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SERMON DELIVERED
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RABBI SIDNEY H. BROOKS
to
CONGREGATION OF TEMPLE ISRAEL

Friday Evening
October 23, 1964

"RELIGION AND OUR ELECTION"

During the last election campaign, religion figured prominently. The choice between John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon was a religious issue for many. Reaction to the idea of a Roman Catholic in the White House led to bitter and violent and, in most cases, inaccurate and abusive appraisals of the Roman Catholic religion. Additionally, any who supported Kennedy were open to attack whether they were Roman Catholic or not. I shall not ever forget some of the phone calls I received in those days, most of them anonymous, with their fearful and sometimes insulting reactions to my contention, in a public address and in the pulpit, that a Roman Catholic or anyone else had a perfect right to seek the presidency.

Since that time one wonders whether experience has tempered such rash judgments or whether, as I believe, there is only fractional improvement in the relationship between outright intolerance and the facts as they are.

This time the campaign, insofar as religion is concerned is different. There is no Roman Catholic-Protestant issue. And surely Mr. Goldwater's Jewish ancestry logically has no place in the discussion. And still the matter of religion has intruded in a strange way.

Even before the nomination of Barry Goldwater one of the most respected and widely read periodicals, The Christian Century, broke with long-standing tradition and editorially proclaimed that IF Barry Goldwater were to be nominated they would not support him. After the nomination, The Christian Century consistently followed its earlier editorial position and urged, first, that Barry Goldwater be defeated and then, because they wanted their position crystal clear, that President Johnson be supported.

At first, it appeared to me that this action of a church directed publication was rather unique. Church publications and Jewish religiously oriented publications have, in the main, taken the same position that most preachers maintain: issues may be discussed, moral implications of policy may be stated from the pulpit but personalities as such or a political party as such should not be made the subject of support or condemnation from the so-called neutral position of a preacher. Though how a neutral preacher can be effective is beyond my understanding.

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But then followed a remarkable sequence of events. Other church publications, among them Christianity and Crisis, another highly respected national church magazine, also pleaded for the defeat of Goldwater and the election of Johnson. Following this, the United Church Herald, official publication of the United Church of Christ, editorialized in the same vein. And in St. Louis 726 Episcopal clergy and laymen, including 10 bishops, issued a statement attacking Barry Goldwater, an Episcopalean.

In our own faith, the Reconstructionist magazine broke a 30-year precedent and editorially asked the defeat of Goldwater and the election of Johnson.

Naturally, a hue and cry has been raised. What right has religion to mix in politics? How dare ministers or priests or rabbis speak in behalf of a candidate? What justification is there for religious journals to editorialize on politics?

Our local paper reflected some of the reaction. In his regular column Morrie Ryskin complained about the pronouncements of some I have already mentioned and added his scorn to the action of another publication of the United Church of Christ called Social Action which had declared that Goldwater had "set himself against the overwhelming consensus of Christian social doctrines enunciated by the churches."

And in a simultaneously printed article, David Lawrence said that laymen are complaining that they do not approve of the politically motivated sermons of their pastors. He adds that while religion pleads for separation of church and state in such matters as prayer in the public schools, the religious organizations themselves feel no compunction to refrain from participating in a political campaign.

Let me say honestly that clergymen group themselves on both sides of this question. We will let them justify their own positions. What is our position?

First, the issue of relation of state to church. We believe that the state (that is the government or any subsidiary of it) should NOT have CONTROL over the belief of any religious organization or of any individual or the exercise or expression of that belief. Freedom of conscience is the issue here and is fundamental to the American way of life. If however, a church or a clergyman or any individual, in the expression of his faith or otherwise transgresses the civil law he may then properly be brought to justice by the state.

But the relationship of the church to the state is not in the same manner as that of state to church as columnist Morris Ryskin and David Lawrence would assume. The American pulpit has no power or legal CONTROL over issues of state. Like newspapers, like radio and TV, like periodicals and books, the pulpit is a means of public expression. And more, the pulpit in exercising this opportunity to teach and to exhort and to inculcate the religious principles of a particular faith into the hearts and minds of those who freely

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come to listen, must be free. If it is not free, it is powerless.

Since the days of Stephen S. Wise when he refused the pulpit of Temple Emanuel in New York City because he was informed his preachments would be subject to the pleasure and point of view of the pulpit committee, no rabbi worth his salt and no congregation worthy of the name has had anything but a free pulpit.

To be sure, judgment is involved. And the preacher must be aware of his resonsibilities and competent to exercise them. To say in our tradition that religion must not mix in politics makes no sense. For then one could with equal justification say that religion ought not to mix in education, or in family life, or in community problems or in matters of war and peace or brotherhood or race relations. This would be to say that religion limit itself to anything except the meaningful, to prayers but not the application of them, to lofty ideas but not their pursuit, to rituals but not to the good life.

In our tradition there was no such thing as "politics", nor any such thing as "religion". The prophets of old spoke the word of God as they understood it to apply to all of life. Religion was not a cloistered private irrelevant luxury but the application of standards of goodness and rightness to ALL OF HUMAN EXPERIENCE.

Therefore, when such a vital and critical matter as faces us in the election of our country's president, religion should not -- dare ~~date~~ not -- hide in the corner. Religion, any religion, and most of all ours, must face such moral issues as civil liberties, social welfare, control of atomic armaments, care of the aged, education and the like. It is not the prerogative of the pulpit, nor I might add, of anyone else to choose on a basis of superficial or whimsical like or dislike of an individual. So that in the case of the Kennedy-Nixon campaign clear endorsement was out of place. These each represented honest differences of policy well within the American way of life. But when pronouncements of a candidate run consistently counter to the teachings of our faith, as I believe those of Mr. Barry Goldwater do, then it is the duty of the rabbi in his pulpit - speaking only for himself (as I believe it the duty of any clergyman or publication to say for his faith) to say so.

Congregants,even as readers,still have freedom of choice. No religious compulsion is involved. This is not a matter of control but of opinion, of teaching and of exhortation.

In this case, the morality of men close to President Johnson is of greatest national concern, but it should not be confused with his personal morality nor even with basic national policy. We can hope for - but not expect - absolute virtue in government service no more than in this congregation! Wherever found, immorality must be exposed and rooted out in either party or in any organization.

But of infinitely over-riding concern at this moment are our basic governmental directions and philosophy. Sadly, the majority

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of congregants do not heed the words of most preaching. Neither are any constrained to heed this. But to preach only to agreement is empty and futile. To plead for a sane approach to the problems of our time in the broad outlines of racial equality, peaceful uses of atomic energy, cessation of polution of the earth's atmosphere by further atomic testing, and the responsibility of government for ALL THE PEOPLE, rich and poor, wise and unlearned is to state a sound Jewish approach to the matter of government which represents us in no different manner than it represents every other group of citizens in our land.

A short time ago the Central Conference of American Rabbis issued a statement on the election which was adopted by the Executive Board of the Conference. Surely it is obvious that the membership of the Conference represents members of both political parties. Many rabbis have served in high capacity in both Republican and Democratic ranks. But the rabbis, nevertheless, have enunciated some of the basic principles of modern life and American goals as seen by measure of our Judaism.

These issues represent the past and present best thinking of our rabbis - our teachers of Judaism as a way of total life.

In the statement is this phrase: "As an organization of religious leaders we neither espouse nor oppose political parties as such or candidates as personalities."....

But then there are these principles declared: "The Social Security system must not only be safe-guarded, but we believe must be expanded to provide medical and hospital care as far as this is feasible for our older citizens.....We have been and will continue to be in the forefront of the struggle for equal political rights and fair economic opportunity for Negroes....We believe that a sustained effort must be made to eliminate poverty and unemployment in our own country and that if we are to prevent the spread of totalitarian doctrines efforts must be made to raise the standard of living of peoples in other parts of the world and very especially in the western hemisphere. The United Nations must be strengthened and not weakened. We are for the progress of negotiation patiently carried out to arrive at the kind of settlements which will ultimately liquidate the Cold War and lift the terrible burden of armament from the shoulders of all nations including our own. ....The traditional American control of civilian authorities over military decisions should be kept intact....We deplore efforts to undermine confidence in the Supreme Court."

Such principles are the majority collective judgment and preaching, if you will, of our rabbis for the guidance but not compulsion of our constituency. I believe these represent the attitude of Reform Judaism to the issues of our day.

Were I still a member of the Executive Board of the Conference I would have urged that the logical conclusion of these statements would be a repudiation of Senator Goldwater and support of President Johnson. I would probably have been defeated. But since neither the Conference nor any congregational pulpit requires

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mandatory compliance with the view expressed, I see "neutralism" as ineffectiveness.

Religion is politics, because it is human life. Religion is education and community life and private life and business and profession. Judaism is our heritage of values, our goals for ourselves and all the world. If we fail to apply our heritage to these issues, religion fails us.

And in this hour it must not fail us. We should give careful and reverent consideration to our vote in freedom. And on the basis of the issues involved this can only mean voting for the man who in one's sincere judgment has by his record and his statement of intentions dedicated himself to the principles of life which are the basis of our Americanism and the teachings of our faith. May our sense of values dictated by our faith guide our choice for the good of all.

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