

CANDIDATES CAMPAIGN IN CHURCHES

Throughout the fall, but particularly over the weekend before election day, Republicans and Democrats running for office campaigned in churches.

For example, on the Sunday preceding election day, candidates for public office campaigned in churches in many states, including Maryland, Virginia, Florida, New York, Georgia, North Carolina, Michigan, Texas, California, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Tennessee. Most of the churches were African American.

In some cases, candidates were literally endorsed from the pulpit. For example, the *Washington Post* said that Maryland Bishop Harry R. Jackson of Hope Christian Church “gave the challenger [Christopher Van Hollen] an enthusiastic plug, and the mostly black congregation bathed him in applause.” And the *Dallas Morning News* reported that Rev. Joe Samuel Ratliff of Brentwood Baptist Church actually instructed the congregation to “vote for Ron Kirk,” a Democratic candidate for office.

Not all those who stumped in the churches were candidates: Bill Clinton and Al Gore campaigned for Democratic candidates in several churches. And Donna Brazile of the Democratic National Committee went so far as to admit that “we have our literature for our churches.”

This prompted William Donohue to say: “This kind of rank electioneering in black churches would never be tolerated in Catholic churches. That the zealots who worship at the altar of separation of church and state have gone mute only proves how utterly unprincipled they are. But let a Catholic priest mention to the faithful that the life

issues should be weighed carefully before voting and all hell breaks loose. Finally, ministers disgrace themselves when they allow their churches to become the venue for a political rally.”