

MILBURN P. AKERS

Great Disservice To Sen. Kennedy

THE GREAT IMPONDERABLE in the closing days of the presidential campaign is the religious issue. Unfortunately, that issue, the same as Banquo's ghost, will not be downed.

The Catholic hierarchy of Puerto Rico did Sen. Kennedy a great disservice by the manner in which they opposed the re-election of Luis Munoz Marin as governor of that American commonwealth. As American citizens, the Puerto Rican bishops certainly possess the right to oppose Munoz or any other candidate for public office. But to forbid Puerto Rican Catholics to vote for Munoz and to create a Catholic Action party—the first on American soil—in their effort to bring about Munoz's downfall is to verify the fears some persons have about any organized religion in politics.



MUNOZ

Sen. Kennedy was quick to object to the action taken by the Puerto Rican bishops of his own church.

The extent to which any church, no matter the denomination, should inject itself into political controversy is always moot. The stand taken by the Catholic church against communism has deservedly been widely applauded. Those who defend the action taken by the Puerto Rican bishops profess to see little difference between the Roman Catholic Church opposing communism, on the one hand, and the action taken in Puerto Rico on the other, although the charge of communism is not made against Munoz. The Puerto Rican bishops are concerned over actions taken or actions refused by the Munoz government in matters involving subjects of primary importance to them as spiritual leaders.

Still, the manner in which the bishops have manifested that concern serves but to verify apprehensions some persons hold. Perhaps in the complexities usually associated with matters incident to theology and churches in general a case can be made in behalf of the three Puerto Rican bishops. The lay mind, however, usually has difficulty in comprehending such matters insofar as its own church is concerned let alone other churches.

KENNEDY HAS MANY TIMES affirmed his belief in the American system of separation of church and state. His legislative record substantiates his declarations in that area. He is entitled to have his candidacy judged on the basis of his economic views, his social views, his knowledge of foreign affairs and his general fitness for office. It is, as has been many times said, as wrong to judge him solely on the basis of his religious affiliation as it is to condemn as bigots others who oppose him on these grounds.

Reformation Sunday commemorating the anniversary of that day in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Cathedral will be observed in many Protestant churches this Sunday.

Indications are that in some Protestant churches, notably those of a fundamentalist persuasion, opposition to Kennedy solely on the basis of his religious affiliation will be expressed from the pulpits. It is also assumed that Reformation Sunday will be the beginning of a renewed drive to fan the flames of the religious issue.

There would appear to be little, if any, difference between the action taken by the Roman Catholic bishops of Puerto Rico and that which has been taken, or will be taken, from some Protestant pulpits on the mainland. In either instance the action does not jibe with established American principles.

REPUBLICANS ARE NOW ACCUSING Democrats of subtly injecting the religious issue into the campaign and Democrats are now making like accusations against Republicans. Undoubtedly such actions are taking place in the lower echelons of both parties. The founder of both great segments of Christianity, Protestant and Catholic alike, once said: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone . . ."



AKERS

If that injunction were to be followed today the religious issue, per se, would be of little consequence in the current campaign. For there would be few with stones to cast.

Both Kennedy and Nixon are entitled to be judged on their economic views, their knowledge of foreign affairs, their social views, and their general fitness for office. Unfortunately, the religious issue is the great imponderable. It cuts both ways. The extent to which persons vote against Kennedy merely on account of his Catholicism, or vote for him merely on account of his Catholicism, will measure the extent to which both democracy and Christianity have failed to measure up to their responsibilities in this day and age.

And That's A Fact . . .

The election is so close that if either Pat or Jackie started to wear eye shadow, her husband could lose by an eyelash.