

PULPIT POLITICS IN HIGH GEAR; IRS COMPLAINTS FILED

The Catholic League has filed two formal complaints with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) alleging illegal pulpit politics.

The first complaint was made against a Miami Baptist church for allowing the church to become the venue of a political rally. On August 29, Bishop Victor T. Curry of Miami's New Birth Baptist Church welcomed Rev. Al Sharpton, who ran against Senator John Kerry for the Democratic nomination, and Terry McAuliffe, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Jamie Malernee of the *Sun-Sentinel* reported that Curry "made no apologies for turning his Sunday service into a political rally."

Rev. Sharpton, speaking from the pulpit, added to the politicized atmosphere by shouting, "We've got to win Florida." But no one was more partisan than McAuliffe: "Bush has misled us for four years and will not mislead us for the next four years. Get out to vote and we'll send Bush back to Texas."

The second IRS complaint was filed on September 15 against two Protestant black clergy groups from Pennsylvania. On September 13, the Pennsylvania State Coalition of Black Clergy endorsed Rep. Joseph M. Hoeffel, the Democratic candidate for U.S. senator; it represents about 800 churches. The next day, the Black Clergy of Philadelphia and Vicinity, a chapter of the Pennsylvania State Coalition, endorsed Arlen Specter, the Republican candidate and incumbent senator; it represents about 450 churches.

Regarding the matter in Pennsylvania, we noted that not one media outlet registered a protest about this blatant violation

of the law. We said to the press, "There is nothing benign about white liberal racism—racism is racism, and all expressions are equally offensive."

The IRS *Tax Guide for Churches and Religious Organizations* says that "churches and religious organizations" are "absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign...." That would seem to settle the matter in both the Miami and Pennsylvania cases.

The Catholic League wants the clergy of all religions to engage in robust freedom of speech. What we object to is newspapers condemning Catholic bishops for threatening to deny Communion to pro-abortion politicians while looking the other way when the clergy of other religions literally endorse candidates for public office.