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On September 2nd of this year, the Pope issued an edict which proclaimed that Priests in the Catholic Church could not hold office in a political regime. This proclamation was made necessary by the fact that a number of Jesuit Priests in Nicaragua held important posts in the Sandinista government. The Pope was upset because the Sandinistas have been, in many respects, at odds with Catholic Bishops in Nicaragua. This papal edict demonstrates how far the Catholic Church has come from the time when the Church was the actual political ruler of much of Italy. For a while some Popes, like Julius II, in the 16th century, served as both Emperor and Military General.

Recently, in America, Father Drainen from Massachusetts, an outstanding Liberal Democrat in the House of Representatives, who was supported by many Jews, had to drop his office at the instruction of the Pope.

John F. Kennedy was the first Catholic to be elected President of the United States. In order to receive the nomination of his party, Kennedy had to make it clear beyond doubt that he would act as his own conscience dictated and not on orders from Rome. The current Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate has publicly stated that while she personally would not have an abortion on religious grounds, she believes that each woman has the right to make her personal decision on the basis of her own belief.

Bishop O'Connor of New York was aroused enough by Mrs. Ferraro's position to declare, "A good Catholic will be 100% against abortion. He or she will not grant to others the right to make a different kind of decision". On the other hand, Bishop Malone of the National Council of Catholic Bishops countered with, "Catholics have the right to choose a position on the basis of their personal conviction". Public opinion surveys would indicate that the majority of America's Catholics agree with the more liberal Bishop.

As election time approaches, it is not unusual for important national issues to rise to the fore. The separation of Church and State, which has been something of a back burner issue for decades, has in this election been pushed to the front burner. What has been called the

American tradition on this issue was developed by men like Thomas Jefferson. In early America, the conflict among the many churches made for such discord that Jefferson pushed through the Legislature of the State of Virginia, a special Statute on Religious Freedom. By his own prior request, Jefferson's tombstone does not mention the fact that he was a President of the United States. It does say that he was author of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, so important was this law to him. The Virginia Statute shows us that Jefferson was concerned with two things: First, that each person should be free to believe or disbelieve whatever he wished in the realm of religion, and secondly, that the State should not establish an official religion, as was the case in England, or show partiality to any one religious sect.

While the attempt of the Regan administration to readmit prayer in the public schools failed in the Congress by a narrow margin, a new law was recently passed which permits equal access to school facilities after school hours. This is to say that religious groups may use Public School facilities after hours to the extent that other groups are permitted to use them. The fact that this law was passed by a large margin in both the House and the Senate shows that most of our Lawmakers are prepared to yield to a growing pressure stemming from religious groups located on the far right of the political spectrum. The Equal Access Law means that there will be increasing pressure on children to join in the religious groups that will be meeting on school property, and there will be an increasing isolation of those children who do not join. One thing back only a few years ago to the time when missionary Christian groups in South Dade passed out buttons to public school children, and it was suddenly clear who were the few Jews in the school. I can't tell you how much psychic pressure this puts on our children who are thus exposed and isolated.

The equal access law is but one part of the program President Regan has put together in his attempt to court the Religious Right. This past August fourth, the newspapers described in detail the major speech the President made at a huge prayer breakfast in Dallas. The Miami Herald Convention Bureau reported, "With a massive choir as his backdrop, the President told some 12,000 worshippers, 'Our government needs the Church'. The report continued, 'his remarks put him squarely in the camp of the Fundamentalist Religious Right that has been much in

evidence at the GOP Convention and is actively supporting Reagans reelection effort." The President did not stop at inviting religious leaders to offer their moral guidance, he also asked for their "theological Guidance", calling that "a good and necessary thing". The article continues, "in addition, Reagan attacked those who oppose voluntary school prayer." The President is quoted as saying, "I submit to you that those who claim to be fighting for tolerance on this issue may not be tolerant at all".

As might be expected, Jewish Religious and Civil Rights leaders were highly disturbed by the President's remarks. But some Christians leaders also expressed their opposition. A spokeswoman for the National Council of Churches said, "We are very concerned about how the question of religion and politics is developing in this campaign". Barry Lynn, a Minister in the United Church of Christ said, "We should not make public policy in this country based on doctrinal matters of religious faith". The same day that the President's speech was reported, the Miami Herald said in an editorial, "...Mr. Reagan's relentless efforts to supplant Americas tradition of morality with a religion based set of dos and dont...(is) frightening.

On the basis of the President's decision to court the Religious Right, on the basis of the new trend in Supreme Court decisions concerning religious liberties, and on the basis of certain religiously oriented goals of the new platform of the Republican Party, we must conclude that we are in for some important battles in the area of religious liberty in the decade ahead.

The Rev. Jerry Falwell, who is one of the princes of the Religious Right, has developed, with the help of like-minded Ministers, a highly organized well financed political machine. This political machine endorses political candidates who think as Falwell does, and it opposes candidates who think contrary to Falwell. What is disturbing is that Falwell has thrown his personal popularity and the power of this Church into the political arena. If Falwell does not actually ask for political contributions on his National Television program, he does assemble the names of those who make a contribution to his Church, and later Falwell approaches these same people to make a political contribution to another organization in which he is the prime mover. Falwell and those like him are playing upon the religious concerns of

his following to lead people into a certain precisely defined political position.

When Senator Richard Stone was running for reelection to the United States Senate, he and his wife repeatedly commented upon the changing character of the political scene in Washington because of the PACS of the Religious Right. Only now is it becoming clear to more of us what a dramatic change is taking place on the American political scene because of the zeal and the efficient organization of the Religious Right.

But fundamentalist Protestants like Falwell are not the only religionists who are trying to persuade voters to vote a certain way because the Church thinks in a certain way. Archbishop Bernard Law of Boston has described abortion as the critical issue in the Presidential campaign. "We are not saying you must vote for a particular candidate", said the Archbishop, "but, we are saying that when you make up your mind for whom to vote, this is the critical issue. I don't want to be a political boss", said Archbishop Law, "but I hope our statement will influence everyone who hears it." The Archbishop who said he was speaking for eighteen New England Bishops said he did not find anything remiss with Mr. Reagans comments linking religion and politics.

The evidence is rather clear that there are not a few but many religious leaders in America who would try to use the power of the Church to influence American voters. That is to say, the religious leaders are useing their extended pulpit to teach that if you want to do what is politically right, you must do what the Church says. This is a dangerous position, and the President of the United States is apparently in support of that position, although we are told that Mr. Reagan, himself, never attends Church.

As one who has always been outspoken on social issues, and as one who was drawn to be a Rabbi because of my admiration of the Hebrew Prophets, let me say that I believe that the clergy ought to speak out on social issues. The ancient Prophets even opposed the military at times when the battle seemed not to be for a proper cause. But those religious leaders who seem to be raising their voices in America, the Falwells

and the Bishop Laws do not seem to be speaking out on issues to benefit the poor or to expand human rights. If anything, they seem to be clearly supporting the candidate and the party which seems the least sensitive to the problems of the poor and least concerned about human rights issues.

We want to be very clear about where the lines are being drawn on the religious scene today. Religious liberals whether Protestant or Catholic are not following the call of Mr. Falwell and Bishop Law. Liberal Protestants and Catholics are still allied with liberal Jews on almost all the central issues of our country. It is the Fundamentalists and most conservative in both Protestant and Catholic groups which are joining together in concerted political action.

While I was on vacation this summer, I read in the Pittsfield, Mass. newspaper that liberal republicans in the area were upset because the right wing republicans had captured all of the delegates to the convention. My knees shook a little when a certain woman and leader of that area's delegation to the Republican Convention said, "We are opposed to all liberals, to all socialists, to all communists." It is scary to see that this kind of a mind - which lumps together liberals and communists - is taking over the Republican Party. It would seem to me that the political standoff in America is not so much between Republicans and Democrats as between Liberals and Fundamentalists, with the Fundamentalist currently in the drivers seat.

It seems to me that the Religious Right has mounted a challenge which must be answered. People in the minority religious groups must join with their friends in the majority groups who are equally concerned about the new trends. I am not saying that we now use the Synagogues and liberal Churches as Falwell and his friends are using their Fundamentalist Churches, for two wrongs do not make a right. Those who are concerned about the new drift in politics which has enabled the far right to capture the Republican Platform have to work all the harder, whether it is with the Republican moderates or with the Democrats to make sure that our country maintains its religious and personal liberties.

The Religious Right has been able to come to power in America because of the apathy of other Americans. Our relative affluence has dulled our powers of observation. We have not been able to see what has been going on under our noses. It is time to answer organization with organization and political pressure with political pressure. The answer must come not through our religious institutions, but through existing political organizations. We answer the Religious Right not only by our vote, but also with our political contributions. Just as Religious Right funds go to support their candidates all around the country, so we have to contribute to the elections of candidates all around the country who stand for separation of Church and State and other precious Jeffersonian liberties.