

Obama, Romney quizzed on religious perspectives

by [Daniel Burke](#) in the [September 19, 2012](#) issue

President Obama says it's not his job to defend his Christian faith against doubters who suspect he's Muslim. His GOP challenger, Mitt Romney, says religion is "integral" to his life, but he often avoids mentioning his Mormon faith by name.

Religion has been a tricky political issue thus far for both men. A recent Pew Research Center poll found that only 49 percent of Americans can correctly identify Obama as a Christian. More Americans know that Romney is Mormon, but a significant minority (30 percent) do not believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is Christian.

In interviews published August 21 by *Cathedral Age*, the magazine of the Washington National Cathedral, the candidates responded in writing to nine questions about their faith.

Asked about people who question the sincerity of his faith, Obama responded: "You know, there's not much I can do about it. I have a job to do as president, and that does not involve convincing folks that my faith in Jesus is legitimate and real."

Answering the same question, Romney said: "I am often asked about my faith and my beliefs about Jesus Christ. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of mankind. Every religion has its own unique doctrines and history. These should not be bases for criticism but rather a test of our tolerance."

Both men said that political candidates should be judged by their works, not their faith. "A political leader's faith can tell us a great deal or nothing," Romney said. "So much depends on what lies behind that faith. And so much depends on deeds, not words."

Both men also said that religion is central to their lives. "My Christian faith gives me a perspective and security that I don't think I would have otherwise: that I am loved. That, at the end of the day, God is in control," Obama said. Romney said that "faith

is integral to my life. I have served as a lay pastor in my church. I faithfully follow its precepts.”

The men differed slightly on the role of faith in public life. Obama highlighted religion’s contributions to the suffrage, abolition and civil rights movements. He also said that faith provides a “moral framework and vocabulary” for the country in times of crisis.

Romney said the country should “acknowledge the Creator, as did the Founders—in ceremony and word.” Declaring that God should continue to be acknowledged on U.S. currency and in the Pledge of Allegiance and history lessons, as well as in nativity scenes and menorahs in public places, he added: “In recent years, the notion of the separation of church and state has been taken by some well beyond its original meaning.” —RNS