

Kerry cites faith, 'family values' The convention speech: The convention speech

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Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry of Massachusetts capped a political convention that saw Democrats emphasizing faith and moral language. “In this campaign, we welcome people of faith,” Senator Kerry told a cheering crowd of about 20,000 delegates, guests and journalists in his acceptance speech at the late July convention in Boston. But alluding to President Bush’s regular use of religious phrases, Kerry said what may have also appealed to Democrats: “I don’t wear my religion on my sleeve.”

Yet, continued the lifelong Catholic, “Faith has given me values and hope to live by, from Vietnam to this day, from Sunday to Sunday. I don’t want to claim that God is on our side. As Abraham Lincoln told us, I want to pray humbly that we are on God’s side.”

The speech came July 29 at the close of a convention in which religious imagery enjoyed a level of prominence unusual for Democrats in recent years. The associated events included the first-ever meetings of two groups—one of liberal religious leaders and another of young Democrats—designed to help Democrats convey the spiritual motivations for their policies.

In introducing Kerry, former Georgia Senator Max Cleland—like Kerry a Vietnam veteran—quoted Jesus to describe Kerry’s war service as a navy boat captain. “The Bible tells me that no greater love has a man than to lay down his life for his friends,” Cleland said. “John Kerry’s fellow crewmates that I’m honored to share the stage with tonight are living testimony to his leadership, his courage under fire, and his willingness to risk his life for his fellow Americans.”

Kerry also attacked what Democrats throughout the week described as the Republican Party’s attempt to focus all moral discussion in politics on abortion and

human sexuality. "For four years, we've heard a lot of talk about values," Kerry said. "But values spoken without actions taken are just slogans. Values are not just words. . . . And it is time for those who talk about family values to start valuing families.

"You don't value families by kicking kids out of after-school programs and taking cops off our streets so that Enron can get another tax break," Kerry said, beginning a litany of critiques of Bush's economic, educational and social policies.

However, other speakers spoke in favor of positions criticized by religious conservatives. Several opposed a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage and others argued for abortion rights. A featured speech by Ron Reagan, son of the late president, urged support for embryonic stem cell research, which many conservatives oppose as immoral.

In his nominating speech, Kerry spoke as if addressing his opponent: "Let's build unity in the American family, not angry division. Let's honor this nation's diversity. Let's respect one another. And let's never misuse for political purposes the most precious document in American history, the Constitution of the United States."

Bush supporters attacked Kerry's speech, including his comments about values. "On the cultural side he says he's for traditional American values," said Senator Rick Santorum (R., Pa.) in a July 30 conference call with reporters. "He doesn't support the Defense of Marriage Act, which passed with 80-plus percent of the vote," Santorum said. "And now he says he's for what the Defense of Marriage Act would have in fact accomplished. The list goes on and on and on."

Some speakers referred obliquely to the marriage debate. For example, former primary contender Al Sharpton said: "The promise of America is that government does not seek to regulate your behavior in the bedroom, but guarantee food in the kitchen." *-Robert Marus, Associated Baptist Press*