

PROTESTANTS AND OTHER AMERICANS UNITED  
For Separation of Church and State

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CHURCH AND STATE MUST STAY SEPARATE

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PAUL BLANDSHARD'S COLUMN

SHADOW OVER THE WHITE HOUSE

Judging by the national reaction to the Catholic bishops' denunciation of birth control, the issue of Catholicism in the White House will overshadow all other church-state issues until July, and perhaps until November. Here in Washington the general sentiment of the "informed observers" is that the religious issue has come to stay in the presidential campaign, and that the chances of Senator Kennedy's nomination and election have been seriously injured. Everybody concedes that he can have second place on the Democratic ticket if he wants it, but who wants second place in a year when most of the political prophets are picking Nixon?

Was the Catholic bishops' denunciation of birth control based upon a sudden surge of moral indignation, or was it the product of calculated political planning? Both the wording and the timing of the episcopal statement indicate deliberate planning. The bishops did not confide their denunciations to moral generalizations, as they could so easily have done; they entered the national political arena with a bold warning to Congress that "United States Catholics... will not... support any public assistance either at home or abroad, to promote artificial birth prevention... whether through direct aid or by means of international organization." They must have known that such an inflammatory statement would raise the issue of church control of a Catholic president and might well guarantee the defeat of any Catholic presidential candidate in the fall.

Kennedy is particularly vulnerable on the birth control issue because he remained silent in 1948 when his own archbishop led the victorious-- and scurrilous--Massachusetts campaign to deny contraceptive rights to non-Catholics as well as Catholics. Even if the birth control question is kept out of the foreign aid debate during this session, the ghost of Cardinal Cushing will be there to plague Kennedy.

Most of the Protestant candidates, and President Eisenhower himself, showed as much timidity in handling the birth control controversy as Senator Kennedy did. They tried to change the subject. They pretended that someone had proposed American dictation of birth control aid for backward peoples. Then they earnestly denounced this mythical compulsion.

Senator Symington deserves credit for making the most candid statement, a short endorsement of the principle of foreign aid for birth control for those countries which desire it. None of the candidates made any reasoned or detailed defense of birth-control freedom, or underscored its moral necessity for the people of the United States as well as for the people of India. It was evident that all candidates and the President, trembled in the presence of adverse ecclesiastical power.

President Eisenhower's statements have been least excusable of all the cautious Washington pronouncements on the subject. It may be that in his famous December press conference when he gave an off-the-cuff answer to a question about birth control, he allowed a bumbling tongue to run away with his intentions. Certainly his final conclusion was as mixed as his grammar. In flatly renouncing all permissive government aid for birth control abroad, he dragged in a reference to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, apparently by way of apologetic appeasement. He made no reference to the fact that the majority of the religious people of the United States see nothing in birth control that is contrary to their faith. He richly deserved the angry condemnations of "religious favoritism" which promptly came from both Jewish and Protestant pulpits.

The President's surrender to sectarian pressure is all the more inexplicable because he had appointed the Draper committee, which had recommended decisive action against overpopulation, and, according to very reliable sources, had encouraged that committee to resist an internal ultimatum to the effect that "the whole House of Representatives, the whole Senate and the whole Roman Catholic Church will descend on us" if we raise this issue.

Nothing in the President's background or associations led any of his friends to expect his submission to Catholic demands on the birth control issue. He once described himself as "an almost fanatic Protestant". His mother was for many years a member of the most fanatically anti-Catholic sect in the United States, Jehovah's Witnesses. His own pastor, Dr. Edward Elson, is a forward-looking Presbyterian who gives out birth control information along with other marital advice to young couples when they are married in his church.

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".... The bill for establishing religious freedom in the United States, the principles of which had, to a certain degree, been enacted before, I had drawn in all the latitude of reason and right... to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Mohamedan, the Hindu, and the Infidel of every denomination."

--Thomas Jefferson

".... I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state."

--Thomas Jefferson

".... James Francis Cardinal McIntyre, of Los Angeles, said here tonight, 'There is no separation of church and state, and there never can be.' " (San Francisco Chronicle, June 24, 1960.)

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Which way shall we go - with Cardinal McIntyre or with Thomas Jefferson?