

PUNDITS GIVE BUDDHIST FUND-RAISER A FREE PASS

The testimony in Washington yesterday by three Buddhist nuns not only raises serious questions about the sect's campaign finance practices, it raises serious questions about the refusal of political pundits to treat this issue as a classic violation of church-state relations.

It is known that since 1993 more than \$150,000 was laundered to Democratic politicians by the Hsi Lai Temple in Los Angeles and that money was sent to the Democratic National Committee (DNC). It is also known that the temple often reimbursed its members for contributions made to friendly politicians. Indeed, in the visit by Vice President Al Gore to the temple in 1996, temple monastics were told in planning sessions to ask those who wished to attend for a \$5,000 contribution to the DNC; the result was that \$100,000 was raised, of which \$65,000 was laundered through nuns and monks at the temple.

It is also known that the videotape of Mr. Gore's speech has vanished and that a list detailing the contributions made by temple devotees before the event was destroyed. In addition, the forms submitted by the devotees requesting reimbursement from the temple for their donations were destroyed and canceled reimbursement checks were altered to make it appear that they were loans or had come from the devotees' personal accounts rather than from the temple's general operating account.

William Donohue addressed the league's principal concern today:

"To show the duplicity that is at work here, just insert the term Catholic church each time the word temple is used. For example, on Wednesday, Senator John Glenn said 'I don't know

whether there's anything illegal about having a fund-raiser at a temple.' What is most astonishing about remarks like this is the incredible hypocrisy: if a Catholic priest dares to even address a public policy issue from the pulpit, pundits are quick to denounce him for violating church and state lines. Yet the Vice President can attend a fund-raiser for his party and Buddhist nuns can launder money, alter and destroy financial documents, and everyone treats it clinically. The double standard could not be more evident."