

Thomas Massaro, S.J. Oct. 4, 2020 Sacred Heart Church, Saratoga, CA
Topic: “Catholic, Politics and Conscience: The 2020 Election”

- I. Introductory remarks: The Perennial Challenges We Face as Christians and Citizens
 - A. How to relate: church and state, religion and society, faith and public life
 1. Without either conflating them or compartmentalizing them
 2. While maintaining respect for the opinions of others
- II. Some Historical Context Regarding the Catholic Community in the U.S.
 - A. Immigrant community experiences, “nativism,” 1928 (AES) and 1960 (JFK)
 - B. Two influential pastoral letters of 1980’s as a “coming of age as public church”
-- 1983 “The Challenge of Peace” and 1986 “Economic Justice for All”
 - C. Two recent challenges to the bishops’ role in promoting “Public Catholicism”:
-- 1998 *Apostolos Suos* and the sexual abuse crisis (2002 to present)
 - D. U.S. Bishops’ series of quadrennial “Statements on Political Responsibility”
 1. What they NEVER do: endorse parties, candidates or “go single-issue”
 2. What they ALWAYS do-- encourage participation, list key issues and respect 3 distinctions: constitutional, theological, pastoral
- III. The Catholic Understanding of Conscience
 - A. Definition of conscience: “judgment about the morality of an act to be done”
 - B. Many senses of the word, including: 1) a capacity, 2) a process, 3) a judgment
 - C. Traditional formula from moral theology: “the judgment of conscience is the proximate norm of personal morality,” so obligation to follow conscience
 - D. Rooted in OT (“heart”), NT (“syneidesis”), moral manual tradition, spirituality
 - E. Challenge to retain a sense of “totality,” avoid deductive approach to decisions
 - F. Important role of church *magisterium*-- as pastor, teacher as well as gatekeeper
 - G. Passages from three church documents (*Veritatis Splendor*, *Gaudium et Spes* and *Dignitatis Humanae*) emphasize the moral freedom of individuals
- IV. Features of this particular Nov. 2019 statement of the U.S. Bishops Conference: “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility”
 - A. More emphasis than pre-2007 statements on:
 1. Conscience formation-- hence the title and the previous section above
 2. Category of intrinsic evil-- includes torture, racism as well as abortion
 - B. Holds the potential to cut through any divisions between Catholics who feel more passionately about either “social justice” or “Gospel of Life” issues
 1. Read the full text at <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/>
- V. Applying These Lessons to Particular Decisions
 - A. Sincere Catholics will search for a responsible “voting ethic” that ignores no threats to human life and dignity, and avoids the politicization of belief
 - B. Neither major U.S. political party measures up consistently to these values
 - C. The “Consistent ethic of life” of the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin is proposed as a promising framework for discerning responsible voting behavior
-- Church voices serve us well when offering such guidance on moral issues when compromises appear necessary and delicate
- VI. Some Final Wisdom Regarding Contemporary Political Discernments