

**Faithful Citizenship, 2004-2008:
The U.S. Catholic Bishops'
Evolving Engagement with American Politics**

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The presidential election of 2004 was a challenging period for American Catholics. Religious faith always has been an important component of American political life, and religion's footprint on politics has grown steadily larger and more visible in the generation since creation of the Moral Majority and the divisions plaguing American politics over moral issues since the 1960s.¹ Senator John Kerry stepped into that environment, facing a president running for re-election who had manipulated religious voters more masterfully perhaps than any other in American politics, as the first Catholic to be his party's nominee for the nation's highest office since John F. Kennedy.² And, of course, John Kerry advocated abortion rights.

The question of John Kerry's worthiness for the presidency became quickly, in Catholic circles, as much a debate over his worthiness to receive the Eucharist. Not at all unlike the medieval behavior of the Church, when excommunication (literally, exclusion from the sacraments) could compel temporal leaders to adjust their political behavior, several American bishops made public statements in 2004 instructing Sen. Kerry not to present himself for Communion in their dioceses and archdioceses.³ The issue before

¹ Tracing the origins of historical or political phenomena such as this increasing Catholic moral consciousness of voter behavior and its political consequences always is a questionable and highly debatable proposition that seems more likely to end in frustration than precision. The factors named above suggest themselves as the most obvious origins. It is perhaps significant enough to note here also that formal U.S. diplomatic relations with the Holy See began in this period as well, in 1984.

² There is no pejorative intention or intention of hyperbole in my estimation of George W. Bush's manipulation of religious voters. A July 18, 2004 report of the Miami *Herald* found that the Bush/Cheney campaign had produced a 22-point plan to rally churches and churchgoers around the president's re-election campaign in an aggressive new strategy devised to take advantage of his considerable popularity among churchgoers. Among other things, the Bush/Cheney plan called on campaign volunteers to recruit members of their congregations and to submit their church directories to the campaign (presumably to supplement the campaign's mailing list). According to a CNN report, President Bush sought in a June 14, 2004 meeting with Angelo Cardinal Sodano for the Vatican to pressure U.S. bishops to get in line behind his candidacy: "The bishops aren't with me," he is reported to have complained. This was an extraordinary and unprecedented mobilization of churchgoers and, one may argue, exploitation of churches.

³ Those bishops included Bishop Fabian Bruskewitz of Lincoln, NE; Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis; Bishop Robert Vasa of Baker, OR; Bishop Peter Jugis of Charlotte; Bishop Robert Baker, then of Charleston, SC; and, Archbishop John Donoghue, then of Atlanta. Credit must go to Archbishop Burke

this study certainly is not to determine how Catholics best ought to oppose abortion through the political process. Indeed, were we to undertake such a question from the point of view cultivated by the rhetoric surrounding this problem we might be tempted to answer “No” to a question raised by the editors of *First Things* in 1996, whether it is possible for a Catholic in good conscience to support the American regime.⁴ Our present question, instead, concerns how the U.S. bishops have engaged these questions concerning abortion—and, importantly, other issues as well—in the years since the Kerry candidacy, as we look ahead to the 2008 presidential election.

Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, chairing a U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) task force on Catholics in public life, sought clarification from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) concerning these questions in 2004, and he received his reply in the form of an apostolic instruction authored by the then-Prefect for the CDF, then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. The instruction makes clear that, “in the case of a Catholic politician” who “consistently campaign[s] and vote[s] for

for a non-partisan consistency, as he gave the same instruction to Republican Rudolph Giuliani in the 2008 race.

⁴ The December, 1996 edition of *First Things* asked whether “we have reached or are reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime.” When we consider that the Democratic Party has held a pro-choice position since 1972, and when we consider also the fruits of Republican administrations, it seems as though neither major party can be a home for Catholics who will agree with the proposition that “Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion.” From John Ashcroft’s confirmation hearings as attorney general in 2001, to John Roberts’s confirmation hearings as chief justice in 2005, to the 2005 confirmation hearings for Samuel Alito, the nominees of at least one Republican president consistently have asserted the accumulating weight of the *Roe* precedent, two of those nominees (Ashcroft and Roberts) having described *Roe* as “settled law.” These more recent facts concerning Republican nominees correspond to statistical arguments that call into question Republican opposition to abortion, abortion rates having soared during the Reagan-Bush years of 1981-1993, and having declined during the Clinton years of 1993-2001. We also may observe that the Reagan/Bush/Bush presidencies included years during which *Roe v. Wade* was affirmed, rather than overturned. Indeed, if Catholics intend to take an approach to American politics that places abortion ahead of other moral issues then it seems the political cause is hopeless in the U.S. If care for this question must outweigh almost all others issues, then the question of how to participate becomes easy to answer. As John Paul II wrote in *Evangelium Vitae*, there is a “grave and clear obligation to oppose [abortion] by conscientious objection.” Neither voting for a Democrat nor for a Republican who follows the Reagan-Bush-Bush trajectory could be acceptable.

permissive abortion laws,” the exclusion of the Eucharist would be possible after meeting with “his Pastor” who is obliged to instruct the politician “about the Church’s teaching, informing him that he is not to present himself for Holy Communion until he brings to an end the objective situation of sin.”⁵ However, a long, significant, and somewhat odd “*nota bene*” is worth quoting at length:

A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate’s permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia. When a Catholic does not share a candidate’s stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons.⁶

The *nota bene* is odd first because it sets off such an important series of statements literally in parentheses. But it is odd no less for how it does not define what might or might not be “proportionate reasons.” Still, such a phrase as “precisely because” brings much apparent clarity, suggesting at least that, while a Catholic politician might still have some explaining to do at the Communion rail, the average Catholic voter who opposes abortion may still vote for incidentally pro-choice candidates and receive the Sacrament with an untroubled conscience.

The clarity we might hope had come for Catholic voters with that CDF instruction vanished quickly in 2004, as Archbishop Raymond Burke raised the bar and suggested that “If the Catholic voter votes for a candidate who is in favor of procured abortion, while the voter is clearly opposed to it, there must be some serious reason to justify it.”⁷ Already, the adjectival modifier has moved from “proportionate” to “serious.” Matters

⁵ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion,” §5.

⁶ Ratzinger, §5.

⁷ Barbara Kralis, “Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, the new ‘John Fisher,’” (August 5, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.catholic.org> on 11 April 2008.

grew even less clear by 2008 when Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver asked, “Can a Catholic in good conscience support a ‘pro-choice’ candidate?” He went on to offer his definitive reply: “The answer is: *I can’t and I won’t.*”⁸ Archbishop Chaput’s January column has excited considerable debate over the interpretation of the 2004 CDF instruction. On one side, bloggers such as Jeff Miller (www.splendoroftruth.com) and Jay Anderson (proecclesia.blogspot.com) have praised Archbishop Chaput for having offered “the purest definition” seen so far in efforts to define what the instruction may have meant by “proportionate reasons,” in such a way as to “Warn[] Catholics on Supporting Pro-Abortion Candidates.”⁹ At the same time, an organization calling itself Roman Catholics for Obama points to Archbishop Chaput’s column as evidence that, despite Archbishop Chaput’s own misgivings (in fact, omitting any reference to them), it may be acceptable for a Catholic to vote for a Democrat such as Barack Obama.¹⁰

The 2004 CDF instruction most certainly has not brought greater clarity to the problem, and with a new book by Archbishop Chaput on the horizon, timed to reach Catholic voters in time for the 2008 election (*Render Unto Caesar...*, due from

⁸ Archbishop Charles Chaput, “10 Points for Catholic Citizens to Remember,” *Denver Catholic Register* (January 16, 2008). Accessed at <http://www.archden.org/dcr/news.php?e=454&s=2&a=9553> on 11 April 2008. In fairness to Archbishop Chaput, his argument admitted subtlety with his recognition that some “serious Catholics” do support pro-choice candidates, and perhaps may not be wrong if “they support them *despite*—not because of—their ‘pro-choice’ views.” However, Archbishop Chaput does make clear that such Catholics are “mistaken” in their reasoning. Archbishop Chaput’s own feelings on the question, and the way in which he most likely would apply the Ratzinger instruction in the Archdiocese of Denver, seem quite clear.

⁹ Jeff Miller, “Catholic Identity in the American Public Arena” (January 16, 2008), accessed at <http://www.splendoroftruth.com/curtjester/archives/008631.php> on 12 April 2008. Archbishop Chaput’s definition, found in this blog posting and in the original *Denver Catholic Register* column: “It’s the kind of reason we will be able to explain, with a clean heart, to the victims of abortion when we meet them in the next life—which we certainly will. If we’re confident that these victims will accept our motives, then we can proceed.” Also: Jay Anderson, “Archbishop Chaput Warns Catholics on Supporting Pro-Abortion Candidates” (February 14, 2008), accessed at: <http://proecclesia.blogspot.com/2008/02/archbishop-chaput-warns-catholics-on.html> on 12 April 2008.

¹⁰ See the text that introduces the link to Archbishop Chaput’s column at <http://www.romancatholicsforobama.com/r.html>.

Doubleday in August), it seems clear that the dilemmas faced by Catholic voters in the 2004 stand to be re-visited later this year, even without a Catholic candidate on the ballot. With those facts in mind, we shall first examine closely the engagement of the U.S. bishops with political issues, with special emphasis on the years 2004-2008. With that done, we shall take an inventory of the issues that look ahead to the 2008 presidential election. We shall conclude with some observations about the state of the Catholic vote and what might be some sensible directions for Catholic voter education to follow.

Faithful Citizenship

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has published a Catholic voter's guide for each presidential election since 1976. The effort to assist Catholic voters in this way amid the pressing and difficult political questions that face them probably finds its root in *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, where the Council Fathers wrote that, "Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the earthly city; [and,] from priests they may look for spiritual light and nourishment."¹¹ To that end,

Bishops, to whom is assigned the task of ruling the Church of God, should, together with their priests, so preach the news of Christ that all the earthly activities of the faithful will be bathed in the light of the Gospel....By unremitting study they should fit themselves to do their part in establishing dialogue with the world and with men of all shades of opinion."¹²

¹¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, §43.

¹² *Gaudium et Spes*, §43. Perhaps it is worth pausing to quote from another passage in the same section as well: "Let the layman not imagine that his pastors are always such experts, that to every problem which arises, however complicated, they can readily give him a concrete solution, or even that such is their mission. Rather, enlightened by Christian wisdom and giving close attention to the teaching authority of the Church, let the layman take on his own distinctive role."

The work of these statements, collectively known under the title “Faithful Citizenship” sits in harmony with that goal, to recognize the influential role played by the laity in politics and to attempt to inform that influence with the moral requirements of Catholic teaching.

The bishops, in these guides, have been remarkably consistent in their emphasis of political issues. Each of the Faithful Citizenship guides since 1999 has emphasized:

- Abortion and euthanasia
- Marriage
- Peace-seeking and peace-building in foreign policy
- Poverty worldwide, especially among children
- The importance of affordable and accessible healthcare
- Discrimination based on race, religion, or gender

Yet, what perhaps is most remarkable is not the consistency of these documents, but the fluidity between each electoral cycle and the manner in which issues appear and disappear. Marriage, for example, is given a very brief, one-sentence treatment in the Faithful Citizenship statement of 1999, and there only in the sense of marriage as a “God-given” institution, among the “foundations for social life.”¹³ As we approached the 2004 election, that language had expanded considerably to say “Marriage must be protected as a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman and our laws should reflect this principle.”¹⁴ The language moves from a rather generic statement in 1999 which seems only to condemn divorce to a very specific response to the Supreme Court’s 2003

¹³ *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium* (October 1999).

¹⁴ *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (September 2003). By 2007, that call had grown in specificity to “Define the central institution of marriage as a union between one man and one woman” (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 2007).

decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* and the debates over marriage laws that followed. Similarly, while all of the Faithful Citizenship statements have referred voters to the Church's longstanding teachings on the morality of warfare, the 2003 statement gives this point particular emphasis in the midst of the Iraq War with special emphasis on "serious moral concerns and questions about preemptive or preventive use of force."¹⁵ It seems clear that these quadrennial documents are not mere re-treads, but instead respond thoughtfully to present political questions.

Certainly, since the 1999 guide which appeared for the 2000 presidential election cycle, the Faithful Citizenship statements have grown to be more subtle and carefully crafted, more sensitive to the issues they raise. For example, the 1999 and 2003 Faithful Citizenship statements both are careful to say that "As bishops, we do not seek the formation of a religious voting block, nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates."¹⁶ Yet this language is placed, both in its 1999 and in its 2003 iteration, in close proximity to statements that "We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which to address all issues," and that "For Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life and a framework for action," going so far as to quote a Vatican statement that "a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith

¹⁵ *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (September 2003).

¹⁶ *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium* (October 1999). The 2003 statement ("We do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote") and the 2007 statement ("we bishops do not intend to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote," §7) both contain similar language, presumably as inoculation against the scrutiny of the IRS. Our concern, as we shall see, is not the presence of the language so much as the development of this concept of advising voters.

and morals.”¹⁷ Even if, as the Vatican asserts, “A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church’s social doctrine does not exhaust one’s responsibility towards the common good,” we yet see reiterated in all of these Faithful Citizenship statements that, “Abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity,” as we hear that “Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle.”¹⁸ The conclusion is inescapable, and even the CDF has said so directly, that abortion and euthanasia are not morally equal to other political questions such as war, the death penalty, etc., and that they involve “moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation.”¹⁹ No one ever yet actually has come around to saying so directly, but there can be no mistaking why so many Catholics feel as though the Church leaves them no moral option but to vote for Republican candidates, and neither is it mysterious why President Bush has felt a sense of entitlement to the Catholic vote. To borrow a metaphor from an unlikely source, the unmistakable ‘emanations from the penumbra’ of these statements is that abortion and euthanasia should sit first in the mind of the Catholic voter who never should vote for a candidate or party that supports them. Indeed, looking back on Archbishop Charles Chaput’s foreclosing any reasonable chance of identifying proportionate reasons to ignore a

¹⁷ *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium* (October 1999), *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility* (September 2003). That quotation from a Vatican statement draws from: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, §4.

¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, §4. Also: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life*, §5. Also: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, §3.

¹⁹ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life*, §4.

candidate's pro-choice views, these selections from USCCB and Vatican statements provide vivid explanation for his position.

For all of these reasons, the appearance of a lengthy section of the 2007 Faithful Citizenship statement which addresses itself to "The Virtue of Prudence" is an especially salutary development. Prudence (*phronesis*, for Aristotle, *prudentia* for Aquinas) is a virtue recognized in the Christian and pre-Christian philosophers who have exerted so much influence on the development of the Catholic moral framework. The *Catechism*, as the bishops quote it in the 2007 statement, defines prudence as enabling us "to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it."²⁰ This invocation of prudence comes amid a most welcome recognition that "Decisions about political life are complex," and that "All the life issues are connected," including abortion and euthanasia, but also cloning, genetic research, the death penalty, war, hunger, poverty, healthcare, etc.²¹ Those thinly-veiled black-and-white political conclusions at which the last two Faithful Citizenship statements hinted are complicated tremendously by the recognition of how democratic decisionmaking in a pluralist state, across a range of urgent moral issues over which one's vote will have varying degrees of influence, forces difficult compromises if goods ever are to be achieved. What particularly is refreshing about the language of the 2007 statement is that this embrace of complexity and an element of democratic pragmatism carries with it no diminution of the moral weight of those questions regarded as "preeminent." Indeed, the 2007 statement

²⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §1806.

²¹ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §31 and §25. On the consistency of life issues, a quotation the bishops' statement drew from *Pacem in Terris* is especially wonderful and apt: "[each of us] has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life; these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and, finally, the social services" (John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, §11).

carries the strongest statement yet made by the USCCB concerning the preeminence of certain moral issues, that we are mistaken to pursue “a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity.”²²

Even further to complicate the picture, the 2007 statement pairs with that “moral equivalence” as a “mistake” the “misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity.”²³ This falls as a terrific blow to facile explanations of a Catholic political position or a means of describing a “Catholic vote,” even as it intensifies what each of these Faithful Citizenship documents has referred to variously as “not an easy [situation] for faithful citizenship” (1999) or a feeling of being “politically homeless” (2003) in American politics. On this view, a vote for either major American political party is fraught with moral ambiguities and yet we are reminded by the first encyclical letter of Pope Benedict XVI that “the direct duty to work for a just ordering of society is proper to the lay faithful,” again echoing that language of *Gaudium et Spes*.²⁴ Catholics must get their hands dirty in the political process, and this is the urgency of a discussion of prudence to sort through the competing priorities—a sorting that leads to no clear, precise answers and may lead different Catholics, weighing the issues, to different voting decisions.

The challenge set before the Catholic voter by the bishops in 2007—and, while onerous, perhaps the most honest framing of the challenge we have seen to date—is to acknowledge that “morally flawed laws already exist,” and that “the process of framing

²² *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §28.

²³ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §28.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, §29.

legislation to protect life is subject to prudential judgment and ‘the art of the possible.’”²⁵ Such a political approach embraces the achievement of lesser goods and the pursuit of incremental progress aimed at working to “improve protection for unborn human life,” for example, without focusing on the uncompromising and presently-unachievable goal of ending abortions and working to promote other goods that serve the cause of life.²⁶ The bishops’ focus no longer is on creating public policies in line with Catholic moral and social teaching and, instead, rests on the voters themselves who must work out their own salvation, and whose preferences will shape public policy. But, whatever the policy outcome, the emphasis first and foremost is in its most constructive place—on aiding individual Catholics who face complex and ambiguous moral problems on the road to salvation, sorting through the imperfect and unsatisfying choices that often face us. Seen that way, this is a far more helpful and—may we presume?—pastorally appropriate approach to the problem.

Yet the bishops have addressed another level of the problem of Catholic political action. It is true that the dilemma for Catholic voters, as we have seen its outlines here, poses a terrific challenge. But no less of a challenge, as the candidacy of Senator Kerry proved especially, has been the problem of how the Church can deal with Catholic political figures who take public positions at odds with the social and moral teachings of the Church. We know, too, that the problem has not vanished since the 2004 election. An Associated Press report during the April 2008 apostolic visit by Pope Benedict to the United States tells us that “Catholic members of Congress who publicly support the right

²⁵ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §32.

²⁶ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §32.

to abortion will trek to Nationals Park Thursday for a Mass celebrated by a pope who has said such lawmakers should not receive Communion.”²⁷ No lawmaker was reported to have been barred from the Sacrament at Nationals Park. Yet none of the bishops who restricted Senator Kerry from the Eucharist in 2004 is known to have reversed his position, and neither is the Holy Father’s own thinking on this subject unknown to us. When queried in a 2007 press conference whether Mexican politicians who support abortion rights should suffer excommunication by their local bishops, Pope Benedict replied, “Yes.” That position was re-emphasized by a spokesman for the pontiff, Rev. Federico Lombardi, during the 2008 visit to the United States, even as Father Lombardi went on to say that the Holy Father was not calling for the excommunication of anyone in particular.²⁸

Though we must take up this matter in its political dimension, it bears noting that this problem is a thorny theological and canonical conundrum. The deeper and more esoteric aspects of this issue are left best to theologians and canonists. Suffice, for these purposes, to say that the question of how to enforce Church discipline on lay Catholic political figures raises significant questions of Church governance and also about the role of bishops. In some cases, a political figure might find himself or herself *persona non grata* at the altar rail of his or her own home parish, but might drive just a few miles to a parish in a different diocese and have no difficulty at all—in fact, he or she would receive the Sacrament with a perfectly clear conscience. This would suggest that moral questions submit to geographical considerations, surely no reassurance of the integrity and

²⁷ Laurie Kellman, “Abortion-rights lawmakers to receive Communion” (16 April 2008), accessed 17 April 2008 at: http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9037ITO1&show_article=1.

²⁸ Laurie Kellman, “Abortion-rights lawmakers to receive Communion” (16 April 2008), accessed 17 April 2008 at: http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D9037ITO1&show_article=1.

universality of the Catholic tradition. At the same time, canon law pronounces each bishop to be the teacher and competent governor of his own diocese.²⁹ The thorny outlines of the Church's dilemma here should be quite clear to us.

That quite short *précis* of the canonical dilemma serves as a suitable introduction to the findings of the USCCB Interim Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians, led by Theodore Cardinal McCarrick in 2004. That task force, comprised of “the elected chairs of seven major committees” of the USCCB was charged by the bishops’ conference to address the “difficult challenge and...important task in addressing the question of how to deal with Catholics in public life who do not reflect the Church’s teaching in their votes and public actions.”³⁰ Explicitly rejecting the arguments made by Catholic politicians who defend their public positions on the grounds that “‘I’m personally opposed, but....,’ or ‘my votes are public and my faith is private,’ or ‘I vote my constituency, not just my own conscience,’” the task force sought to bring some regularity to the imposition of sacramental penalties among the nation’s hundreds of Catholic bishops. In its final report (submitted to the USCCB on November 17, 2004, several days after the presidential contest between George W. Bush and John Kerry had concluded), the task force made several recommendations:

1. The Committee on Doctrine, with assistance from the Committee on

²⁹ “A diocesan bishop in the diocese committed to him possesses all the ordinary, proper and immediate power which is required for the exercise of his pastoral office except for those case which the law or a decree of the Supreme Pontiff reserves to the supreme authority of the Church or to some other ecclesiastical authority” (*Code of Canon Law* 381§1). Also: “Although they do not enjoy infallible teaching authority, the bishops in communion with the head and members of the college, whether as individuals or gathered in conferences of bishops or in particular councils, are authentic teachers and instructors of the faith for the faithful entrusted to their care; the faithful must adhere to the authentic teaching of their own bishops with a sense of religious respect” (*Code of Canon Law*, 753).

³⁰ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Interim Reflections: Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians,” June 15, 2004, accessed 17 April 2008 at: <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/intreflections.shtml>. Also: Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, “Opening Comments—Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians,” June 15, 2004, accessed 17 April 2008 at: <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/comments.shtml>.

Pastoral Practices, [will take] up the matter of Church teaching on the proper disposition to receive Holy Communion, not only for politicians, but for all of us.

2. There will be continuing consultation on the complex theological and canonical aspects of these matters within our Conference and with the Holy See.
3. The Task Force is developing resources and tools to help the bishops follow through on the commitments we made, namely:
 - a. We must keep our pledge to “teach more clearly.” The Task Force is developing a “Reader on Catholics in Public Life” with excerpts from Papal, Conciliar and USCCB statements on the responsibilities of Catholics in public life. This “reader” would be made available to bishops to be used as the basis for teaching, dialogue, and persuasion.
 - b. We pledged to do more “to persuade” all people that human life is precious and human dignity must be defended, and to help Catholics act on our principles in public life. To help us do this, we will share with each other examples of how bishops have undertaken efforts to engage, persuade, and mobilize the Catholic community.
 - c. We made a commitment to maintain communication with public officials who make decisions every day that touch issues of human life and dignity. We will continue to reach out to leaders in public life to explain our principles and to dialogue with them.
 - d. We affirmed that the Catholic community and Catholic institutions should “not honor” those who act in defiance of our fundamental moral principles. The Task Force plans to consult with leaders in Catholic education, Catholic health care, and Catholic social services to discuss how we can together best carry out this guidance.³¹

Perhaps what is gleaned most revealingly from quoting this report at such length is the absence of concrete proposals or solutions. Apart from pledges to continue to discuss the problem among themselves, with the Holy See, and in dialogue with Catholic public officials, the most concrete commitment made by the bishops was to the creation of a

³¹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Task Force on Catholics Bishops and Catholic Politicians—Report by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick,” 17 November 2004, accessed 18 April 2008 at: <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/mccarrick1104.shtml>.

reader for public officials. Even that step, which surely represents nothing either controversial or onerous, has not yet been taken as of this writing.

So little progress did the bishops' task force make toward resolving this problem that less than one year later then-Bishop Donald W. Wuerl of Pittsburgh (who soon would succeed Cardinal McCarrick as Archbishop of Washington) called for "some way in which the bishops can establish a process, mechanism or procedure' for appropriate national consistency."³² Citing to the range of concerns we here have surveyed already (the danger of a geographically-contingent moral framework, the competence of bishops as teachers and governors), then-Bishop Wuerl called for "an actual mechanism of the conference to facilitate some consensus and unified pastoral practice," as sure a sign as we are likely to find that the 2004 task force failed to arrive at any such thing.³³ Again, in 2006, the USCCB issued a Statement on Responsibilities of Catholics in Public Life over the signatures of Cardinal Keeler, Cardinal McCarrick, and Bishop DiMarzio that, again, recognizes the need for "more effective dialogue and engagement with all public officials, especially Catholic public officials," but still no goes no further than the 2004 task force report toward finding some effective resolution.³⁴ And so the question of how to deal with Catholics in public life remains at an impasse, witnessed even so recently as at Pope Benedict's Mass at Nationals Park where Catholic legislators whose public political positions identify them as pro-choice received the Sacrament consecrated by the

³² Jerry Filteau, "Bishop cites 'national impact' of denying politicians Communion," Catholic News Service, 18 August 2005, accessed 11 April 2008 at: <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0504718.htm>.

³³ Jerry Filteau, "Bishop cites 'national impact' of denying politicians Communion," Catholic News Service, 18 August 2005, accessed 11 April 2008 at: <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0504718.htm>.

³⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Statement on Responsibilities of Catholics in Public Life" (March 10, 2006), accessed 17 April 2008 at: <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2006/06-050.shtml>

hands of the pontiff who believes grounds exist for their excommunication, yet who recognizes that the problem is so complicated he has no particular wish to call for that or to deny them the Sacrament.

The prospects for a clearer and more constructive teaching that will instruct Catholic voters as individuals seems much more close to resolution, but the problem of how to deal with Catholic politicians continues to resist any easy settlement. We may ascribe the problem credibly at least in part to those thorny canonical issues concerning the office of the bishop. Yet something else at work in the problem of Catholic public officials who do not discharge the teachings of the church in the discharge of their office can be found in those rationales the bishops' task force identified in their 2004 report: "'I'm personally opposed, but....,' or 'my votes are public and my faith is private,' or 'I vote my constituency, not just my own conscience.'" The discipline of political science recognizes the legitimacy of these explanations, grouping them together generally under the description of a 'delegate model' of representation, a model acknowledged in political life at least so far back as the eighteenth century when Edmund Burke described it (which description indicated that some people demand such things from their representatives) even as he rejected it.³⁵

³⁵ Steven S. Smith, *et al*, *The American Congress* 4th ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 26. A delegate model of representation has the representative "faithfully present the views of his or her district or state in Congress." The trustee model sees the representative use "independent judgment about the interests of a district, state, or nation." To survive politically, most representatives mingle these approaches as circumstances dictate. Shortly after they elected him, Edmund Burke told his Bristol constituents that "it ought to be the happiness and glory of a representative to live in the strictest union, the closest correspondence, and the most unreserved communication with his constituents. Their wishes ought to have great weight with him; their opinion, high respect; their business, unremitting attention....But his unbiased opinion, his mature judgment, his enlightened conscience, he ought not to sacrifice to you, to any man, or to any set of men living. These he does not derive from your pleasure; no, nor from the law and the constitution. They are a trust from Providence, for the abuse of which he is deeply answerable. Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion"(Burke, "Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll," *Works* Vol. II, Boston:

The bishops assert that “Politics at its best is about persuading others,” and in the case of Catholic public officials we should assume the bishops hope for Catholic politicians to persuade their constituents that Catholic positions on the issues are correct. That is a fine idea whose spirit sits well with the best Catholic social thought of the twentieth century, from Jacques Maritain to the fathers of the Second Vatican Council. The considerable problem, however, is that the diverse voting population we find in a pluralist democracy is unlikely to elect Catholic politicians who disagree with them, in order to be persuaded of the Catholic position. Restricting Catholic public officials to the ‘trustee model’ of representation, where the legislator abides by his or her own conscience and hopes to persuade and teach constituents, will find Catholics elected only in places where Catholics already are in a majority. In all other places, it is hard to imagine the Catholic voice even could be heard at all. This should seem to any reasonable observer to pose a significant problem, and to find roots in a lack of democratic pragmatism which threatens to make desirable perfections the enemies of achievable goods. As in the discussion of the prudence that might guide voters to vote for an incidentally pro-choice candidate so that the Catholic position might be advanced on other issues, the most subtle and daunting implication before the Catholic bishop facing a pro-choice politician who might favor the Church position on capital punishment or healthcare is that to sanction such a politician for supporting abortion may silence the Catholic Church in politics on those other important issues. How many tangible sacrifices must be made by those who have no healthcare or those who work in dreadful conditions so that the Church can maintain the clarity and purity of her principles?

Little Brown & Co., 1884, 95). Significantly, those constituents did not return him to his Bristol seat after this statement of principle.

Arguments that abortion is more fundamental are persuasive, but no one should argue that it is fully responsive to the problem.

The difficulties facing Catholic voters, politicians, and bishops are multiplied by the genuine pluralism of American society, a pluralism that the bishops, much to their credit, praise in these documents. How to reach a satisfying resolution to these dilemmas continues to elude all of us.

Issues in Light of the 2007 USCCB Statement

When news outlets reported on the Vatican's identification of new forms of social sin in March 2008, it was as though the Ten Commandments had been whited out and re-written. Scarce little of theological nuance ever should be expected from mainstream news coverage, but this particular bit of reporting was extraordinary for the haste with which ordinarily reasonable people had been brought to think that the Vatican had re-thought the concept of sin entirely. It is difficult not to enjoy the nonsensical audacity of headlines that proclaim "Recycle or go to Hell!!"³⁶ But, probably, we are wiser to see something more subtle at work.

The new forms of social sin were nothing more than applications of older teachings to the new circumstances of a twenty-first century world. The proscription of littering and ecological recklessness is nothing other than a re-formulation of exhortations to stewardship that can be traced to the fourteenth century writings of Thomas Aquinas. Such willingness to re-examine sin and its applications to contemporary life stands squarely alongside the bishops' Faithful Citizenship statements, and their willingness

³⁶ This headline was reported in: Catholic News Agency, "Vatican bishop points to new social sins" (11 March 2008), accessed 18 April 2008 at: <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/new.php?n=12031>.

therein to respond to the evolving American political conversation (as was noted above at p. 6). We see that willingness reflected in the most recent bishops' statement quite powerfully.

Even though the *Catechism* condemns torture, no Faithful Citizenship statement prior to the most recent edition released in 2007 has even made mention of it.³⁷ Perhaps that is no surprise, since the *Catechism* is a document intended to stand for generations and must, therefore, address the full range of moral circumstances to accommodate itself to every foreseeable possibility. The Faithful Citizenship statements, after all, are timed for particular political cycles to instruct Catholic voters about the Church's teaching as it applies to political issues. Who, when the bishops began to issue these statements in 1975, ever would have dreamed it would be necessary for the Catholic Church to remind American voters that torture is not morally acceptable? Yet, the 2007 statement condemns torture in five separate instances.³⁸ Even more remarkably, the 2007 statement draws torture into the orbit of "direct threats to the sanctity of human life," mentioning torture alongside other issues in the same category as abortion and euthanasia (racism, embryonic stem cell research), identifying it as being "intrinsically evil."³⁹ There is, in Catholic moral terminology, no stronger phrasing available. It should also be clear that, even if a political official insists that "aggressive interrogation techniques" are not

³⁷ *Catechism* §§2297-2298. "Torture which uses physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred is contrary to respect for the person and for human dignity." Also: "In times past, cruel practices were commonly used by legitimate governments to maintain law and order, often without protest from the Pastors of the Church, who themselves adopted in their own tribunals the prescriptions of Roman law concerning torture. Regrettable as these facts are, the Church always taught the duty of clemency and mercy. She forbade clerics to shed blood. In recent times it has become evident that these cruel practices were neither necessary for public order, nor in conformity with the legitimate rights of the human person. On the contrary, these practices led to ones even more degrading. It is necessary to work for their abolition. We must pray for the victims and their tormentors."

³⁸ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §23, §29, §45, §64, and §88.

³⁹ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §23.

torture, the language of the *Catechism* (“physical or moral violence to extract confessions, punish the guilty, frighten opponents, or satisfy hatred”) is sufficiently plain that any average intellect can reach an appropriate conclusion about Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, or the much-debated practice of waterboarding. In other words, the bishops have complicated tremendously the easy identification of issues affecting human life with one particular political party or another. It is equally unacceptable, on this analysis, to support abortion and to support torture, or to vote for a candidate because he or she supports them.

Yet, while the evolving statements of the bishops have engaged more deeply a wide variety of issues that further complicate the task of the partisan voter and implicate every Catholic voter in the serious moral consequences of his or her citizenship, much remains the same as we look forward to the 2008 presidential election. Indeed, all present indications suggest that, in the 2008 electoral cycle, the issues that bishops will identify for special focus of Catholic political action will be much the same as they have been in the past, despite some considerable evolution in how those issues are described and approached. This is not altogether surprising, certainly, since the Church never has changed gears quickly in the first place and, in any event, certainly much work remains to be done across the range of those dependable issues we see come to the fore when the bishops address themselves to a new electoral cycle. Ecological consciousness and torture are growing in significance as issues. But if such things supplanted those other issues like abortion or euthanasia, that indeed would be cause for surprise.

We can look, for a representative example, to the days leading up to the congressional elections of 2006 when Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis took up a

proposed amendment to the Missouri state constitution that now permits embryonic stem cell research since its approval by Missouri voters. Archbishop Burke's opposition to the Missouri amendment is not remarkable for our purposes here, nor were his arguments against it, since all were in line with the traditional teachings of the Church. Somewhat more remarkable was the overall tone of his last column in the *St. Louis Review*, his archdiocesan newspaper, before the November 2006 election. Perhaps in fairness we should observe that the constitutional amendment was a particular and unique event that preoccupied Archbishop Burke's attention. Nevertheless, the 2006 election was viewed nationally as a referendum on Bush Administration policy in the War on Terror.⁴⁰ The fact that, when Archbishop Burke wrote about "the protection of the fundamental right to life" in that column, no mention is made at all of larger issues—including conduct in war and torture, which seem to have grown in the consciousness of the bishops since 2003—may tell us something about how slowly the consideration of torture as an unequivocal life issue is entering the political analysis of the bishops.⁴¹

Further to that point, we have examined already another bishop who has come to be identified with the question of Catholics in political life, Archbishop Charles Chaput of Denver. Perhaps there is no American bishop more consistently outspoken on the subject of Catholics in public life (and, surely no other has a book on the subject presently forthcoming), and yet the issues highlighted by Archbishop Chaput in his most recent comments follow the lines of the issues given the most attention in 2000 and in

⁴⁰ "The political pendulum in American politics swung away from the right yesterday, putting an end to the 12-year Republican Revolution on Capitol Hill and delivering a sharp rebuke of President Bush and the Iraq war" (Peter Baker and Jim VandeHei, "A Voter Rebuke For Bush, the War And the Right," *Washington Post* 8 November 2006, A1).

⁴¹ Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, "Voting for family and life on Nov. 7," *St. Louis Review* (3 November 2008), accessed 20 April 2008 at: <http://www.stlreview.com/abpcolumn.php?abpid=11777>.

2004. Indeed, a search of Archbishop Chaput's public comments and published columns over the last four years does not find any condemnation of torture, nor any endorsement of environmental consciousness as a moral necessity. Again, this is not to identify any fault in Archbishop Chaput's political analysis, but only to illustrate once more that those issues, despite their prominence in the 2007 Faithful Citizenship statement (indeed, despite the great emphasis placed on torture), are slow to gain traction at the practical level of how bishops are approaching the questions.

There are hundreds of bishops in the U.S. Conference, and these examples are drawn only from two of the more outspoken bishops on the subject of faith in public life. Yet it seems fair to say that these examples illustrate a larger point—the U.S. bishops, and the Church more generally, can be a bit cautious in their response to the changing political and moral climate. Those notable statements of the 2007 Faithful Citizenship document aside, the heavy focus of the bishops' engagement with political action remains on the durable issues of abortion, euthanasia, and marriage primarily. And, of course, those issues must claim a strong focus. Still, perhaps, there is not only a missed opportunity here for us to recognize, but some danger as well.

Some of the most recent polling done on the subject finds that, "In America, 61 percent of those surveyed agreed torture is justified at least on rare occasions."⁴² Far more disturbing, a contemporaneous Pew Research Center poll broke that polling down according to religious denomination, finding in its aggregate respondents a figure (63% of the population at large approved of torture in some circumstances) comparable to the rate found among the population at large by that AP poll. However, when Catholic

⁴² Associated Press, "Poll finds broad approval of terrorist torture" (9 December 2005), accessed 18 April 2008 at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10345320>. Those numbers actually rise to near ninety percent in other parts of the Western world.

respondents were separated out we found that a startling 72% of Catholics approved of torture.⁴³ That difference of 9% is too large for any anomaly due to the methodology of the poll. Indeed, Catholic approval of torture ran ahead of white Protestants (65%), white evangelicals (65%), and even secular/non-religious voters (51%), identifying Catholics unmistakably as the most solid foundation of pro-torture sentiment in American public opinion. This is problematic for at least two very important—and, almost entirely self-evident—reasons. First, so far as Catholic moral teaching describes torture as being “intrinsically evil,” which is to say actions that “must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned,” it is evident that the Catholic faithful are crying out for clearer instruction from their bishops if some 72% of that flock finds that torture might be “justified...against suspected terrorists in order to gain important information.”⁴⁴ Second, and equally disturbing, the Pew poll raises a tough question: If conscience must be “well-formed,” if a critical “role” is played by the Church and the bishops “in the formation of conscience, and if the well-formed conscience must reject what is intrinsically-evil, then how can it be that secular/non-religious voters reject torture at such a markedly higher rate (21% fewer support torture) than Catholics? The 2007 Faithful Citizenship statement reflects a courageous effort to address these problems. However, the statements and actions of individual bishops since the publication of that statement have not done much to advance the goal of teaching Catholic voters.

⁴³ Tom Carney, “Americans, especially Catholics, approve of torture,” *National Catholic Reporter* (24 March 2006), accessed 18 April 2008 at: http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/032406/032406h.htm.

⁴⁴ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §22. Also: Tom Carney, “Americans, especially Catholics, approve of torture,” *National Catholic Reporter* (24 March 2006), accessed 18 April 2008 at: http://ncronline.org/NCR_Online/archives2/2006a/032406/032406h.htm.

The important point here, perhaps, is that while opposing torture is morally urgent, the even more critical issue from a Catholic perspective is the scandal of this Catholic support for torture. Scandal is important to the Catholic moral understanding, linked insuperably to the credibility of Catholic moral teaching. When Catholic bishops and institutions issue rebukes or appear to shun a public figure because he or she supports abortion rights, it is because the bishop must not ‘give scandal’ to his flock.⁴⁵ The absence of a stronger, more unified effort to teach the Catholic faithful in such a way that fewer Catholics would support what is intrinsically evil, even as torture remains an issue debated in the headlines, does not place the emphasis on other morally urgent problems in the most favorable light possible.

At least one additional problem exists, one other possible source of scandal amid the teaching of the bishops on faith in public life. Gallup polling finds that 75% of Americans believe that we will begin to see the effects of global warming within their lifetimes, or sooner.⁴⁶ The scientific verdict remains a subject of debate in some circles, but the direction followed by overwhelming numbers of scientific authorities sees the planet itself in permanent ecological peril. The 2007 Faithful Citizenship statement reflects that, and the bishops’ conference “offers a distinctive call to seriously address

⁴⁵ “Scandal is an attitude or behavior which leads another to do evil. The person who gives scandal becomes his neighbor's tempter. He damages virtue and integrity; he may even draw his brother into spiritual death. Scandal is a grave offense if by deed or omission another is deliberately led into a grave offense. Scandal takes on a particular gravity by reason of the authority of those who cause it or the weakness of those who are scandalized. It prompted our Lord to utter this curse: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Scandal is grave when given by those who by nature or office are obliged to teach and educate others. Jesus reproaches the scribes and Pharisees on this account: he likens them to wolves in sheep's clothing. Scandal can be provoked by laws or institutions, by fashion or opinion” (*Catechism* §§2284-2286).

⁴⁶ Accessed 18 April 2008 at: <http://www.pollingreport.com/enviro.htm>.

global climate change.”⁴⁷ Yet a profound question hangs unasked by that distinctive call. The rationale by which the Catholic moral tradition identifies intrinsic evils lies in when something poses a “direct[] attack on life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others.”⁴⁸ If the highest priority is reserved for those issues at the foundation of human life, which concern the integrity of life itself (abortion, euthanasia), and if we accept the hypothesis posed by the scientific community which sees the planet on which every living thing depends in peril (“global climate change”), how can environmental recklessness not rank as intrinsic evil? The question, it should be noted, derives not so much from any certainty that irresponsible care for the Earth ranks with abortion or euthanasia. Instead, again, it is a question related to scandal. 75% of Americans believe that the peril exists, and are persuaded by the consensus of the scientific community. If the risk of global climate change does not demand the moral attention of the Catholics as any fundamental threat to life does, then it seems necessary to clarify the distinction, as vast majorities seem to appreciate the threat on that level. At the same time, if climate change is such a moral issue, then that case must be made more distinctively. In either case, again the specter of scandal looms over the issue.

Hopefully this does not come across as nitpicking the teachings of the bishops. Indeed, nothing could be farther from the purpose of this study. The identification of climate change and, especially, torture as moral issues is, to repeat the point, a courageous step forward and a constructive deepening of the Catholic political dialogue for which the U.S. Conference should draw marked praise. Indeed, we might say in chief

⁴⁷ *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007), §87.

⁴⁸ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics* (1998), §5.

that this discussion of the issues here points to the urgency of prudence and the difficulty of making political calculations, again a fact that has been recognized by the 2007 statement. Life seems to grow more complicated by the day, and political life with it. So far as the bishops continue to embrace this complexity, and to highlight the necessity of a careful prudence amid the complexity, in their teaching, so much for the better.

If anything, as the bishops' 2007 statement appears to make plain, the difficulties for Catholic voters and the bishops who lead them, are multiplying more quickly than ever.

Cooperatores Veritas

In his homily at Yankee Stadium during his 2008 apostolic journey to the United States, Pope Benedict called on Americans to reject “a false dichotomy between faith and political life.”⁴⁹ His call corresponds well to the bishops' rejection of Catholic politicians' rationales in the 2003 Faithful Citizenship statement, as well as to the more general objections to the distinctions between public and private life that have been a part since the Second Vatican Council, and even before.⁵⁰ The American tendency to draw lines between public and private activity long have been a source of difficulty and

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, Homily, Mass of the Fifth Sunday of Easter, Yankee Stadium, New York (20 April 2008), accessed 22 April 2008 at: http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/homilies/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_hom_20080420_yankee-stadium-ny_en.html.

⁵⁰ “...there is no human activity - even in secular affairs - which can be withdrawn from God's dominion” (*Lumen Gentium* §36). More generally, the nineteenth century Roman Catholic Church lamented the separation of church and state that derives from the separation of public from private spheres. We see in the encyclical letter of Leo XIII, *Longinqua Oceani*, this sentiment expressed clearly: “it would be very erroneous to draw the conclusion that in America is to be sought the type of the most desirable status of the Church, or that it would be universally lawful or expedient for State and Church to be, as in America, dissevered and divorced”(LO §6). Though the Church now praises the “genuine pluralism” found in the United States fostered by the division of private and public interests, it is clear that the discomfort evidenced so recently by Pope Benedict has a long pedigree in the Church's engagement with American politics.

frustration for Catholics, and that fact shows no sign of changing. Political life in the United States, as around the developed world, creates these vexing circumstances as the natural and inevitable result of the “genuine pluralism” praised by the U.S. bishops and by the documents of the Second Vatican Council.⁵¹

Many times so far this survey of the recent teachings of the U.S. bishops has praised the entry of a serious discussion of prudence into the calculation of political decisionmaking, as a constructive recognition of how complex the moral task of the Catholic voter (or, Catholic public official) truly is. To find the beginning of that entry, we may be wisest to look to that instructive *nota bene* issues by the CDF over Cardinal Ratzinger’s signature in 2004. The subtlety of the distinction between “remote cooperation” and “formal material cooperation” of the Catholic voter in the decisions of political officials and public policy commands our attention for its keen perception of the complexity of our circumstances, as much as for the utility it offers as a way in which to negotiate those circumstances. But most, we are right to see that *nota bene* as the beginning of a shift in tone on Catholics in political life which seems to be now blooming under the papacy of Benedict XVI.

⁵¹ “No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. On the contrary, following in the footsteps of the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, this sacred synod ardently implores the Christian faithful to “maintain good fellowship among the nations” (1 Peter 2:12), and, if possible, to live for their part in peace with all men,(14) so that they may truly be sons of the Father who is in heaven” (*Nostra Aetate*, §5). Also: “the usages of society are to be the usages of freedom in their full range: that is, the freedom of man is to be respected as far as possible and is not to be curtailed except when and insofar as necessary....Wherefore this Vatican Council urges everyone, especially those who are charged with the task of educating others, to do their utmost to form men...who will come to decisions on their own judgment and in the light of truth, govern their activities with a sense of responsibility, and strive after what is true and right, willing always to join with others in cooperative effort. Religious freedom therefore ought to have this further purpose and aim, namely, that men may come to act with greater responsibility in fulfilling their duties in community life”(*Dignitatis Humanae*, §§7-8).

The many citations of the 2007 Faithful Citizenship statement to the first encyclical letter of Pope Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, also tell an important story, and we should look to a particular passage from that encyclical for our guidance as to why:

The Church's social teaching...recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice....As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.⁵²

In its substance, this passage does not reflect any innovation of the Church's approach to political questions since the Second Vatican Council. The clarity and the urgency with which Pope Benedict places the Church's political involvement on the shoulders and in the life of each individual believer, however, marks a change in *how* the Church discusses Catholic political action. The focus moves off specific policy outcomes (ending abortions, prohibiting stem cell research, etc.) and directly into the mind and soul of the believer who must understand what justice requires less for political purposes than for the deepest of religious reasons—his or her own spiritual commitments demand it. The existential burden that this emphasis places on the shoulders of the ordinary believer is awesome, and we see it in the newest Faithful Citizenship document of the U.S. bishops.

As cardinal, Joseph Ratzinger took as his motto: "*Cooperatores Veritas*," "co-workers in the truth." Perhaps when Cardinal Ratzinger wore the hat of doctrinal enforcer at the CDF it was too tempting to focus all of our attention on the last half of that motto, its reference to an inflexible, objective truth. The papacy of Benedict XVI seems to reveal how necessary it is for us to recover an appreciation of the first half of

⁵² Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* §28.

that cardinalial motto. The work must be done by individual believers, and perhaps we hear this as well in Benedict's assertion that "believers hold all things in common."⁵³ This description of Christian community (*koinonia*) is drawn from the Acts of the Apostles and contextually it refers to the material possessions that otherwise would distinguish rich from poor, but it admits to a wider application. The importance of our working in the truth is dual: we each must do the work ourselves, and yet the work only is meaningful and fruitful if it is done together. The Church provides a structure and an organization for this work, yet the work remains our own just as salvation is for each our own.

In the statements of the U.S. bishops between 2004 and 2008 we see a distinctive change of emphasis, a change we may credibly attribute to the influence of Pope Benedict. There can be no doubting this is a salutary development in the Church's engagement with political action, though as we have seen in the discussions of torture and global climate change, it is an emphasis only slowly creeping into the individual words and deeds of U.S. bishops.

⁵³ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* §20.