

RELIGION AND POLITICS

There have been a good number of instances where politicians have told the bishops and priests that they should stay out of “political affairs.” Nevertheless, politicians do not appear to stay out of “religious affairs.” Actually, the issue is not properly posed. It is not easy, if not impossible, to distinguish between what belongs to the political sphere and what belongs to the religious sphere exclusively. That comes from the fact that each one of us is a single person and not two.

We are (or, should be) political individuals that espouse a value system. Consequently, we are persons of both religion and politics. By religion, I refer to our relationship with the Supreme Being that brought us into existence so that we might be a force for the common good. By politics, I refer to the process by which we exercise that role. Both of them have their own set of rules (as does science, for example), each of which can be exercised without rejection of the other.

Yet, rejection is what is being asked of such people as Judge John Roberts. I suspect that his confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court will be an assertion that he should reject his personal religious beliefs in order to be a good justice. My contention is that individuals who do so do not make good justices; or politicians, for that matter.

Judge Roberts’ statement in the past that “Roe vs. Wade” was not decided properly, legally speaking, is now being held against him. But, should he, as a justice, not be concerned if a law has been enacted improperly, regardless of its religious implications? Is not that what judges are suppose to be about?

Without representing his parish or the Church, one of our priests recently exercised his right of political expression in the public press. Those who disagreed threatened him with the loss of his parish’s tax-exempt status.

Do not bishops, priests, religious, and faithful members of the Church have the same rights and responsibilities, as do other citizens of our nation? Are not decent persons fit for public office any more?

It appears to me that there is a movement underfoot attempting to punish individuals associated with inherent values by denying them their civil rights. The political forum is being used to curtail religious expression. Remembering what happened in Central and Eastern Europe after World War II when rights of individuals associated with the spiritual were denied, I am deeply concerned.