

"Born Again" Candidate

BY ROBERT E. SEGAL

Three of the men who want to be elected President in November seem to have experienced a "born - again - Christian" phase in their lives.

Jimmy Carter, who still finds time to teach Sunday School, has made it clear from the early days of his political career that he is proud to be a Southern Baptist and a born - again Christian.

Ronald Reagan's father was an "Irish-American Catholic," his mother was a member of the Christian Church, the candidate himself says he made a conscious decision to accept Christ when baptized in the Church of Christ as a young boy, and now attends a Presbyterian Church in Bel Air, California.

John B. Anderson was brought up in the Evangelical Free Church of America and is reported to have had a conversion experience when only 9.

None of this trio of Presidential aspirants has had as much trouble about walking the high wire separating church and state as John F. Kennedy had in 1960.

But Mr. Anderson has been embarrassed about the haunting fact that in 1961, 1963, and 1965, he indicated support for a constitutional amendment proclaiming that this nation "devoutly recognizes the authority and law of Jesus Christ, Saviour and Ruler of nations, through whom are bestowed the blessings of Almighty God." John Anderson wishes with all his might now that he escaped getting caught on that flypaper. Some congressmen still call him "Saint John The Righteous," and he continues to say that "God is my campaign manager." But he has forthrightly declared that his religion, that of the Evangelical Free Church of America, has increasingly become a very

private thing, nor is he trying to create the image that religion is consuming him and is a part of his campaign.

Abe Lincoln, with courage and dignity, gave perhaps the best Presidential campaign answer to pietistic snoopers who came to him pressing their own religious preferences on him. Lincoln said he lacked allegiance to any specific creed but would unite gladly with that church which assented to the substance of the law declaring "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself," a Deuteronomic and Levitical pledge which sent his inquisitors away puzzled but apparently satisfied.

But in these days of a new drive, identifiable as "Washington for Jesus," the campaign for the American Presidency is colored by a strange clamor for forging piety -- primarily of an evangelical nature -- with a shrieking nationalism. We must be a mighty fortress not just for God but by virtue of billions of new dollars worth of military hardware; we must build a new morality by making war on abortion and not by creating jobs and protecting the dwindling financial resources of the poor; we must pray our way to prosperity for the comfortable and well - to - do while permitting human services for the mentally ill, the handicapped, and those who freeze in ill - heated ghetto tenements endure the agony of the neglected.

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Such trends seems to many of us the ultimate message of the Rev. Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority," of Dr. Richard Zone's "Christian Voice" and of newly - minted television and radio gospel criers who command mounting incomes by shouting their hosannas over the airways while warning of the wrath to come, if we fail to vote a straight ticket of right - wing reaction.

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