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Intrusion of Politics

Three recent events raise interesting questions about the proper boundaries of politics and its relationship to sex, religion and science.

The most sensational case was the matter of Gary Hart's dealings with Donna Rice. The surveillance, published stories and subsequent discussion suggest that many in the media feel a presidential candidate loses all rights to privacy when he announces his candidacy—as if the public's right to know about all aspects of his life were as great as the power of the office he sought.

The fact that no further revelations concerning Hart's sex life followed his withdrawal from the presidential race (although, we are told, *The Post* has in hand affidavits concerning these matters) tacitly suggests a corollary to the principle: presidential candidates have no right to privacy, but ex-candidates do. It is an interesting doctrine, one that sucks the whole life of a presidential candidate into the political arena.

Public opinion polls tell us that most Americans believe presidential candidates do have a right to privacy and do not approve of *The Miami Herald's* investigation. They were, nonetheless, influenced by its disclosures.

A second case concerned the behavior of Bishop John McGann at the funeral of the late CIA director William J. Casey. McGann shocked most of those at Casey's funeral when in the homily he followed an approving description of Casey's good works in the diocese with criticism and disapproval of Casey's opinions on nuclear policy and aid to the contras.

Now, the Casey funeral was largely a matter among Roman Catholics, and it is surely not for a non-Catholic (like me) to pronounce on what is and is not appropriate behavior of a bishop toward a communicant and friend. Presumably, McGann believed Casey's views on nuclear and Nicaraguan policy were relevant to his quality as a man, a Christian and a Catholic. But treating such questions of public policy as a matter of faith and morals not only politicizes religion, it makes the religion of a public official a matter of public concern because it seriously compromises the independence of the two domains. Did McGann intend to reopen this issue faced and presumably put to rest by John F. Kennedy in 1960?

A third instance of the intrusion of politics into a domain our society generally considers nonpolitical was the decision to deny Harvard political scientist professor Samuel P. Huntington admission to the National Academy of Science. It was the second time that Huntington, president of

the American Political Science Association and director of Harvard's Center for International Studies, was recommended by social scientists in the academy for membership in this honorific academy. And for the second time he was turned down.

The extraordinary campaign mounted against Huntington by mathematics professor Serge Lang and the nature of the charges against Huntington convinced many that Huntington was judged less on the basis of his scholarship than on the basis of his political opinions.

The fact that Huntington's "pure science" critics attacked all social science as based on opinion only slightly complicated the issue. Like all academic and scientific organizations, the National Academy of Science normally operates on the principle that scholarly qualities should be evaluated by fellow scholars trained in the methods and standards of the relevant field. But the high regard in which Huntington is held by fellow political and social scientists was overridden by people who found his association with the U.S. government *prima facie* evidence of his lack of full qualification as a "scientist."

In politicizing the consideration of Huntington, these academy members also politicized the National Academy of Science and broke down some hallowed barriers between politics and scholarship.

What are we to think of these cases? Is sex relevant to politics? Is politics relevant to the situation of a dead man's being commended by his bishop to God? Or by a political scientist considered for membership in a learned society? Each of these issues concerns the proper boundaries of politics.

Maintaining boundaries between politics and the rest of society has been a defining characteristic of liberal democracy, one that differentiates it from totalitarian states, where all society and all social relations are politicized. In totalitarian states, there are political criteria for admission to higher education and for entrance into preferred professions. There are political criteria for career advancement and for professional honors. There are political criteria for art, science, literature, music.

Liberal democratic societies not only believe that the power of government should be limited, they believe the domain of political relations should be strictly defined and most human relations and activities treated as "private" rather than "public." In this view, each domain should be judged by its own standards of excellence and not by political standards.

But the "totalitarian temptation," as Jean Francois Revel called it, is always

with us, tempting us to extend the boundaries of politics to make "private" morality and activities a "public" matter.

Freedom of the press, of religion and academic freedom are all the product of the fences we have built between politics on the one hand and private life and opinion on the other. *The Miami Herald*, Bishop McGann and the National Academy of Science have a large stake in preserving these fences—and their freedom.

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