

WILL MCCAIN AND OBAMA RESPECT CHURCHES?

In June, the Paul B. Henry Institute for the Study of Christianity and Politics at Calvin College released a survey that reported 57 percent of Americans believe that religious leaders should not support political candidates during worship services. The findings of this poll had grave implications for anyone who decides to run for public office.

Sen. John McCain and Sen. Barack Obama should set an example by pledging never to attend a church service that is a front for a political rally. Too often, clergy have abused their office by making veiled endorsements—and in some cases explicit endorsements—of candidates for public office at a church service. Just as bad has been the practice of the candidates themselves making a pitch to the congregation from the pulpit.

In the Henry survey, not a single demographic category could marshal majority support for the proposition that “Clergy should be permitted to endorse political candidates during worship services.” The categories included the following: Evangelical Protestants, Mainline Protestants, Latino Protestants, Black Protestants, Catholics, Latino Catholics, Other Christians, Other Faiths, Jews and Unaffiliated; subcategories were listed in some instances. Of all the groups, Catholics and Jews had the best record.

In this regard, the Catholic Church is a model for all other religions. While it is not uncommon for Protestant churches (especially African American ones) and Jewish synagogues to be used as a political forum, it is almost non-existent in the Catholic community. Moreover, unlike others, the Catholic clergy are barred from holding public office. In 1980, Pope John Paul II mandated that all priests withdraw from electoral

politics; this stricture is recognized in Canon Law.

The American people have spoken and their voice was made clear. If McCain and Obama continue their practice of turning houses of worship into political playing fields, they should be roundly criticized for doing so.