

Journal of Catholic Legal Studies

Volume 47
Number 2 *Volume 47, 2008, Number 2*

Article 8

February 2017

One Catholic's Thoughts on Voting for a President

Susan J. Stabile

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.law.stjohns.edu/jcls>



Part of the [Catholic Studies Commons](#)

This Symposium is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Catholic Legal Studies by an authorized editor of St. John's Law Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact selbyc@stjohns.edu.

ONE CATHOLIC'S THOUGHTS ON VOTING FOR A PRESIDENT

SUSAN J. STABLE[†]

How does a faithful Catholic approach a presidential election? As followers of an incarnational faith, which holds that God is present in all persons and in all things, Catholics are obligated to “take an active part in public life,”¹ to participate directly in working “for a just ordering of society,”² including by voting. Catholics are compelled to think seriously about how they will cast a vote on November 4, 2008, for the next President of the United States.

The Catholic Church has, in various ways, attempted to provide guidance to American Catholics, including through a series of statements issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops about what faithful citizenship means.³

[†] Robert and Marion Short Distinguished Chair in Law, University of St. Thomas School of Law; Fellow, Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership; Affiliate Senior Fellow, St. John's University Vincentian Center for Church and Society; Research Fellow, New York University School of Law, Center for Labor and Employment Law; J.D. 1982, New York University School of Law; B.A. 1979, Georgetown University. I am grateful to John B. Freund, C.M., Beth Nicol, Robert J. Delahunty, Michael A. Scaperlanda, Elizabeth R. Schiltz, Patricia Tryon, and Robert K. Vischer for their thoughtful comments on this Essay.

¹ CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ¶1915 (2d ed. 1997) (emphasis omitted).

² BENEDICT XVI, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *DEUS CARITAS EST* ¶29 (2005) (“The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society . . . is proper to the lay faithful.”).

³ The most recent of these was issued on November 14, 2007. See generally UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (2007) [hereinafter *Forming Consciences*], available at <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf>. The Church has also provided other guidance to Catholics, including, for example, a doctrinal note issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. See CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, DOCTRINAL NOTE *THE PARTICIPATION OF CATHOLICS IN POLITICAL LIFE* (2002) [hereinafter DOCTRINAL NOTE]. One can also find statements in a number of papal documents speaking to the duty of the lay faithful regarding the political process. See, e.g., JOHN PAUL II, APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION *CHRISTIFIDELES LAICI* ¶¶2, 3, 6, 23, 38, 42, 60 (1988); PAUL VI, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION *GAUDIUM ET SPES* ¶60 (1965) (noting that “the duty most consonant

Perhaps not surprisingly, the statements have been received with varying degrees of enthusiasm, praised by some and criticized by others.⁴

This Essay represents my attempt to articulate how I, as a person of the Catholic faith, approach the presidential election. It is not intended as a statement as to how all Catholics must approach the election; “the responsibility to make choices in political life rests with each individual in light of a properly formed conscience.”⁵ It represents merely one effort to grapple with the serious challenges faced by our country in light of the guidance available from the American bishops, the Vatican, and other sources.

There are two points that I think are important to note at the outset. First, in my view, neither the Republican nor the Democratic Party has either a vision or platform that in all respects conforms to the teachings of the Catholic Church. As a gross generalization, I think it is fair to say that the Republicans, as a party,⁶ have been more closely aligned with the Catholic Church than have been Democrats on the life issues of abortion and stem cell research, as well as on matters relating to marriage. However, the Democrats fair much better when

with our times, especially for Christians, is that of working diligently for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, both on the national and international level”).

⁴ Richard John Neuhaus called the most recent statement a “carefully considered reflection on political responsibility, the difference between ‘intrinsic evils’ and prudential judgments, and the ways in which conscience is rightly formed.” Posting of Richard John Neuhaus to First Things, Debating the Separation of Religion and Politics/The Bishops’ Conscience Clause, <http://www.firstthings.com/onthesquare/?p=901> (Nov. 16, 2007, 7:33 EST). Comments favorable and unfavorable to the most recent statement are available on the Internet. See Catholics in the Public Square, <http://thepublicsquare.blogspot.com/2008/01/catholic-discussion-of-usccbs-forming.html> (Jan. 8, 2008, 22:24 EST) (containing a brief compilation of reactions to *Forming Consciences* found on the internet); see also Matthew Cullinan Hoffman & Steve Jalsevac, *Praise and Criticism for Lengthy US Bishops Statement on Catholics and Political Responsibility*, LIFESITENEWS, Nov. 16, 2007, <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2007/nov/07111601.html> (noting that “[t]he statement is being praised for its new emphasis on the life issues in voting,” but also that “this seems to be neutralized by the practical equivalent emphasis also given to many other issues and the fact that the document omits the issue of communion to pro-abortion Catholic politicians”).

⁵ *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 7.

⁶ I am speaking in general party terms; there are some Republican candidates who have espoused a pro-choice position and some Democrats who have taken a pro-life position.

measured by Catholic social teaching on the preferential option for the poor, solidarity, and on matters relating to the protection of the environment. Thus, I do not believe that a faithful Catholic can approach the election simply on party lines.

The lack of complete consonance of either party with the Catholic Church was expressed well by one Catholic couple in a recent *Washington Post* op-ed: “[W]e as a Catholic couple feel . . . homeless with respect to a perfectly compatible political party or candidate.”⁷ The U.S. bishops’ statement on faithful citizenship implicitly recognizes this by talking about the need for Catholics to “transform the party to which [they] belong.”⁸

Second, the U.S. bishops’ most recent statement on faithful citizenship provides some guidance to Catholic voters in forming their consciences with respect to voting, but does not provide clear answers, notwithstanding its extensive discussion of the application of Catholic teaching to major issues of public policy. The bishops recognize that it is not their role “to tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote.”⁹ Moreover, although they emphasize that not all issues have the same moral priority and ranking, the bishops clearly do not advocate single-issue voting. For example, the statement clearly indicates that “[a] Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who takes a position in favor of an intrinsic evil, such as abortion or racism, if the voter’s intent is to support that position.”¹⁰ However, it also states that “a voter should not use a candidate’s opposition to an intrinsic evil to justify indifference or inattentiveness to other important moral issues involving human life and dignity”¹¹ and that “a Catholic who rejects a candidate’s unacceptable position may decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons.”¹²

⁷ Liz McCloskey & Peter Leibold, Op-Ed., *Political Orphans in 2008: Is There Space for Our Pro-Life Ethic?*, WASH. POST, Jan. 22, 2008, at A19. The authors lament that in many elections they are faced with the dilemma: “Which of our values must take a back seat when we go to the voting booth?” *Id.*

⁸ *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 14. They also talk about the sense of Catholics that “no party and too few candidates fully share the Church’s comprehensive commitment to the life and dignity of every human being from conception to natural death.” *Id.* ¶ 16.

⁹ *Id.* at 5. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith makes the same point. See DOCTRINAL NOTE, *supra* note 3, ¶ 6.

¹⁰ *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 34.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* ¶ 35. Even with respect to abortion, the statement only says that a candidate’s support for legal abortion “may” lead a Catholic voter to vote against the

The bishops' emphasis on the need for prudential judgment is of particular salience with respect to the presidency, as one has to take into account what power a President actually has with which to accomplish certain aims. The fact, for example, that a presidential candidate's platform indicates a pledge to work for a constitutional amendment on abortion does not change the fact that no President has the power to actually get such an amendment passed. The bishops' statement indicates that it is proper for voting decisions to take into account a candidate's "ability to influence a given issue."¹³

The thrust of both points is that a Catholic citizen must come up with some way of deciding how to vote for a candidate who is more than simply checking off a candidate's party or position on various issues. How, then, as a Catholic, will I decide?

I approach the election with the conviction that an important role of the President of the United States—perhaps the most important role—is that of moral leader.¹⁴ I make that claim despite the fact that "moral leader," however we define it, is not a term easily applied to our most recent presidents. Few, if any, would call President Bush or former President Clinton strong moral leaders.¹⁵ But there have been presidents¹⁶ and other

candidate on that ground. *See id.* ¶ 36.

¹³ *Id.* ¶ 37.

¹⁴ John F. Kennedy, in one of his 1960 debates with Richard Nixon, spoke of the importance of this aspect of the presidency, as did Franklin Roosevelt, who called the Presidency "above all a place of moral leadership." *See* Vice President Richard M. Nixon & Senator John F. Kennedy, Second Joint Radio-Television Broadcast (Oct. 7, 1960), in 3 FREEDOM OF COMMUNICATIONS 152 (U.S. Senate, Comm. on Commerce ed., 1961). Kennedy observed the importance of the President speaking out and giving his views clearly on "great moral issue[s]." *Id.* Ronald Reagan spoke of using the moral authority of the presidency to speak out against racial animosity and violence. *See* President-Elect Ronald Reagan, Message to the National League of Cities Conference (Dec. 1, 1980), in Richard S. Williamson, 1980: *The Reagan Campaign—Harbinger of a Revitalized Federalism (with Reagan's Messages to the National League of Cities and the National Conference of State Legislatures)*, 11 PUBLIUS 147, 152 (1981). Nixon also spoke of using the "moral authority of the Presidency" to advance peace and social justice. *See* Letter from President Richard Nixon to William W. Stanton, Chairman, President's Commission on Campus Unrest (Dec. 12, 1970), <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=2844>.

¹⁵ *See, e.g.*, John J. Maresca, Op-Ed., *Where Is the Moral Leader of the West?*, INT'L HERALD TRIB., Jan. 6, 1995 (arguing that Clinton abdicated his role as moral leader in his reaction to the Russian bombing of the Chechens).

¹⁶ For example, a headline in the April 9, 1918 issue of *The New York Times* reads "Applaud Wilson as Moral Leader," referring to the reaction in Great Britain to a speech by Wilson pronouncing the American commitment against German military power. The article cites a report in *The Daily News* that speaks of the

heads of states¹⁷ to which that term has been applied with sincerity.

What do I mean by saying we are looking for a President who will be a moral leader? The term is not one that has a clear and uniformly acceptable definition. I do not use the term to refer simply to the personal morality of a President. Jimmy Carter, for example, was a highly moral and religious man, yet "his religious convictions and perceived virtue did not give him much leverage with Congress," and his moral claims about energy conservation "did not cause many citizens to turn down their thermostats or leave their cars at home."¹⁸ Moreover, it has been suggested that his "consciousness of moral superiority seemed to insulate him from advice he could have used and negotiations that might have advanced his purposes."¹⁹

Instead, I think that to call a President a moral leader means that the person possesses several different characteristics that start to create some parameters for a voting decision. First, a President who is a moral leader is someone who can help bring us to our higher good, who will appeal to the best of which we can be, not the worst of which we are capable. To speak in Christian terms, we are a fallen, sinful people, but also a people who are capable of striving always to become more Christ-like in our thoughts and actions. I want to vote for a President who, rather than appealing to our basest human instincts such as greed and lack of concern for others, appeals to—and tries to strengthen and nourish—the spark of divinity within us. We want to identify a leader with "a special ability to get us to believe in ourselves, to tie that belief to our highest ideals and imagine that together we can do great things."²⁰

What we are looking for is "a president who understands that his responsibility is to articulate a vision and encourage others to achieve it; who holds himself, and those around him, to

"spacious and enlightened statesmanship" governing Wilson's actions. *Applaud Wilson as Moral Leader*, N.Y. TIMES, Apr. 9, 1918, at 3.

¹⁷ Nelson Mandela, who has been referred to by many as a great moral leader, immediately comes to mind.

¹⁸ Laurin L. Henry, *Politics and Moral Leadership*, 76 VA. NEWS LETTER 1, 3–4 (2000), available at <http://www.coopercenter.org/publications/sitefiles/vanl/vanl0700.pdf>.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 4.

²⁰ Caroline Kennedy, Op-Ed., *A President Like My Father*, N.Y. TIMES, Jan. 27, 2008, at WK18.

the highest ethical standards.”²¹ Or, in the words of peace activist John Dear, “[m]oral leaders make it easier for us to be moral.”²² A moral leader, Dear observes, has a vision of peace and justice that

lift[s] that vision up for all to see[,] and then point[s] the way forward to make that vision of peace a reality here and now. If we had authentic, moral leaders, everyone would be inspired to join the great work at hand—the task of abolishing hunger, poverty, homelessness, the death penalty, war and nuclear weapons.²³

A moral leader would inspire the protection of all human life, from conception to natural death.

Second, a President who is a moral leader is one who will unify rather than divide, who will help us see what unites us rather than what divides us. Jesus reacted harshly to the divisions of His time, to those who looked down on others because of their ethnicity or their profession. Think of the Gospel parable of the Good Samaritan.²⁴ “The ancient Jewish concept of neighbor was actually an altogether particularized one,” which did not include Romans, tax collectors, sinners, and certainly not Samaritans.²⁵ By calling the Samaritan neighbor, Jesus effected a “one-hundred-eighty-degree turn from particularism in all its forms to a universalism that embraces the world and humanity.”²⁶ Jesus promoted a “‘global’ culture of solidarity.”²⁷ Thus, when I speak of unifying, I do not mean to simply speak of unity within the United States. “Moral leadership requires a vision of peace and justice for the entire human family. This vision goes beyond our national borders to see the benefits of global peace and justice for ourselves and all people.”²⁸

I am not suggesting that moral leadership demands glossing over real differences to promote a superficial unity. What I am

²¹ *Id.*

²² John Dear, *On Moral Leadership: The Need for Prophets for Peace and Justice in a Culture of War and Injustice*, in *MORAL LEADERSHIP* (Daniel Deffenbaugh ed., 2005), available at http://www.johndear.org/articles/moral_leadership.htm.

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ See *Luke* 10:29–37 (New American).

²⁵ HANNA WOLFF, *JESUS THE THERAPIST* 126 (Robert R. Barr trans., Meyer-Stone Books 1987) (1978).

²⁶ *Id.* at 127.

²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, ADDRESS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE VATICAN FOUNDATION *CENTESIMUS ANNUS: PRO PONTIFICE* ¶ 2 (1998) [hereinafter *PRO PONTIFICE*].

²⁸ Dear, *supra* note 22.

looking for is a quality of being that aims to promote reconciliation of competing ideas and to bring those on different sides together. Moral leadership, in my view, eschews divisiveness, partisanship, and demonization of those with different viewpoints, all of which operate against a "vision of peace and justice for the entire human family."²⁹

Third, a President who is a moral leader is one in whom we can have trust. As I write those words, I think of the description of Jesus in Mark's Gospel: "[H]e taught them as one having authority."³⁰ There was an authenticity to Jesus when He spoke because He spoke out of a truth written on His heart. We seek authenticity and integrity in a moral leader. Lawrence Lessig recently spoke of this in terms of "a certain kind of moral courage."³¹ The question, he suggests, is "whether the candidate is calculating in the face of right, or whether in the face of knowing what's right or consistent with his or her principles, he or she chooses that answer regardless of the consequences."³² Among other things, this means a President who is a moral leader understands that he is not above the law, either in his personal life or in the fulfillment of his executive duties.

In a related vein, a focus on moral leadership means we are looking for a President in whom we can have confidence. Think of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, where he claimed that "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."³³ Roosevelt was able to help the American people regain faith and hope in themselves and the country: "[t]heir confidence was restored by his confidence."³⁴ And whatever else one thinks of him, the image of Rudy Giuliani on television in the days after

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Mark* 1:22 (New American).

³¹ Video file: 20 Minutes or so on Why I Am 4Barack (Lawrence Lessig 2008), available at <http://s3.amazonaws.com/truth/4obama.mov>. For a transcript of Lessig's video, see Chris Ball, Transcript of Lawrence Lessig Obama Video, <http://blog.printf.net/articles/2008/02/05/transcript-of-lawrence-lessig-obama-video> (Feb. 4, 2008).

³² Video file: 20 Minutes or so on Why I Am 4Barack, *supra* note 31; Ball, *supra* note 31.

³³ President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1933), available at <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrfirstinaugural.html>.

³⁴ Kate Zernike, *The Charisma Mandate*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 17, 2008, at WK1. More than the legislation he secured guaranteeing the banks, what restored people's confidence was Roosevelt himself. "When he smiled on the crisis, it seemed to vanish." *Id.*

the September 11th attacks was a source of security and comfort to many people; people believed he had things under control and that had an enormous effect on them.

These last points mean that a candidate's character, integrity,³⁵ and leadership qualities all matter a lot more than simply what the candidate says his position on a particular issue is. That is especially the case since we have seen more than our share of instances of candidates espousing different positions on different issues depending on their audience or, indeed, the day of the week. As one commentator suggested recently, "[y]ou'd think it would be safe to vote on issues, but politicians often don't feel the need to honor their campaign promises."³⁶

These parameters translate further for me into some concrete criteria by which I think candidates ought to be evaluated.

Does the Candidate Seek To Promote the Dignity of the Human Person?

A central aspect of Catholicism is belief in the inviolable dignity of the human person, a dignity that flows from human creation in the image and likeness of God.³⁷ That belief has implications for the structuring of the society in which we live: "A just society can become a reality only when it is based on the respect of the transcendent dignity of the human person."³⁸ Respecting human dignity requires that human rights be protected and basic needs of people be met.³⁹ At various points, the bishops elaborate on their statement, giving examples of what it means to revere "the lives of all human beings as children of God,"⁴⁰ and quoting Pope John XXIII's teaching that all persons have "the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life;

³⁵ Character and integrity are included in the bishops' statement as factors important to take into account. See *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 37.

³⁶ Maureen Dowd, Op-Ed., *Captive to History's Caprice*, N.Y. TIMES, Feb. 17, 2008, at WK12.

³⁷ I discuss the principle of the dignity of the human person more fully in Susan J. Stabile, *Catholic Legal Theory*, 44 J. CATH. LEGAL STUD. 421, 422–25 (2005).

³⁸ PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *COMPENDIUM OF THE SOCIAL DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH* ¶ 132 (2004).

³⁹ See *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 49.

⁴⁰ *Id.* ¶ 45.

these are primarily food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and, finally, the necessary social services."⁴¹

This means that a candidate's commitment to ensuring that human rights are respected and that society be structured in such a way that the basic needs of people are provided for is an important factor to be weighed in assessing a decision whether to vote for the candidate. It matters what a candidate thinks on issues such as immigration, health care and poverty.

Let me be clear. I am not saying a candidate has to have a particular position on some of these issues—for example, that there should be national health insurance. There is room for substantial disagreement as to how we achieve certain goals. What I am saying is that the candidate has to manifest an acceptance of the proposition that all human beings have an equal dignity and that the legal and political system must serve the development and flourishing of the human person. The candidate, to use my prior example, need not support national health care, but must proceed from the premise that it is unacceptable in our society for some people to lack access to affordable health care and accept that there might be some role for the government in addressing that lack of access.⁴²

The same is true for other issues of public policy. With respect to immigration, for example, a candidate worthy of voting for need not favor completely open borders, but must believe it is important to develop an immigration policy that recognizes the dignity of those persons seeking life in the United States. With respect to abortion, it is one thing for a candidate to acknowledge that abortion is morally wrong but to take the position that with respect to government action abortion should be "safe, legal and rare," supporting policies that encourage birth rather than abortion. It is another for candidates, as some Democratic candidates have over the years, to speak in ways that suggest that abortion is an aspect of routine medical care, to speak as though there were no difference between an abortion and a root canal.

⁴¹ *Id.* ¶ 25 (quoting POPE JOHN XXIII, ENCYCLICAL LETTER *PACEM IN TERRIS* ¶ 11 (1963)).

⁴² I have elsewhere talked about a role for the federal government in addressing access to health care consistent with the Catholic social thought principle of solidarity. See generally Susan J. Stabile, "Poor" Coverage: The Preferential Option for the Poor and Access to Health Care, 5 *VILL. J. CATH. SOC. THOUGHT* (forthcoming 2008).

Does the Candidate Promote Unity and Inclusiveness?

I suggested earlier that looking for a President who will be a moral leader means we are looking for a candidate who will unify rather than divide. Relevant to whether a President can exert a unifying force is how he speaks, and particularly relevant is how he speaks about marginalized or unpopular groups. A few examples help illustrate the point.

Last year, President Bush made the audacious statement that there was not a problem with lack of access to health care because, after all, sick people can always go to the emergency room.⁴³ Leave aside for a moment the fact that he was flat-out wrong in his conclusion, and that in fact people who lack insurance do not get the medical care that they need.⁴⁴ But aside from that, ask yourself: Do you think President Bush would think it acceptable if he or one of his family members or friends had to sit in an emergency room to receive medical care? If the answer to that question is no, then we have to ask why it is acceptable to ask some people to rely on treatment we would not find acceptable for ourselves and those we feel a group connection to. The statement suggests that some people, because of their lack of income, are worthy of lesser medical treatment. It may be that Bush's statement reflects merely a lack of contact with reality, rather than a belief that poor people are worth less, but a

⁴³ See President George W. Bush, Remarks at the Intercontinental Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio (July 10, 2007), available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2007/07/20070710-6.html> (“[P]eople have access to health care in America. After all, you just go to an emergency room.”).

⁴⁴ Several years ago, the American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine reviewed 124 scientific studies published over a ten-year period and found that uninsured people are: more than three times as likely to delay seeking medical care as people with health coverage; nearly three times as likely to report that they have not received needed medical care; more likely to need hospital treatment that could have been avoided for conditions such as diabetes, asthma, hypertension, and pneumonia; more likely to have a serious disease discovered too late to be treated successfully, for example, more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at a late stage; and more than three times as likely to die in a hospital. It also found that children with no health insurance are: up to eight times less likely than insured children to have a regular source of care; up to six times more likely to go without needed medical care; up to four times more likely to delay seeking medical care; and 40 percent more likely not to receive any medical attention for a serious injury. See Todd Zwillich, *ACP-ASIM: Lack of Insurance Is a Health Hazard*, FAMILY PRACTICE NEWS, Jan 1, 2000, available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0BJI/is_1_30/ai_59457739.

President so out of touch with the reality of life for large segments of the population will find it hard to be a unifier.

Another example is the failure to enforce civil rights laws. Think back to the long and arduous struggle to integrate schools—a struggle that in many respects is still going on. De facto school segregation continued to exist for years after the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*.⁴⁵ It continued because in people's hearts and minds, black persons were dehumanized based on the color of their skin. And that belief was fostered by the acts of executive officials in the South. George Wallace vowed in his first inaugural address as Governor of Alabama, "Segregation today. Segregation tomorrow. Segregation forever."⁴⁶ He pledged to "stand in the schoolhouse door"⁴⁷ to prevent school integration and did exactly that: Think of how powerful the image is of Wallace standing at the door of a University of Alabama building, blocking the passage of two black students.⁴⁸ The Governor of the state used his words and deeds to signify to the people of Alabama that those two black students do not belong with us.

Can the Candidate Promote Understanding Between Cultures and, Therefore, Act as a Promoter of Peace Throughout the World?

Moral leadership is not simply an internal matter. "[T]he White House, and the President who resides there, have in our time acquired a central responsibility as the West's voice of moral

⁴⁵ 347 U.S. 483 (1954); see Barbara A. Noah, *A Prescription for Racial Equality in Medicine*, 40 CONN. L. REV. 675, 700 n.107 (2008) (acknowledging that de facto segregation of schools continued through the 1980s and 1990s).

⁴⁶ George C. Wallace, Governor of Alabama, 1963 Inaugural Address (Jan. 14, 1963), available at http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/inauguralspeech.html. Interestingly, almost lost to history is the fact that Wallace ran his first race as a pro-integration candidate, a position he discarded after losing the governor's race. More significantly, also lost is the fact that while he was governor, Wallace invested heavily in education and health-care programs for blacks and established free clinics and vocational schools that helped black and other low-income residents of his state.

⁴⁷ See George C. Wallace, Governor of Alabama, Statement and Proclamation at the University of Alabama (June 11, 1963), available at http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/schooldoor.html. This speech became widely known as the "stand in the schoolhouse door" speech.

⁴⁸ To view a photograph and accompanying account of Wallace giving his infamous speech in the schoolhouse door, see Jay Reeves, *A Changed Alabama Remembers '63*, CBS NEWS, June 11, 2003, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/06/11/national/main558016.shtml>.

authority.”⁴⁹ A truly Catholic perspective can not be a parochial U.S. one. The Church believes in a “‘global’ culture of solidarity,”⁵⁰ meaning that it is important to ask whether a President can create the kind of understanding among world cultures that can negotiate a lasting peace and, also, whether a President can speak to other leaders with a “‘voice of moral authority,’ ”⁵¹ with the kind of authority that helps them act as moral leaders of their own countries. In this context, I think of Richard Nixon’s actions in opening relations with China. Nixon’s initiatives “shifted the world balance of power and put international relations in the Far East on a basis that greatly lessened the risk of a major war—surely an outcome of moral significance.”⁵²

Promoting understanding between cultures means acting as a leader and peacemaker, not as a bully. Little is gained by presidential actions that result in labeling the United States as the “Bully of the Free World”⁵³ or as a “belligerent bully.”⁵⁴ There can be no hope for international cooperation for the global common good when a President’s foreign policy style is characterized as “bullying, unreceptive, [and] brazen.”⁵⁵ We need a President who can lead by persuasion rather than by overreaction, heavy-handedness, and threats.

⁴⁹ Maresca, *supra* note 15.

⁵⁰ *PRO PONTIFICE*, *supra* note 27, ¶ 2.

⁵¹ See, e.g., John M. Swomley, *The Secular State in Historical Perspective*, 5 CHRISTIAN ETHICS TODAY 19 (1999), available at http://www.christianethicstoday.com/issue/022/Issue_022_June_1999.htm (quoting from an open letter of Republican Party Platform Committee member Henry Hyde inviting Catholics to align with the Republican Party in 1996).

⁵² Henry, *supra* note 18, at 4.

⁵³ See generally Garry Wills, *Bully of the Free World*, FOREIGN AFFAIRS, Mar./Apr. 1999, available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/19990301faessay967/garry-wills/bully-of-the-free-world.html> (criticizing the leaders of the United States for equating a capitalist society with freedom).

⁵⁴ Vicki Allen, *Bush’s Policy on Iraq Labels U.S. as ‘Belligerent Bully,’ Byrd Says*, COMMON DREAMS, Jan. 18, 2003, <http://www.commondreams.org/headlines03/0118-01.htm> (noting that Senator Robert Byrd “blasted President Bush” and claimed that politicians must “work to restore the image of the United States to that of strong peacekeeper instead of belligerent bully”).

⁵⁵ Roger Cohen, David E. Sanger & Steven R. Weisman, *Challenging Rest of the World with a New Order*, N.Y. TIMES, Oct. 12, 2004, at A1.

CONCLUSION

Does the candidate seek to promote the dignity of the human person? Does the candidate promote unity and inclusiveness? Can the candidate promote understanding between cultures and, therefore, act as a promoter of peace throughout the world? These are the kinds of questions I will be asking myself as I decide who I will vote for on November 4th.

Let me emphasize that I am not suggesting that there "is a moral equivalence that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity."⁵⁶ I am also not expressing disagreement with the bishops' admonition that "[t]he direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many."⁵⁷ However, I do believe that ultimately what promotes human dignity and the right to life is more than what a candidate expresses as his or her position on whether or not *Roe v. Wade*⁵⁸ should be overturned or whether the government ought to permit stem cell research.

Our debates over many contentious public policy issues have been skewed by a divisive partisanship. A lack of moral leadership magnifies our difficulties over specific issues. A candidate who feeds into the existing divisiveness can not help us move forward. I believe a moral leader can.

It is a different question whether any of the current presidential candidates possess all of the qualities of a moral leader. Judged rigorously by the parameters I have suggested, perhaps none do. Nonetheless, I believe moral leadership to be the criteria by which we ought to be judging who we want to be the next President of the United States. And so the question is: Who can best fill that role?

⁵⁶ *Forming Consciences*, *supra* note 3, ¶ 28.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

