

# Alfred Smith was first

Patricia Zapor's CNS article (CR, Dec. 13) about Mitt Romney's speech on religion and public life at the GHW Bush Library in College Station, Texas, contains a glaring omission.

Ms. Zapor paraphrases Richard Ostling, identified as a former AP and Time magazine correspondent, as saying that "like Kennedy, Romney is the first member of his church to have a viable shot as his party's Presidential nomination."

Let's look at the record. John Kennedy was not the first Roman Catholic to seek the Presidency as the nominee of a major party, viable or otherwise. New York's Alfred E. Smith holds that distinction, having been nominated by the Democrat party in 1928. In fact, Mr. Smith's name was first placed in nomination as early as 1920, albeit as an honor.

In 1924, Mr. Smith and William McAdoo battled 103 ballots at the Democratic convention in Madison Square Garden before a compromise candidate was settled upon. In 1928, Mr. Smith was selected on the first ballot, losing to Herbert Hoover in November of that year. Mr. Smith's chances were slimmer in 1932, but he and his backers mounted a serious challenge to the nomination of Franklin Delano Roosevelt in Chicago.

Mr. Smith's opposition to Prohibition, his New York accent and the "Republican" prosperity of the mid to late 1920's all were factors contributing to his defeat in 1928.

The primary and most fierce opposition to Mr. Smith's candidacy, however were those who believed that a Roman Catholic was unfit for the presidency. If Mitt Romney "channeled" JFK's speech in 1960 to the Greater Houston Ministerial Alliance, then President Kennedy was standing on the shoulders of Al Smith's defense of his candidacy and his faith both in print (Atlantic Monthly, 1927) and on the campaign stump (Oklahoma, 1928).