

AN UNSEEMLY MIX OF POLITICS AND RELIGION

The 2000 elections will be remembered for lots of things, few of them honorable. Among the long list of dishonorable things, count the unseemly mix of politics and religion that colored so many of the races. To be specific, the extent to which candidates carried their campaigns into houses of worship was appalling.

Though Republicans and Democrats were both guilty of stumping in churches and synagogues, there is little doubt that the most egregious abuses took place by Democrats in African American Protestant churches. Indeed, it sometimes looked like we had two constitutions—one for black Protestants and one for the rest of the nation. That, in fact, is the way Jesse Jackson, Jr., congressman from Illinois, put it.

When asked about the phenomenon of candidates campaigning in black churches, Jackson said, “Certainly there’s a separation of church and state. But in our community there’s little distinction between our religion and our politics...And so in many African-American churches born out of experience in this country, the role of the churches has evolved into a very, very active political institution which has been very effective for a number of causes in the black community.”

The clincher was Jackson’s answer to the question, “And that supersedes the law?” To which the congressman replied, “Absolutely. Oh, absolutely.” Translated this means that because of the historical nexus between churches and political activism in the African American community, it is okay for blacks to ignore the First Amendment.

The Sunday before the election, Hillary Rodham Clinton campaigned in eight African American churches. In every case,

she was greeted with unrestrained enthusiasm and every case she campaigned from the pulpit. No one said a word though the one time that New York's Archbishop, Edward M. Egan, spoke on the question of abortion, Planned Parenthood of New York and Catholics for a Free Choice came down his throat.

Both pro-abortion organizations blasted Archbishop Egan for his homily of October 29 urging Catholics to vote for those "who share our commitment to fundamental rights for the unborn." The Archbishop's appeal was also made in the form of a letter he sent to all parishes in the New York Archdiocese.

The Catholic League immediately rose to Archbishop Egan's defense with the following news release:

"There is a cruel irony in the lecture Archbishop Egan received from Planned Parenthood of New York and Catholics for a Free Choice. Both organizations have spent the entire fall campaigning for pro-abortion candidates and have never uttered one word of criticism at those ministers and rabbis who have allowed their churches and synagogues to become a playground for Republicans and Democrats seeking election. Now they have the nerve to criticize Archbishop Egan for simply exercising his freedom of speech.

"Planned Parenthood and Catholics for a Free Choice have something else in common: both have their origins in bigotry. Planned Parenthood was founded to promote the eugenic ideal of limiting the African American population and Catholics for a Free Choice was founded as an explicitly anti-Catholic organization. Neither has any moral authority to advise any Catholic leader on any subject.

"What's really bothering the pro-abortion lobby is Archbishop Egan's willingness to engage the culture. They'd better get used to it."

What is needed is for all future candidates for elective office to sign a pledge saying they will not campaign in any

house of worship. This is something the league will seek to do next time around.