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!ELIGION IN POLITICS

In 1960 the winning presidential candidate, John F. Kennedy, went to great pains to put distance between himself and his church and to reassure every questionBr • that his religion would never interfere with his judgment as President. His campaign featured many pictures and much publicity about his serving as a PT boat commander during World War II, but/P I have no recollection of hii/ever having been f:x'.6'.fflC/photographed attending church on Sunday. It was even reported that he had secured a dispen sation from attending church during his campaign.

The front-running Democratic candidate in 1976 has established a reverse priority. He never mentions and shows no photographs of his experience as a naval submarine commander, nor as being on the staff of the top nuclear submarine expert, Admiral Rickover. However, the candidate's religion is very much in evidence.

Why is Jimmy Carter's religion acceptable to the voters while Jack Kennedy's was thought not to be? Among several reasons, probably the principal one is fallout from Watergate. Our nation learned a bitter lesson of what can happen when there is an absence of religious and moral values in White House leadership.

It is hard to expect our people to have such values, however, when the majority of Americans are educated in schools where religious principles are forbidden to be taught.

While the American people have been moving toward acceptance of a prominent place for:religion in public affairs, the U.S. Supreme Court has been going in the opposite direction. Twenty-four years

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ago, Justice Idlliam Douglas, speaking for the Court majority in upholding a law under which students could have released time from public schools to attend religious instruction at their own churches, stated: "We are a religious people whose j_nstitutions presuppose a Supreme Being•..• We find no constitutional requirement which makes it necessary for government to be hostile to religion and to throw its weight against efforts to widen the effective scope of religious influence.•.• We cannot read into the Bill of Rights a phi.losophy of hostility to religion."

Although never overruled, that splendid principle was eroded by many contradictory decision!:l, the net effect of which was indeed "to create a hostility to reU.g:i.on and to eliminate even the slightest religious influence in the public educatj_on of our grade ancl high school children.

Although the Supreme Court has upheld Federal aid to religious colleges, it has prohibited any kind of governmental aid to religious grade or high schools. The Supreme Court's rationalization of this double standard is very frank. Chief ,Justice Warren Burger stated bluntly that aid to religious colleges is approved because !!college students are less impressionable and l ss susceptible" to religious training than grade and high school chJldren.

This means that the Supreme Court has put its blessing on aid to religion at the college level, where it is too late to have any major influence on the student; but the Supreme Court forbids helping religion at the elementary and secondary school levels, where it could have a highly beneficial effect **in** building character, conscience, a:nd citizenship in the next generation.

There is consi.derable evidence that the religious and moral vacuum mandated **by** the U.S. Supreme Court is a major cause of the recent tre mendous increase in public school crime. Maybe the 1976 presidential campaign forecasts a chang• in attitude alrnut the necessity of religious and moral training for grade and high school children.

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