of office.’”<sup>19</sup> Romney argues that the Roman Catholic John F. Kennedy was elected president, and the Mormon Romney was elected governor of Massachusetts, “one of the most Catholic states in America,” because “American voters care more about values than individual theologies.” “‘They get to know candidates. They learn about their positions,’ he said. ‘And they see whether they have the same values or not. And that sweeps away questions about someone’s particular religion.’ Voting

<sup>17</sup> Robert B. Bluey, *Q&A: Mitt Romney Discusses Iraq War, Reagan’s Influence and Gay Marriage* (Jan. 1, 2007), <http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=18683>.

<sup>18</sup> See Huckabee, *supra* note 9.

<sup>19</sup> Jill Lawrence, *Will Mormon faith hurt bid for White House?*, USA TODAY, Feb. 13, 2007, at 1A, available at [http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-02-12-romney-cover\\_x.htm?csp=34](http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/2007-02-12-romney-cover_x.htm?csp=34).

strictly on religious grounds, he said, is not 'the American way.'"<sup>20</sup>

But what are these values by which Romney would govern? In another interview, the Governor identified a similarity between Mormon and American values:

There's not very much that's well known about my church because it's not broadly based throughout the nation with large numbers of people who are adherents. When anything is unknown, people are going to be a little skeptical. But I think, again, as individuals look at my life and my family's life, they'll recognize that my values are quintessential American values; that my religious beliefs are consistent with the religious beliefs of other Judeo-Christian faiths, such as a belief in the divinity of God and the need to provide service to others, the preeminence of the family unit. These types of elements are what America looks for in a leader.<sup>21</sup>

Romney's comments suggest two approaches to relating faith to public policy; his presidential campaign may clarify which one he supports. First, a Mormon president is acceptable because Mormonism shares common elements with other religious traditions; or second, Romney will govern according to quintessential American values that are not based on his or any other religious tradition. If the former interpretation is correct, then he is also a faith-based politician who begins with his religious values and then applies or translates them to public policy. Presumably some days he would sound like Huckabee and talk about religious values, and other days he might translate his Mormon beliefs in Obama's style.

If Romney follows the latter position, i.e., promising to govern according to a "political religion," then Romney is a better representative of the liberal tradition than Obama. If one holds the three candidates to the standard of the preeminent advocate of liberal politics, the late philosopher John Rawls, then Romney appears closest to the Rawlsian standard of public reason. According to Rawls, "Our exercise of political power is proper

<sup>20</sup> Globe Staff, *In Interview, Romney Aligns with Christian Right*, THE BOSTON GLOBE, Mar. 17, 2006, at B4, available at [http://www.boston.com/news/politics/governors/articles/2006/03/17/in\\_interview\\_romney\\_aligns\\_with\\_christian\\_right/](http://www.boston.com/news/politics/governors/articles/2006/03/17/in_interview_romney_aligns_with_christian_right/).

<sup>21</sup> Bluey, *supra* note 17.

only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions—were we to state them as government officials—are sufficient, and we also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons.”<sup>22</sup> Citizens should not reasonably expect to be governed by religious beliefs that they do not share. According to Rawls, “For example—I cite an easy case—if we argue that the religious liberty of some citizens is to be denied, we must give them reasons they can not only understand—as Servetus could understand why Calvin wanted to burn him at the stake—but reasons we might reasonably expect that they, as free and equal citizens, might reasonably also accept. . . . those who believe that fundamental political questions should be decided by what they regard as the best reasons according to their own idea of the whole truth—including their religious or secular comprehensive doctrine—and not by reasons that might be shared by all citizens as free and equal, will of course reject the idea of public reason. Political liberalism views this insistence on the whole truth in politics as incompatible with democratic citizenship and the idea of legitimate law.”<sup>23</sup>

Most Americans can *understand* why a faithful Mormon might want all Americans to be governed by his faith, but should not reasonably *expect* to be governed by Mormon theology. What should a Mormon candidate do? Under the Huckabee model, he should speak openly of his faith and appeal to voters on that ground. Romney, however, has said that he does not plan to debate the intricacies of Mormon theology with the public. The Mormon situation explains part of the appeal of traditional liberalism; it frees politics from extended theological debates about which faith is best suited to govern. In a debate set on religious terms, Romney would be repeatedly subjected to questions about the tenets of Mormonism, while Huckabee could preach a more mainstream faith. Romney would be forced (as he already has been) to defend the mainstream nature of his religion against charges that it is a cult or simply has odd beliefs. More importantly, in a campaign based on religious arguments, it is likely that majority religions will gain the most votes. A

<sup>22</sup> John Rawls, *The Idea of Public Reason Revisited*, 64 U. CHI. L. REV. 765, 771 (1997).

<sup>23</sup> *Id.*

competition based on political arguments gives all religions a chance, as minority religionists John Kennedy and Mitt Romney may have realized when they preached a political religion instead of a politics of religion.

Obama's translation model does not solve the problem; it merely hides it, leaving politicians to govern according to religious beliefs as long as they discover a secular rationale (or any reason?) for governmental action. For this reason, in Rawls's work, the key words are "public reason," not secular reason, and "public reason" is best interpreted as political.<sup>24</sup> The goal is not for the Mormon, or Baptist, or Church of Christ candidate to figure a secular way to lead others to his faith. This approach to politics undermines political stability and demonstrates disrespect for one's fellow citizens. Instead, politicians should employ political reason as the starting point for their decision-making on matters of law and politics.

Why would even liberal Democratic candidates reject a liberal theory of political reason? One reason for religion's resurgence in American politics has been the fear that religion-free or secular politics is value-free, and therefore bad for the body politic. That fear ignores the reality that the U.S. Constitution contains common values shared by the electorate. The Constitution provides standards of equal protection, due process, and religious liberty, *inter alia*, which shed light on gay marriage and other political questions. *Translating* religious values into secular or political language misses the point. The liberal point is that the discussion should begin with political and legal principles. That is not to say that constitutional or political principles provide easy or determinate solutions in every situation. They should,

<sup>24</sup> See Rawls, *supra* note 22, at 775-78.

We must distinguish public reason from what is sometimes referred to as secular reason and secular values. These are not the same as public reason. For I define secular reason as reasoning in terms of comprehensive nonreligious doctrines. Such doctrines and values are much too broad to serve the purposes of public reason. Political values are not moral doctrines, however available or accessible these may be to our reason and common sense reflection. Moral doctrines are on a level with religion and first philosophy.

*Id.* at 777-778.

What we cannot do in public reason is to proceed directly from our comprehensive doctrine, or a part thereof, to one or several political principles and values, and the particular institutions they support. Instead, we are required first to work to the basic ideas of a complete political conception and from there to elaborate its principles and ideals, and to use the arguments they provide. Otherwise public reason allows arguments that are too immediate and fragmentary.

however, provide the premises of the argument from which the debate begins. The first question about gay marriage is not what the Bible, a church, or moral philosophy says about its morality but what the Constitution's standards suggest is the appropriate role of morality in determining its legality.<sup>25</sup>

Like other Democrats, Obama now speaks more openly of his faith because he wants to win more votes. There is some evidence that this will be a successful strategy for his party.<sup>26</sup> But liberalism or political religion does not yet have to concede its political ineffectiveness or unpopularity. Sociological studies demonstrate that how politicians frame issues is significant in attracting voters. Framing identifies what an issue is *about*. Is abortion, for example, *about* fetal life, or a woman's choice, or humanitarian medical care?<sup>27</sup> Is gay marriage *about* protecting traditional marriage, or equality, or non-discrimination?<sup>28</sup> Is religious participation in politics *about* giving religious people an equal voice in political life or *about* imposing religious values on non-believers? On that last question, Senator Obama campaigns in a political environment in which the dominant recent frame has been the perception that political reason and liberalism unfairly exclude religious voices from the public square.<sup>29</sup>

There are two types of frames, according to Professor Gene Burns's recent study of the development of contraception and abortion law; he labels them "moral worldviews" and "limiting frames."<sup>30</sup> Moral worldviews, as the name suggests, are broad perspectives that "encompass many morally charged issues

<sup>25</sup> For examples of politicians stumbling over the morality of public policy issues, see Glenn Thrush, *Clinton, Obama: Gays Not Immoral*, NEWSDAY, Mar. 15, 2007, <http://www.newsday.com/news/nationworld/nation/ny-ushill0316.0.7484037.story> (Clinton and Obama respond to Gen. Peter Pace's statement that homosexuality is immoral).

<sup>26</sup> See Green, *supra* note 15 (noting that Democrats who spoke religiously in the 2006 election won, but also that voters picked a selection of values, some moving to Democrats because of their opposition to the war).

<sup>27</sup> For the framing discussion, I rely on the excellent book GENE BURNS, *THE MORAL VETO: FRAMING CONTRACEPTION, ABORTION, AND CULTURAL PLURALISM IN THE UNITED STATES* (Cambridge University Press 2005).

<sup>28</sup> See Clyde Wilcox, Linda M. Merolla & David Beer, *Saving Marriage by Banning Marriage: The Christian Right Finds a New Issue in 2004*, in John Clifford Green, Mark J. Rozell & Clyde Wilcox, *The Values Campaign?: The Christian Right and the 2004 Elections*, 60 (Georgetown University Press 2006).

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., the success of STEPHEN L. CARTER, *THE CULTURE OF DISBELIEF* (Basic Publishing 1993).

<sup>30</sup> BURNS, *supra* note 27.

simultaneously.”<sup>31</sup> Limiting frames are much more narrow or focused, allowing individuals to agree on the specific topic while disagreeing on broad moral questions. Socialism and feminism, for example, were broad moral worldviews that supported access to contraception as part of an ambitious campaign of social change; groups that focused on access to contraception *only* had a more limiting frame. Burns’ thesis is that limiting frames are more successful than moral worldviews in implementing change:

What type of frames, then, allow societies to address moral disputes without fighting their moral battles to the death? In short, the answer is that the rhetoric of debate must isolate issues so that larger social and moral implications of concern to participants in the polity at large are minimally specified (whether those implications are real or imagined). Essentially, then, the more reduced and simplified discussion of an issue is—so that it is stripped even of the many specific moral implications that most people would, in other circumstances, attach to the issue—the more likely that groups with differing opinions can live with each other.<sup>32</sup>

A limiting frame is narrow enough that citizens can support it without committing to a broad moral perspective or changing their whole moral worldview; “limiting frames are essential in the institutionalization of pluralism, precisely because they can allow people to avoid commitments to entire worldviews.”<sup>33</sup> In contrast, broad moral causes succeed only when people “perceive the movement’s goal to be redress of a specific moral wrong, rather than implying an entire moral worldview,” as occurred, according to Burns, when the Civil Rights Movement persuaded citizens that discrimination and segregation were serious moral wrongs that required redress.<sup>34</sup>

Framing mattered to the development of contraception and abortion law, according to Professor Burns, and it also explains why the Christian Right, with its broad moral worldview, was never able to implement its entire policy agenda. Framing is also

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* at 16.

<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 284.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 14.

relevant to our discussion of the specific topic of gay marriage and our broader question of the relationships between religion and politics.

Scholars who studied the statistical results of the 2004 election concluded that after court decisions favoring gay marriage were issued (including one in Mitt Romney's home state of Massachusetts<sup>35</sup>), the gay rights groups were unprepared to frame the question of gay marriage, and so it fell to the Christian Right to advocate the *protecting marriage* frame. That strategy worked, at least in the short term, and "[i]n the absence of an alternate frame—for example, a focus on equality."<sup>36</sup> Over the long term, the authors question whether Americans "may find the argument that the institution of marriage is endangered by allowing other Americans to marry . . . less compelling."<sup>37</sup>

In this context, *translation* of religious values misses the point, and may be unsuccessful, as it is still governance based on a broad religious and moral worldview rather than political decision-making on a specific and limited topic. Beginning with one's Baptist, Church of Christ, or Mormon perspective may lead one late, or never, to a conclusion that gay marriage is about equality or non-discrimination, while from the Fourteenth Amendment starting point equal protection offers a more limiting frame.

On the subject of religion and politics, Obama should consider adopting Romney's frame of political religion. On Romney's side are the arguments that political reason protects minority religions from being subjected to the religious principles of the majority, frees the political marketplace of ideas from extensive theological debate, and respects the principle of reciprocity by asking citizens to be governed only by those ideals "which they can reasonably be expected to endorse."<sup>38</sup> Those are "very great values" protected by the liberal tradition.<sup>39</sup> Then citizens could hear a debate between the Illinois Senator and the former Governor of Massachusetts whether the Massachusetts gay marriage case, which was decided while Romney was governor,

<sup>35</sup> See *Goodridge v. Dep't of Pub. Health*, 798 N.E.2d 941 (Mass. App. Ct. 2003).

<sup>36</sup> Wilcox, Merolla & Beer, *supra* note 28, at 60.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.*

<sup>38</sup> Rawls, *supra* note 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.*

was properly decided on equal protection grounds with no need to translate the theological tenets of the United Church of Christ, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> See Goodridge, 798 N.E.2d 941.