



# What They Wished For: American Catholics and American Presidents, 1960-2004

*Lawrence J. McAndrews*

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As a religious bloc, Roman Catholics constitute the most populous religious denomination in the United States, comprising one in four Americans. With the election of John F. Kennedy as president in 1960, they attained a political prominence to match their rapidly ascending socioeconomic and cultural profile. From Vietnam to Iraq, the civil rights movement to federal funding for faith-based initiatives, and from birth control to abortion, American Catholics have won at least as often as they have lost. *What They Wished For* by Lawrence J. McAndrews traces the role of American Catholics in presidential policies and politics from 1960 until 2004.

Though divided by race, class, gender, and party, Catholics have influenced issues of war and peace, social justice, and life and death among modern presidents in a profound way, starting with the election of President Kennedy and expanding their influence through the intervening years with subsequent presidents. McAndrews shows that American Catholics, led by their bishops and in some cases their pope, have been remarkably successful in shaping the political dialogue and at helping to effect policy outcomes inside and outside of Washington. Indeed, although they opened this era by helping to elect one of their own, Catholic voters have gained so much influence and have become so secure in their socioeconomic status—and so confident in their political standing—that they closed the era by rejecting one of their own, voting for George W. Bush over John Kerry in 2004.

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