

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 Observations Regarding Features of This Year's Elections

A. Enhanced Appeals to Voters of Religious Conviction and Conscience

B. Religious Media Reports Pressures on Contemporary Political Discernments