P.S. to the NEWS
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MIXING RELIGION AND POLITICS

Just as fashions in clothes and in foods change with the times, so do styles and subjects of editorials. Today it is high fashion to editorialize against the involvement of preachers in politics, and the righteous rhetoric ranges from irritation all the way to outrage.

The high priestess of indignation is Mrs. Patricia Harris, President Carter's Secretary of Health and Human Services. She compared fundamentalist preachers to the Ayatollah Khomeini, charging that they "pose a serious threat to the democratic process."

The reason for all this indignation is that in 1980 some preachers with large followings expressed themselves as pro-Ronald Reagan. Nobody objected in 1976 when many preachers lined up their flocks for Jimmy Carter.

Although Khomeini is the catchword of the intemperate rabble-rousers leading the charge against preachers in politics, "separation of church and state" is the cliche most used by those wringing their editorial hands and crying crocodile tears of fear. Both slogans are intended to harass, intimidate, and frighten the evangelicals and fundamentalists back into their pews and away from the polls.

Separation of church and state is a time-honored pillar of our American culture, but it doesn't mean what the liberals allege it means. As designed by the framers of the First Amendment, it means simply that the United States must not have any established state religion as do England, Sweden, and many other Western nations.

Separation of church and state certainly never meant that religion should be excluded from public life or from our schools and colleges. Prior to 1962, it never meant that a prayer could not be said in a public school.

It never meant that preachers could not be active in politics and even be elected to office. The election in the 1970s of Roman Catholic Father Robert Drinan as a Congressman from Massachusetts and of Mormon Bishop Orrin Hatch as a Senator from Utah clearly prove that.

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Funny thing, when John Paul II ordered Father Drinan out of politics, the liberal establishment groaned at the harshness of the Pope's order. But now that evangelical Christian ministers are expressing their views about Congressional and Presidential elections, suddenly we are told that religion and politics don't mix.

The liberals who object to preachers in politics today shake their heads, wrinkle their brows, and opine about the danger that "moral absolutists" will "impose their own morality" on American citizens. Funny thing, the liberal establishment did not discern the same threat ten years ago when the Fathers Berrigan, the Rev. William Sloane Coffin, and the Rev. Martin Luther King tried to impose their morality on U.S. policy in Vietnam.

The liberals are expressing shock and dismay because the evangelical preachers are denouncing SALT II and calling for the rebuilding of U.S. military defense as a "moral" issue. Funny thing, those same liberals did not get at all exercised when the Catholic Bishops and the National Council of Churches worked for SALT II and the Panama Treaty that gave away our Canal, or when Catholic nuns organized by "Network" lobbied against the B-1 bomber.

One of the phoniest arguments used by those who see a right-wing plot under every fundamentalist pulpit is that preachers have no right to be in politics because they don't pay taxes. Since when is paying taxes the criterion for the suffrage?

Millions of Americans on welfare and in low income categories do not pay taxes, but no one suggests that their voting privileges be taken away. The hundred-million-dollar foundations pay no taxes but are highly influential on controversial national policies.

The entire "preacher" issue is as phony as a $3 bill. Preachers have the same rights as every other American citizen -- freedom of speech and press, the right to participate in politics, and the right to urge others to follow their leadership.

The real reason the liberals are so upset is because they have made secular humanism our de facto state religion in government and education, and they realize that those who believe in the eternal verities and the Ten Commandments of the Judeo-Christian culture are starting to exercise their inalienable political rights.

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