

Faith and the Public Square: How the Year of Faith is meant to impact Catholic Citizenships

I. Introduction

- A. Cardinal Francis George of Chicago last week wrote a column in his Archdiocese's newspaper that has raised a lot of eyebrows because he confirmed some words that he had said off-the-cuff a couple of years ago that have taken almost prophetic significance. To stress what the ongoing secularization of our society could bring he said that he expected to die in bed, his successor would die in prison and his successor would die a martyr in the public square, but his successor would pick up the shards of a ruined society and slowly help rebuild civilization." The words were not an attempt to dissuade anyone from wanting to be the next Archbishop of Chicago, but to highlight what he thought was the main issue faithful Catholics must face in the public square. He said that that "the secularizing of our culture is a much larger issue than political causes or the outcome of the current electoral campaign, important though that is." After describing the terrible harm done by atheistic communion, which, "imposed a total way of life based upon the belief that God doesn't exist," he said, "Secularism is communism's better-scrubbed bed-fellow." Like Communism, it's seeking to implement a total way of life based on the premise that God doesn't exist.
- B. Once upon a time, secularists mostly minded their own business, except for those in the ACLU who would sue so that there would be no mention of God at graduation and football games, no crèche on public property, no mention of God in the Pledge of Allegiance. But secularists have become far more militant and radical and have started to use the organs of government to try to suppress religious belief, religious freedom and freedom of conscience.
- C. Nowhere is this more plain than in the attempts of the present presidential administration, various state governments and various judges to force believers to violate their consciences to cooperate in what they consider evil. Pope Benedict called it out in January in a meeting with visiting US bishops, when we described "powerful new cultural currents that are not only directly opposed to core moral teachings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but increasingly hostile to Christianity as such.... an extreme individualism, seek[ing] to promote notions of freedom detached from moral truth. ... a radical secularism that finds increasing expression in the political and cultural spheres. ... Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion. Many of you have pointed out that concerted efforts have been made to deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholic individuals and institutions with regard to cooperation in intrinsically evil practices. Others have spoken to me of a worrying tendency to reduce religious freedom to mere freedom of worship without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience."
- D. This is a problem that's not exclusive to the United States. Two years ago, when he was in Scotland, Pope Benedict considered the dangers posed by the "more aggressive forms of secularism" in a Mass celebrated in Glasgow's Bellahouston Park. He called attention to the "dictatorship of relativism" that is threatening British society by obscuring "the unchanging truth about man's nature, his destiny and his ultimate good." He said that there are some who are seeking "to exclude religious belief from public discourse, to privatize it or even to paint it as a threat to equality and liberty." When religious belief is excluded, he stressed, society — even a cultured society like Britain, built on the foundation of Christian "cult" — will devolve into nothing more than a "jungle of self-destructive and arbitrary freedoms."
- E. Secularism, as Pope Benedict has defined it, is living *si Deus non daretur*, "as if God were not a given." For militant or aggressive secularists, however, it's not enough for them to live as if God does not exist, but they want to force their practical atheism on everyone else, at least in public. They may concede the right to "freedom of worship," meaning the liberty to spend one's free time going to the Church, synagogue or mosque, but they want to restrict — as we must sadly but candidly admit President Obama's administration has been doing, both home and internationally — the right to "religious freedom," meaning the liberty to live one's faith publicly.
- F. This goes hand-in-hand with a denial of any prerogatives of conscience: if everyone needs to live as if God doesn't exist, then no one can claim to be hearing and following God's voice in the inner sanctuary of

conscience. That's why for secularists no one can be granted exceptions to being forced to comply with the secularist push for the concocted rights to abortion-on-demand and husbandless or wifeless marriages.

- G. The secularists seek to suppress not only expressions of faith but actually living out the faith in the light of conscience. That's one of the reasons why they're going after the Church's charities. This occurs not only whenever the Church's charity is linked to a truth claim that is offensive to secularist morés — for example, with regard to abortion or the real meaning of marriage. But it also occurs, I think, because in the final analysis, many secularists despise the practice of religion — real religion, which is not a weekend social club but something that someone really believes and lives, that binds the person in conscience to the truth, with moral absolutes antithetical to secularist libertinism — more than they appreciate the charity that flows from religion. Therefore they would more easily want to shut down the work of the Church in helping sex trafficking victims, or rebuilding lives in Haiti, or caring for 6 million patients a year in hospitals, or educating even more in Catholic schools, or arranging for adoptions of children in homes with married couples, or helping drug addicts, battered women, at risk teens or any of the other hundreds of programs through Catholic Charities, than to allow those in the Church to do this while not having to compromise on truths that make secularists uncomfortable.
- H. Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia, the most prophetic voice in the Church in the United States, went to Slovakia a couple of years ago to support the Church there after 50 years of suffering under Nazi and Soviet regimes. While he was there, he examined what happens when a society tries to order itself as if God did not exist and when those who do believe in God fail adequately to resist this secularizing trend. He called upon Catholics in the West to recognize the signs of the times and not to be caught asleep as a dictatorship of practical atheism seeks to “repudiate the Christian roots and soul of our civilization.” His analysis, sobering at times, needs to be considered by all those who care about the future of the Church, the future of our country and the survival of western civilization.
1. Archbishop Chaput began by giving the Slovaks a brief history of what helped to make the United States of America historically great and free in contrast to the bloodshed that bathed many parts of Europe after the Enlightenment: the positive role of faith in American culture. America, he stressed, was established as a non-sectarian state, but one in which faith was expected and fostered as a pre-requisite for a free society. Contrary to the opinions of revisionist secularist historians today, the founding fathers had “no desire for a radically secularized public life,” Archbishop Chaput stated. “They had no intent to lock religion away from public affairs. On the contrary, they wanted to guarantee citizens the freedom to live their faith publicly and vigorously, and to bring their religious convictions to bear on the building of a just society.”
  2. The danger today is, he continued, that in both the U.S. and in Europe, “we face an aggressively secular political vision and a consumerist economic model that result — in practice, if not in explicit intent — in a new kind of state-encouraged atheism. To put it another way: The Enlightenment-derived worldview that gave rise to the great murder ideologies of the last century remains very much alive. Its language is softer, its intentions seem kinder, and its face is friendlier. But its underlying impulse hasn't changed — that is, the dream of building a society apart from God.” He said that their vision “presumes a frankly ‘post-Christian’ world ruled by rationality, technology and good social engineering. Religion has a place in this worldview, but only as an individual lifestyle accessory. People are free to worship and believe whatever they want, so long as they keep their beliefs to themselves and do not presume to intrude their religious idiosyncrasies on the workings of government, the economy, or culture.”
  3. Despite the “rhetoric of enlightened, secular tolerance,” government agencies in the United States, he explained, “now increasingly seek to dictate how Church ministries should operate, and to force them into practices that would destroy their Catholic identity. Efforts have been made to discourage or criminalize the expression of certain Catholic beliefs as ‘hate speech.’ Our courts and legislatures now routinely take actions that undermine marriage and family life, and seek to scrub our public life of Christian symbolism and signs of influence. In Europe, we see similar trends, although marked by a more open contempt for Christianity.” He drew stark conclusions from these trends: “These are not the actions of governments that see the Catholic Church as a valued partner in their plans for the 21st century. Quite the opposite: these events suggest an emerging, systematic discrimination against the Church that now seems inevitable.”

- I. In the midst of these great challenges coming to the Church from secularism, which impacts the way individual believers and ecclesial institutions are viewed and exist in society, Pope Benedict has called a Year of Faith. This holy year began on October 11 and runs through November 24. The Year of Faith is the Church's response, the counterrevolution, to militant secularism. Whereas secularism seeks to live — and force others to live — as if God did not exist, Christians are called to live by faith and walk by faith, to live knowing that God exists, to be his good servants first and therefore better citizens, to let their faith overflow in works of charity.
- J. Archbishop Chaput said in Slovakia that the response of believers needs to be to resist the falsities and euphemisms — the lies — of secularism by living according to the truth that makes us free. Archbishop Chaput said that for Christians, living within the truth means living according to Jesus Christ, “proclaiming the truth of the Christian Gospel, not only by our words but by our example. It means living every day and every moment from the unshakeable conviction that God lives, and that his love is the motive force of human history and the engine of every authentic human life. It means believing that the truths of the Creed are worth suffering and dying for. Living within the truth also means telling the truth and calling things by their right names. And that means exposing the lies by which some men try to force others to live.” The two main lies he said was that Christianity was of relatively minor importance in the development of the West and that Western values and institutions “can be sustained without a grounding in Christian principles,” that relativism is an adequate civil religion and public philosophy for us” in the West. Without a grounding in God or in a higher truth than public consensus, he said, “our democratic institutions can very easily become weapons against our own human dignity, [through] a form of intimate violence that clothes itself in democracy [wherein] the will to power of the strong is given the force of law to kill the weak.” That despotism of might-makes-right — seen for example those who are older, bigger, stronger, richer take the lives of those who are smaller, weaker, younger and more vulnerable in the womb — is “where we are heading in the West today,” he warned, and needs to be resisted, as the Slovaks resisted the totalitarians of the nazist and communist murder regimes. This resistance, he added, must come not just from “Church professionals” but from “every serious believer.” The whole Church is called to imitate the Slovakian heroes of the faith and become a “believing community of resistance.” Such a community, he said, will call things by their true names, “really believe what we say we believe,” and be willing to prove God is real by the witness of their lives in the midst of a world that is on the verge of forgetting him. “The renewal of the West depends overwhelmingly,” he concluded, on Christian families, parishes and dioceses beginning to live out this faithful communal resistance in the truth.
- K. So that's the larger context of what I'm going to be speaking about tonight, something far more consequential than the important issue of the elections that will be decided one week from today. Catholics are being called in this Year of Faith to “really believe what we say we believe” and act on it, as good citizens serving the genuine common Good. I'd like to focus in this talk:
  1. First on why and how the Church involves itself in the political arena. The secularists push an exaggerated notion of the separation of Church and state by which they mean the permanent exclusion of God and faith in Him from all public and political life. Some express outrage that the Church would comment on issues of political importance at all, as if this were de facto some type of mortal sin against a pseudo-biblical moral code published by the I.R.S. Others have embraced the Church's living out its commission to be salt, light and leaven when pastors speak out against certain issues with which they agree, but have become apoplectic when the Church speaks about issues with which they either dissent or simply do not take as seriously as the Church does. In this Year of Faith, all in the Church are called to see how we are called to the bring God and the truths he has made known to all of us by reason to the public square to prevent our society from becoming a jungle of self-destructive and arbitrary freedoms.
  2. Then I would like to turn to how individual Catholics are called to behave in the public square, particularly the political arena. There's a story told of a married man who as soon as he got into his car took off his wedding ring. He didn't want the reality of his marriage to impact how he would do his job and how people would look at him. Most people see that as a cop-out and a sign of a weak marriage. Yet many Catholics, pushed by the secularism of our culture, think that she should leave their faith at home or in the Church when they go to work, or school, sporting events, or polling booths. But our covenant with God in faith is supposed to be even more of a defining reality for us than the covenant of marriage

is between a husband and a wife. We shouldn't take off our faith as we live our life. We'll examine the guidance of the Church in how to do it.

3. Thirdly, we'll take a quick look, on the basis of this year of faith, how those who serve us in public office are called to live and act together with God in their public decisions.

## II. Faithful Catholic Citizenship

### A. What is the role of Catholic faith in politics in general?

1. Answering that question has been one of the major objectives of Pope Benedict in his travels abroad. I'd like to highlight some of what he's said and draw some conclusions from it for our own situation here.
2. During his customary press conference on "Shepherd One" with journalists traveling with him on the plane to Mexico last year, Pope Benedict was asked about the Church's response to widespread narcoterrorism and the massive social disparity between rich and poor. Both realities, the journalists implied, were incompatible with Catholic principles in a country in which the vast majority of citizens are Catholic. In his response the pope not only gave a concise primer on moral theology, but also on the importance and the scope of the Church's involvement in politics and public morality that extends far beyond the Rio Grande.
3. "Inasmuch as politics should be a moral reality," the Holy Father said, "the Church fundamentally has to do with politics." Even though this insight is obvious, it is nevertheless bound to be controversial in an age in which many hold to a separation of Church and state so strict as to try to mute the Church in public questions and reduce the Church's influence only to questions of private morality. Because political decisions are good and evil, however, the pope says that the Church must be involved.
4. The Church's "first thought" with regard to politics is "to educate consciences and thereby to awaken the necessary responsibility." The Church has a "great responsibility . . . to teach moral responsibility and to expose evil." With regard to drug trafficking and violence, he said, the Church has to unveil the "idolatry of mammon that only enslaves people and to expose the false promises, untruthfulness and cheating that are behind drugs." Few journalists and citizens would object to the Church's prophetic work in these areas. Many in fact have praised the heroic involvement of some Church figures in the moral war against the drug culture and the mafia that profits from and violently protects this fallen way of life. Likewise, with respect to the vast socioeconomic disparity between rich and poor, most applaud the Church's efforts to apply the Church's social teaching to help people discover the "essential models for political collaboration, especially in order to surmount this social, antisocial division that unfortunately exists."
5. This involvement, however, shows the importance of the Church's educating consciences "both in individual and public ethics," the pope said. "And here, perhaps, something is missing." Then the pope used an expression that certainly caught the journalists' attention. "In Latin America, and also elsewhere, among many Catholics a certain schizophrenia exists between individual and public morals: personally, in the private sphere, they are Catholics and believers but in public life they follow other trends that do not correspond with the great values of the Gospel which are necessary for the foundation of a just society. It is therefore necessary to teach people to overcome this schizophrenia, teaching not only individual morality but also public morality."
6. Over the course of the last few decades in our country, this type of schizophrenia has been popularized as a civic duty by certain prominent Catholic political figures who claimed that they were personally opposed to practices that the Church justly condemns but that they were publicly tolerant or supportive of these same practices. But it has also been practiced by many believers who consciously violate in their public decision-making and behavior what they know the Church teaches as objectively immoral. Benedict exposes such lack of internal consistency for what it is: a type of schizophrenia in one's conscience and moral life. And the pope's choice of terminology is not only highly descriptive but also quite important as a first step in seeking to address the underlying issues to believers, society and the Church from such a lack of moral and intellectual integrity: few aspire to be labeled by anyone, not to mention the pope, as morally schizophrenic.
7. But Pope Benedict's understated point about "here, perhaps, something is missing," is an indication that in some places the Church has been failing in her mission to educate consciences properly and help believers and others overcome this moral schizophrenia, this fissure between faith and life, between the properly informed judgment of conscience and one's behavior in both private and public life.

8. In his public addresses to statesmen in his foreign travels, Pope Benedict has personally been trying to make up for what is “missing” in this educational responsibility of the Church. The principles he elucidates are applicable not just to those in public office, however, but to everyone.
9. When he visited Westminster Hall in September 2010 to address the political, diplomatic, academic and business leaders of Great Britain, he cited St. Thomas More, whom he said is “admired by believers and non-believers alike for the integrity with which he followed his conscience,” saying that the dilemma he faced is a “perennial question” that all political leaders must face with regard to what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God. The question is about the “ethical foundations of civil discourse” and action, which he said must be “more solid than social consensus,” because social consensus for generations tolerated the immorality of slavery and “many other social evils, not least the totalitarian ideologies of the 20th century.”
10. The foundation must not be just a poll of popular sentiment, but the truth about the moral good. Pope Benedict sketched out how religion can “help purify and shed light upon the application of reason to the discovery of objective moral principles” — in other words, how the faith can assist in the proper formation of the conscience of those involved in political decision-making — so that reason won’t “fall prey to distortions as when it is manipulated by ideology, or applied in a partial way that fails to take full account of the dignity of the human person.” Without this education of conscience, reason purified and challenged by religion, there is not only an acute possibility of morally schizophrenic leaders but also those who fail to follow the conscience privately as well as publicly.
11. Likewise, when he spoke to the Bundestag in Berlin a year later, Pope Benedict sought to continue to educate leaders about the moral reality of politics. He cited King Solomon’s prayer for a listening heart to govern God’s people, so that he might be able to discern between good and evil. This, he said, tells us “what should ultimately matter for a politician. His fundamental criterion and the motivation for his work as a politician must not be success, and certainly not material gain. Politics must be a striving for justice, and hence it has to establish the fundamental preconditions for peace.
12. Naturally a politician will seek success, without which he would have no opportunity for effective political action at all. Yet success is subordinated to the criterion of justice, to the will to do what is right, and to the understanding of what is right. Success can also be seductive and thus can open up the path towards the falsification of what is right, towards the destruction of justice.” He went on to say, quoting St. Augustine, that without justice a state is nothing but a great band of robbers.
13. Pope Benedict says that good and evil aren’t and cannot be determined by democratic vote. Even though majority rule can suffice for many of the matters that need to be regulated by law, he said, for the fundamental issues, where “the dignity of man and of humanity is at stake,” the majority principle is not enough. This is clear enough in German history with the democratic ascent of the Nazis. Alluding to the Third Reich, he added, “We Germans know from our own experience ... how power became divorced from right, how power opposed right and crushed it, so that the state became an instrument for destroying right — a highly organized band of robbers, capable of threatening the whole world and driving it to the edge of the abyss. To serve right and to fight against the dominion of wrong is and remains the fundamental task of the politician.”
14. We saw the same failure of democracy in U.S. history where majority rule determined that slaves were only three-fifths persons and trampled on their dignity.
15. These abuses ended up being opposed precisely on the basis of a higher law than that of the majority, what Pope Benedict called “the law of truth” that grounds good and evil.
16. The question of how to recognize what is truly right and thus to serve justice when framing laws, he said, “has never been simple.” Many in the Bundestag, especially the more secular among them, likely anticipated that the pope would just hand out copies of the Bible and “Catechism” as the principle fonts where they could find this law of truth that contained the principles by which they could lead with the wisdom of Solomon. He didn’t. In fact, he explicitly said that in the history of humanity, the Church stands in marked contrast to pagan systems of thought that explicitly tried to align political and juridical order with their polytheistic revelation. Instead of proposing revelation, the Church from St. Paul through the present day has proposed reason and nature as the universally valid source of this law of truth. The natural law has been discovered anew, he said, by the universal ecological consensus of the immorality of environmental destruction, something that should lead us to recognize a similar law,

accessible by reason, about the ecology of man. This law written on the heart should inform the conscience, which he described as “nothing other than Solomon’s listening heart.” This is a heart that listens to God and discovers the truth about moral action, both privately and publicly. He suggested that all public servants ask for this listening heart, in order to lead themselves and others rightly. Solomon recognized he couldn’t be an effective leader if he were a moral schizophrenic. No one can. And what applies for public servants applies likewise to citizens.

B. Becoming Solomons rather than Schizophrenics as Catholic Citizens

1. I’d like to give a little primer on what the Church teaches about the duties of Catholics in the public and political sphere.
2. Catholics are called to be salt, light and leaven.
3. The traditional duties of a Catholic citizen
  - a. In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.
    - i. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do.
  - b. Minimally, Christian citizens must pay taxes, vote, and defend one’s country
    - i. GS 75: All citizens should be mindful of the right and also the duty to use their free vote to further the common good. The Church praises and esteems the work of those who for the good of men devote themselves to the service of the state and take on the burdens of this office.
    - ii. CCC 2240: Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory to pay taxes, to exercise the right to vote, and to defend one's country: Pay to all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due (Rom 13:7)
    - iii. CCC 1916: As with any ethical obligation, the participation of all in realizing the common good calls for a continually renewed conversion of the social partners. Fraud and other subterfuges, by which some people evade the constraints of the law and the prescriptions of societal obligation, must be firmly condemned because they are incompatible with the requirements of justice
  - c. Respect, obey, collaborate with, and pray for legitimate public authority
    - i. CCC 1900: The duty of obedience requires all to give due honor to authority and to treat those who are charged to exercise it with respect, and, insofar as it is deserved, with gratitude and good-will.
    - ii. CCC 2238: Those subject to authority should regard those in authority as representatives of God, who has made them stewards of his gifts: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution.... Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God." Their loyal collaboration includes the right, and at times the duty, to voice their just criticisms of that which seems harmful to the dignity of persons and to the good of the community.
    - iii. CCC 2240: St. Paul the Apostle exhorts us to offer prayers and thanksgiving for kings and all who exercise authority, "that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way."(1 Tim 2:2)
  - d. Exercise political rights for the common good, not for selfish gain.
    - i. CCC 2237: The political rights attached to citizenship can and should be granted according to the requirements of the common good. They cannot be suspended by public authorities without legitimate and proportionate reasons. Political rights are meant to be exercised for the common good of the nation and the human community.
    - ii. CCC 2239: It is the duty of citizens to contribute along with the civil authorities to the good of society in a spirit of truth, justice, solidarity, and freedom. The love and service of one's country follow from the duty of gratitude and belong to the order of charity. Submission to legitimate authorities and service of the common good require citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community.
    - iii. GS 75: All Christians must be aware of their own specific vocation within the political community. It is for them to give an example by their sense of responsibility and their service of the common good. In this way they are to demonstrate concretely how authority can be

compatible with freedom, personal initiative with the solidarity of the whole social organism, and the advantages of unity with fruitful diversity. They must recognize the legitimacy of different opinions with regard to temporal solutions, and respect citizens, who, even as a group, defend their points of view by honest methods.

- e. Christian citizens should take an active role in leavening society
  - i. CCC 1913: "Participation" is the voluntary and generous engagement of a person in social interchange. It is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person.
  - ii. CCC 1914: Participation is achieved first of all by taking charge of the areas for which one assumes personal responsibility: by the care taken for the education of his family, by conscientious work, and so forth, man participates in the good of others and of society.
  - iii. CCC 1915: As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life.
  - iv. GS 65: Citizens, on the other hand, should remember that it is their right and duty, which is also to be recognized by the civil authority, to contribute to the true progress of their own community according to their ability. Especially in underdeveloped areas, where all resources must urgently be employed, those who hold back their unproductive resources or who deprive their community of the material or spiritual aid that it needs gravely endanger the common good
  - v. The lay faithful, not the clergy, have the fundamental responsibility for leaving society.
    - a) LGL: In a special way, we call on U.S. Catholics, especially those in positions of leadership -- whether cultural, economic or political -- to recover their identity as followers of Jesus Christ and to be leaders in the renewal of American respect for the sanctity of life. "Citizenship" in the work of the Gospel is also a sure guarantee of responsible citizenship in American civic affairs. Every Catholic, without exception, should remember that he or she is called by our Lord to proclaim His message. Some proclaim it by word, some by action and all by example. But every believer shares responsibility for the Gospel. Every Catholic is a missionary of the Good News of human dignity redeemed through the cross. While our personal vocation may determine the form and style of our witness, Jesus calls each of us to be a leaven in society, and we will be judged by our actions. No one, least of all someone who exercises leadership in society, can rightfully claim to share fully and practically the Catholic faith and yet act publicly in a way contrary to that faith.
  - f. Bishops have the primary responsibility to hand on the Church's moral and social teaching. Together with priests and deacons, assisted by religious and lay leaders of the Church, we are to teach fundamental moral principles that help Catholics form their consciences correctly, to provide guidance on the moral dimensions of public decisions, and to encourage the faithful to carry out their responsibilities in political life.
  - g. It is not enough for pastors just to encourage people to sing more loudly. They have to confront issues.
- 4. Some might bristle at this, but the bishops do have a responsibility before God to tell us right and wrong. The US Bishops said in their document, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," "Some question whether it is appropriate for the Church to play a role in political life. However, the obligation to teach about moral values that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is central to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ."
- 5. This happened also in the Old Testament when a warning was given to the shepherds in Ezekiel.
- 6. Those who are doing wrong are generally not going to like it. Wife-beaters are not going to like bishops talking about the evil of spousal abuse; spin-doctors are not going to like sermons against lying.
- 7. Similarly people who like to think of voting autonomously are not going to like it when the bishops start talking clearly without nuance about their responsibilities.
- 8. There is a certain "pro-choice" logic that invades some Catholics' thinking about voting. Just like when people say, "my body, my choice," and deny any moral law outside of their own whims, so people can say, "my vote, my choice."

C. Voting is a moral action

D. St. Gregory of Nyssa, one of the great early fathers of the Church, said that, morally, we are our own parents. By our actions, by the choices we make in response to the values we prioritize, we form our

character. By telling the truth we become an honest person. By sacrificing unselfishly for others we become loving. By taking what doesn't belong to us, we become a thief. Our values, choices and actions all help to mold who we are and eventually they manifest who we have become.

- E. As we approach the elections, it's important for all of us to remember that voting is a supremely moral action.
1. First, to exercise the right vote is a moral duty (Catechism, 2240). It is one of the important ways in which we follow the commission Christ has given us to be the salt of the earth, the light of the world, and the leaven of our culture. A person who chooses not to vote is opting to be profoundly and literally irresponsible, to forsake the responsibilities he or she has as a Christian and as a citizen. That's why the Church considers the choice not to vote a serious sin of omission.
  2. But it's not enough merely to vote. We also need to vote as salt, light and leaven, as responsible stewards who are striving to promote the common good. Like any moral action, how we vote expresses what we prioritize. Depending upon the values we're expressing in our electoral choices, we could be voting either morally or immorally, and forming ourselves to be either morally better or morally worse.
  3. We when vote, we should never forget that it's a moral decision that will be considered in another election, the one at the end of our life in which we're the candidate and God has the sole vote. The US bishops talk about this in the document "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," saying, "It is important to be clear that the political choices faced by citizens not only have an impact on general peace and prosperity but also may affect the individual's salvation. Similarly, the kinds of laws and policies supported by public officials affect their spiritual well-being."
- F. Conscience Formation
1. Catholics are called to vote in accordance with the truths and values of the Catholic faith, according to a well-informed conscience. Many Catholics today are confused about what the conscience is, not to mention how to inform it and act morally in accordance with it. At a practical level, many people think that "conscience" means simply one's own thoughts about right or wrong, or one's preferences about the way things ought to be, or one's gut-instinct about what one should do.
  2. Conscience, rather, is an organ of sensitivity — like an "inner ear" within our head, heart, and soul — given to us by God by which we're able to hear his voice telling us to do or avoid something or helping us to see whether something we did or failed to do was in accord with what he wanted. Conscience is not an "oracle" barking out divine mandates but an "organ" by which we tune ourselves to what God is saying to us. Just like an ear, however, this organ can lose its hearing — and even when it can hear clearly, it can listen to and believe falsities and lies.
  3. JP II in *Evangelium Vitae* talks about an "eclipse of conscience." — All this explains, at least in part, how the value of life can today undergo a kind of "eclipse", even though conscience does not cease to point to it as a sacred and inviolable value, as is evident in the tendency to disguise certain crimes against life in its early or final stages by using innocuous medical terms which distract attention from the fact that what is involved is the right to life of an actual human person.
  4. The conscience, we should state, is not the origin of truth, but the means to recognize the truth revealed by God and apply it to our concrete choices, including the moral choice about for whom to vote.
  5. Catholics are called to form their consciences to be able to hear, as clearly as possible, God's voice guiding us. We're given various "hearing aids" — God's word, the Catechism and teaching of the Magisterium, prayer, the lives of the saints and the wise counsels of trustworthy men and women with well-trained consciences. But the essence of voting according to a well-formed Catholic conscience means to be turning to the Lord and asking him, "How should I vote?"
  6. Voting is not a morally autonomous zone. It's certainly not an area about which God is indifferent, leaving us on our own to vote for whomever or whatever we "like" as if our choices were amoral and inconsequential. We can clearly see from the history of the Jewish people how God approved of certain leaders and political decisions and thoroughly disapproved of others. Our leaders matter to God. Our votes matter to God. We must obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
  7. Voting is something far different than a choice between apples and oranges; on occasion, it can be a choice between Christ and Barabbas and, as US bishops stated in their document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, voting "may affect the individual's salvation."



## G. How should individual Catholics Vote?

1. So how God does want us to vote? Do we need to read lengthy tomes to discover what God wants us to factor into our electoral decisions? Is it hard to decipher God's values and priorities and what he's asking of his faithful sons and daughters? In most cases, no.
2. He is the Lord of life. In a choice between a candidate who recognizes that abortion is the massacre of innocent human beings and intends to work to reduce and eliminate it and one who celebrates abortion as a great civil "right" and even wants to force Catholic individuals and institutions to have to pay for it, is it complicated to figure out which candidate's values God wants us to support? Similarly, would he want us to vote for or against candidates and legislation that would give doctors the ability to help patients commit suicide?
3. God instituted marriage in the beginning as the union of one man and one woman, as a reflection of his own image. Would he want us to support candidates who see marriage as he does or those who believe that such an idea of marriage is bigoted, unconstitutional, and needs to be redefined to embrace husband-less or wife-less unions?
4. God founded a Church, calls us to use our freedom to live our faith through acts of charity, and wants us to be people who conscientiously follow his voice. Would he want us to support candidates who defend freedom of conscience and religion or those who want to use their office to compel Catholic institutions, priests, nuns, families and businesses to pay for other people to have free chemical abortions, sterilizations, and contraception?
5. The answers, for those of a well-formed conscience, aren't complicated.
6. Could a Catholic ever vote for someone who supports abortion, doctor-prescribed suicide, the redefinition of marriage and attacks on freedom of religion and the rights of conscience? Only in extreme circumstances, when the person abhors the evils that the candidate supports and votes for the candidate for reasons that the future Pope Benedict in 2004 said would be "proportionate" to the gravity of those evils.
7. What would such issues be? They would have to be so grave as to persuade an African-American, for example, to vote for a KKK member or a Jew to vote for someone anti-Semitic, since Catholics need to be against the evils mentioned as African-Americans are rightly against racism and Jews against anti-Semitism. The justification would have to be sufficient that one would feel comfortable saying to the Lord at the particular judgment, "I really believed in conscience that *you* wanted me to support that person despite the intrinsic evils that the candidate supported because I believed that the evils the other candidate supported were objectively even worse." That's a very high standard indeed.
8. Back in 2006, Pope Benedict in an address to European politicians, said, "As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are *not negotiable*. Among these the following emerge clearly today: the protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death; recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family — as a union between one man and one woman based on marriage...; and the protection of the rights of parents to educate their children."
9. Sometimes people try to downplay the evil of a pro-choice position by saying that pro-choice candidates may be better in allocating tax dollars to favor pre-natal, family, or other social programs and opposing the death penalty and the war. Pope John Paul II effectively answered this kind of argument in his beautiful 1988 document on the laity, *Christifideles Laici*: "The common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights — for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture — is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination."
10. This does not mean, the bishops of the United States tell us, that Catholics are "single-issue voters," but they add that "a candidate's position on a single issue that involves an intrinsic evil, such as support for legal abortion or the promotion of racism, may legitimately lead a voter to disqualify a candidate from receiving support."
11. It's hard to believe that a Catholic citizen of sound judgment and conscience would ever support a politician who either supported — or lamely refused to act publicly according to his "personal opposition to" — cruelty to animals, or child abuse, or domestic violence. If a candidate's character

were such that either he or she did not acknowledge these evils or was too weak to act according to them when it came to their public duties, would we ever give such a vitiated character a pass because we think the candidate has a better economic plan? Yet, that is what many Catholic Americans have done with respect to abortion, which kills children in ways more sadistic than the worst of animal cruelty and constitutes the ultimate form of child abuse and domestic violence.

12. Unfortunately today we have to acknowledge there are many candidates who support what God and his Church have emphatically taught as intrinsic evils. Even more unfortunate is that many Catholics reflexively vote for them. To support such candidates is to become materially complicit in the evil they do when elected. When we choose to vote for them, we're prioritizing other values — often party affiliation, or financial concerns, or a candidate's "likeability" — over fighting with God the real moral evils the candidates support. Such votes express our character, or better, our lack of character.

#### H. How should Catholics as a whole vote?

1. The US bishops wrote in *Forming Consciences* that the allegiance of the Catholic voter to Christ and to the Church he founded must trump loyalty to a particular party or political persuasion. "As Catholics," they write, "we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our attachment to a political party or interest group. When necessary, our participation should help transform the party to which we belong; we should not let the party transform us in such a way that we neglect or deny fundamental moral truths."
2. Last week, Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput talked plainly about the message Catholics are called to proclaim at the ballot box. "We're Catholics before we're Democrats. We're Catholics before we're Republicans," he said. "We're even Catholics before we're Americans, because we know that God has a demand on us prior to any government demand on us." He said a lack of this clear awareness among Catholics has, for example, allowed the Democratic Party to become so virulently pro-abortion. "Catholics have been historically part of the Democrat Party in great numbers, and I think really could've stopped [the Party's push for abortion], if they tried, but they didn't, in order to accommodate people from the other side of the issue. That's why the position of the Democrat Party has gotten worse and worse as time goes on, because Catholics haven't abandoned them as they've moved in that direction." Our votes matter and the more Catholics vote in favor of pro-abortion candidates, others notice that our faith isn't really that important to us.
3. Archbishop Chaput didn't spare Republicans either. "You can't trust the Republicans to be pro-life 20 years from now," he added. "You can't let any party take your vote for granted. And that's unfortunately what's happened. I think many of the Democrats have (taken) Democrat Catholic votes for granted because they'll go with them no matter what the party position might be on abortion. ... So we just have to be insistent on that, Catholic identity takes precedence over everything."
4. Our Catholic faith is meant to influence every thing we do. Catholics should vote differently from the general populations, and consistent with the teaching of the faith. When we do, that's when our votes will matter. That's when no party will be able to take our votes for granted. That's when Catholicism in our country will regain its salt and once more become real light and leaven for the betterment of the country we love.

#### I. The need for faithful Catholics running for Office

1. We need more Chris Smiths.
2. We need more Bob Casey, Sr.
3. LI episode

#### III. Catholic public officials and faith

- A. 39. The Holy Father, in a particular way, called on Catholic politicians and legislators to recognize their grave responsibility in society to support laws shaped by these fundamental human values, and urged them to oppose laws and policies that violate life and dignity at any stage from conception to natural death. He affirmed the responsibility of bishops to teach these values consistently to all of their people.
- B. Figure of St. Thomas More.
  1. When Pope John Paul II named St. Thomas More the patron saint of statesmen and politicians, he did so above all for his testimony to "the inalienable dignity of the human conscience," which with "inflexible firmness" he never compromised. Though a lawyer, parliamentarian and eventually Chancellor in an age rife with bribery, intrigue, and compromises on principles for the sake of particular

political ends, More never capitulated. It was a time when King Henry VIII thought he could get away with proclaiming himself Supreme Head of the Church in England, declaring his own marriage dissolved, and despotically forcing his subjects to take oaths before God that he was right. But More refused to swear to something he knew in conscience to be a lie, even when it meant his resignation, the impoverishment of his family, his arrest, imprisonment, conviction by perjured testimony and beheading. His “passion for the truth” and his “sense that man cannot be sundered from God, nor politics from morality,” John Paul II noted, was what enlightened his conscience and made him capable of being faithful to the God who speaks in that interior sanctuary.

2. Visiting Westminster Hall, the site of More’s spurious trial, in September of 2010, Pope Benedict addressed this critical theme of conscience before four former prime ministers and hundreds of parliamentarians and diplomats. He remarked that More is “admired by believers and non-believers alike for the integrity with which he followed his conscience, even at the cost of displeasing the sovereign whose ‘good servant’ he was, because he chose to serve God first.” The truly conscientious public servant, the Pope implied, always serves God first through listening for and heeding his voice whispering in conscience. The dilemma More faced, the Pope stated, is the “perennial question of the relationship between what is owed to Caesar and what is owed to God.”
  3. More’s witness to conscience, giving God and the truth what is owed even to the point of personal suffering, is particularly important today, when many politicians misunderstand or manipulate the meaning of conscience as a justification for cowardice rather than courage, for disobeying rather than following the moral law, for serving the desires of powerful lobbies rather than God. When More followed his conscience, it meant surrendering his job, pauperizing his loved ones, and ultimately losing his life. When many politicians today cite their conscience, it’s often as a pretext for ignoring the truth God has revealed in order to keep their jobs, to please interested parties, and generally to enrich their families. They cite conscience while at the same time compromising it out of fear of losing their positions or otherwise suffering out of fidelity to God’s voice. Nowhere is this seen more than with Catholic politicians who preposterously say they’re following their conscience in publicly supporting the so-called right to abortion, as if God himself would be commanding them — rather than to defend the lives of innocent human beings made in his image and likeness — to champion the right of others to kill them. As More’s life shows, faithfully following God’s voice in conscience will regularly lead to persecution and suffering from those who seek to impose their will without regard to the truth; it will rarely lead to campaign funding, vociferous support and plaudits from abortion providers and other purveyors of evil.
  4. The bishops of Pennsylvania in a 2010 pastoral letter suggested that More’s example is more vital now than ever. More stood, they wrote, as a “powerful beacon of hope and inspiration, ... a light in the darkness,” not just to believers but all citizens, precisely because he “refused to place the demands of the state before the requirements of his conscience and ... insisted that there were objective truths that governments could not legitimately seek to override.”
  5. We are now living in an age when many are tempted or even expected to compromise their consciences, when various state legislatures compel doctors and nurses to dispense abortifacient “morning after pills” in emergency rooms, when pharmacists are coerced by governments or employers to dispense contraceptives, when justices of the peace are forced to preside over same-sex “marriages,” when taxpayers are obliged to pay for abortions, and when medical students are required to participate in abortions as a mandatory part of their training. It’s a time when many politicians and citizens routinely compromise their consciences for personal advantage or out of fear of the consequences. It’s an age in which politics seem to be governed by power rather than principle. That’s why, the Pennsylvania bishops say, we need more than ever “examples of moral integrity,” showing all of us how “our consciences should stand for objective truth and not bend and shift to fit the changing fashions of the day.” That’s what St. Thomas More does.
- C. Personally opposed, publicly tolerant schizophrenia
1. Archbishop Chaput, in his book “Render Unto Caesar,” mentioned the example of the Catholic former Governor of New York, Mario Cuomo to demonstrate that public officials who claim that they cannot impose their moral beliefs about abortion on others do not hesitate to impose their ethical understanding on others in other areas. In Cuomo’s case, he argued in a famous 1984 speech at Notre

Dame that even though he and his wife accepted Catholic moral teaching on abortion, he did not feel it appropriate to translate that judgment of conscience into public policy. Archbishop Chaput notes, however, that Governor Cuomo did not feel any of the same qualms about acting according to his conscience with regard to the death penalty. Twelve times in his dozen years as governor he vetoed capital punishment legislation, “imposing” his own view on the majority not merely of the legislators in Albany but of the populace in the state of New York, both of which supported the death penalty.

2. Governors, Senators, Congressmen, and activist judges seem to have no anxiety at all about imposing their view of the good on others when it concerns smoking legislation, taxes, the environment, marriage, the treatment of prisoners, economic bailouts, or war and peace. Why is it that the only time politicians ever invoke a false sense of pluralistic tolerance of evil is when they’re talking about abortion?

#### IV. Conclusion

##### A. Year of Faith