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### 6. Faithful Citizenship in the USA and Uganda

#### A Comparative Analysis of Recent Catholic Pastoral Letters on Politics

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#### Abstract

This article offers a comparative analysis of two 2015 Catholic bishops' statements on politics: the Ugandan Episcopal Conference's "Free and Fair Elections" and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' "Faithful Citizenship." Both statements were released in the run-up to presidential elections in Uganda and the United States in 2016. Overall, the U.S. bishops offer a detailed, policy-oriented, magisterially-guided statement that aims to form the political consciences of American Catholic voters. In contrast, the Ugandan bishops provide a broader, process-oriented statement that reflects their self-styled image as "prophets to the nation." Not surprisingly, both national episcopal conferences uncritically embrace the political imagination of the nation-state, limiting both hierarchies' ability to conceive of Catholic identity in more genuinely catholic, transnational terms.

Keywords: church and state, U.S. bishops, Uganda, politics, 2016 elections

## Introduction

When I was brainstorming possible papers for this symposium, I was struck by the confluence of 2016 presidential elections in the U.S. and Uganda, topics of conversation that repeatedly arose during my research in Uganda in 2015. In February 2016, Uganda returned President Yoweri Museveni to another five-year term in power in controversial elections that the opposition claimed were rigged in favor of the thirty-year incumbent. (In addition to allegations of bribery and intimidation, security forces detained the main opposition candidate in the weeks leading up to and following the election.) In November 2016, the United States chose a new president to succeed Barack Obama in an electoral cycle that has proven to be the most divisive since at least 1968. In the midst of these momentous political events, Catholic bishops in both countries have publicly and officially asserted their collective magisterial voice on the crucial questions of public policy and political process facing the peoples of Uganda and the United States.

Theologians and ethicists in the United States have offered ample commentary on recent Catholic political engagement, including the U.S. bishops' public statements on American politics (Cafardi; Budde; Heyer, Rozell and Genovese; Kari; Cochran and Cochran). Likewise, Ugandan Catholic scholars have analyzed their own bishops' tradition of engaging postcolonial Ugandan politics (Mukasa; Waliggo, Ssettuuma, Katongole, and Katongole; Ssekabira). Where this essay breaks new ground, however, is in reading these episcopal voices together. This also represents a new kind of scholarly synthesis for me, coalescing my personal identity as an American Catholic living in the United States with my academic scholarship that has focused on church and state relations in eastern and central Africa. My primary purpose in this paper is to offer a comparative analysis of each episcopal conference's most recent statement on politics, namely the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) November 2015 edition of their quadrennial "Faithful Citizenship" document and the Uganda Episcopal Conference's (UEC's) August 2015 statement on "Free and Fair Elections."

Overall, I will argue that the Ugandan bishops offer a biblically-grounded, process-oriented statement that reflects their self-styled image as "prophets to the nation." In contrast, the USCCB statement offers a papal-guided, policy-oriented statement that aims to form the political consciences of Catholic voters. For all of their differences, both documents reflect a didactic style in which the imagination of the modern nation-state largely supersedes either the global common good or what Michael Budde has described as "Christian ecclesial solidarity" (3).

To understand the contexts for these contrasting visions, however, we need to first trace the roots and history of Catholic pastoral letters in each country.

## The History of Catholic Pastoral Letters in the United States

Catholic Bishops in the United States have issued pastoral letters engaging social issues since the dawn of the republic. As the nation's founders were promulgating a Bill of Rights that included freedom of religious expression, the first American Catholic bishop John Carroll released the nation's first Catholic pastoral letter in 1791. Carroll's language here was telling, reflecting the fusion of American and Catholic identities that would become a

hallmark of the Church in the United States. “This Synod is in reality, the real formation of American Catholicism, the fusion of Catholic principles with American circumstance” (Kari: 4). Throughout the nineteenth century, Catholic pastoral letters focused on three primary goals: 1) unifying and defending a Catholic immigrant minority population dispersed across the republic; 2) responding to outside attacks from nativists and other anti-Catholic critics; and 3) assuring the large Protestant majority of the U.S. that Catholicism was compatible with American citizenship (Kari: 1-33). In the words of Margaret Ross Sammon, Catholic leaders generally adhered to Carroll’s dictum that “Catholic priests should avoid political involvement unless the interests of the Church were in danger” (11). For example, Catholic bishops were notable for their abstention from the pressing Christian social reform efforts of the nineteenth century, including abolitionism, women’s suffrage, and the temperance movement, in part because many of the leading Evangelical Protestant reformers were themselves deeply anti-Catholic (Kari: 21, 38).

During the early-to-mid twentieth century, this predominantly defensive, institutional posture shifted toward a broader engagement with American public policy and social reform. During World War I, the Catholic bishops initiated their first national bureaucratic organization, the National Catholic War Council, to coordinate Catholic war relief efforts. After the war, this evolved into the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC). Under the influence of advisors like Mgr. John A. Ryan, popularly known as the “Right Reverend New Dealer” (Broderick), the bishops began to speak out more frequently on a wide range of public issues including unemployment, industrialization, labor relations, global peacebuilding, anti-Semitism, materialism and secularism, and race relations. In Camilla Kari’s phrasing, Catholic bishops between the 1920s and 1950s sought to “emerge as a voice of moral authority in the public arena” (42), reflecting the broader mainstreaming of Catholics in American society.

In the aftermath of Vatican II, the U.S. bishops in 1966 founded two organizations: the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC). The USCC in particular focused on public policy. In the 1960s, this included issues such as the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights movement, and the plight of farm workers. (As a point of reference, the NCCB and the USCC merged in 2001 into the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB].) Interestingly, however, the U.S. bishops did not issue any quadrennial “voting guides” – the precursors of today’s “Faithful Citizenship” document – until 1976 (Carr: 1).

What changed? In one word, *Roe*. After a flurry of increasingly permissive state rulings on abortion rights, the U.S. Supreme Court established a constitutional right to abortion in its landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. This was a “crossing the Rubicon” moment for the U.S. Catholic bishops, and in 1974 they began a full-scale lobbying effort to overturn *Roe*. As Sammon notes, this was the first time in U.S. Catholic history that the bishops appeared to support active civil disobedience of a U.S. law (14). Reflecting the clergy’s Democratic leanings at the time, Bishop Joseph Bernardin and other USCC leaders lobbied 1976 presidential candidate Jimmy Carter and other Democrats to support a constitutional “human life amendment” that would effectively overturn *Roe*. Such efforts proved fruitless, and after Ronald Reagan’s election year “conversion” to the pro-life cause, the Republican Party became the political flag-bearer for pro-life activists in the 1980s (D’Antonio: 50-63).

Although abortion was the most important issue in mobilizing the Catholic hierarchy's political voice, the bishops also spoke out on other issues, most famously in their 1983 pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace" and their 1986 pastoral "Economic Justice for All" (Pagorelc: 215-24; Kari: 69-121).

In many ways, the last 40 years have seen a Catholic tug-of-war between what one could call the "abortion firsters," arguing that the intrinsic evil of abortion trumps all other policy issues, and the "seamless garment" advocates who argue that Catholics should vote on the basis of the broad spectrum of Catholic social teaching. Both positions are used by partisans to further their own political aims, with Republicans supporting the former approach and Democrats the latter. The obvious takeaway, of course, is that Catholic policy positions do not neatly fit one party; everything comes down to priorities. In the words of David O'Brien, "at least since the 1890s Catholics and their bishops were progressive on economic issues, conservative on cultural issues and divided on foreign policy" (22). These countervailing winds have only blown stronger since the 1970s. Ironically, even as Catholics have become increasingly politically homeless, Catholic bishops have become increasingly strident in demanding that Catholics participate in the political process, especially presidential elections.

### The History of Catholic Pastoral Letters in Uganda

Turning now to Uganda, we see some similarities between the tradition of U.S. Catholic political engagement and that of the Ugandan Catholic bishops. First, Catholics were a suspected group in both countries, and as in nineteenth-century America, Ugandan church leaders focused in the early twentieth century on building up their flocks and steering clear of political controversy. In Uganda, this stemmed from the competitive Anglican and Catholic missions of the 1880s, the politicization of these identities during the religious conflicts of the early 1890s, and the subsequent establishment of a *de facto* Anglican political monopoly under the post-1900 British colonial protectorate (Twaddle; Low; Waliggo). Reflecting the colonial power dynamic, the majority of Buganda's twentieth-century political elites and all of its *kabakas* (kings) were Anglicans. Catholic leaders retained generally cordial relations with British colonial officials, especially since they depended on the state for most of their educational resources (Hansen: 169). But the Anglican Church was clearly the unofficial established church in Uganda throughout the colonial era, and a lingering sense of political marginalization remained a key marker of Ugandan Catholic identity throughout the late colonial and early post-colonial periods.

As in the United States after World War I, Ugandan Catholic leaders' historically defensive posture became more "outwardly-focused" in the 1940s and 1950s. This was largely due to the leadership of Uganda's and Africa's first indigenous Catholic bishop, Msgr. Joseph Kiwanuka (1899-1964). Appointed bishop in 1939, Kiwanuka issued a 1947 pastoral letter in which he described himself as the "educator of the nation," and he took an active part in the 1955 Hancock conference that helped bring Buganda's *kabaka* (king) back from British-imposed exile. In the run-up to independence, Kiwanuka in 1961 issued a statement entitled "Church and State," one of the most famous Catholic pastoral letters in modern Africa. Here Kiwanuka called for a democracy with a largely ceremonial constitutional monarchy, warning Kabaka Edward Muteesa that "when political parties are established in a country, if the king still mixes up in politics, the kingship is on the way to digging its own

grave” (27).<sup>1</sup> On the eve of independence in October 1962, Kiwanuka and his fellow Catholic bishops issued a joint pastoral letter calling on political leaders to responsibly serve the nation. Here they warned against an “exaggerated patriotism,” called for a “distinction” if not “separation” between church and state, and argued that every human being “has certain inviolable rights, endorsed by all civilized nations, which are called human rights” (UEC 1962: 474-77).

As students of postcolonial Uganda know all too well, these noble sentiments were generally disregarded by Uganda’s political class. Under the leadership of Milton Obote (1962-71) and later Idi Amin (1971-79), Uganda descended into an autocratic military state infamous for its massive violations of human rights. After suspending the constitution and chasing Kabaka Muteesa out of the country, Obote began detaining thousands of his political opponents in the late 1960s. Upwards of 300,000 Ugandans died during Amin’s despotic regime, and another 500,000 civilians perished during the civil war that dominated Obote’s second term of 1981-85. Between 1962 and 1979, Ugandan bishops were publicly silent in the face of these human rights abuses; the bishops did not issue a single joint pastoral letter between 1962 and 1979 (Ssettuuma et al.: 20-21). This changed after 1979 as Catholic leaders issued a series of scathing commentaries on the ills of Ugandan politics, echoing Exodus in claiming to “hear the cries of our people” and speaking out forcefully against the abuses of the security services. “Violence has been the curse that has poisoned the lives of people all over the country . . . For too long people in uniform have engaged in acts of violence against peaceful civilians rather than defending them from the enemies of peace” (UEC 1980: 5). In particular, Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga became the face of nonviolent public opposition to Obote during the early 1980s. On Ash Wednesday of 1982, Obote even ordered government soldiers to raid Rubaga Cathedral and Nsubuga’s personal residence.

After Yoweri Museveni’s National Resistance Movement (NRM) came to power in 1986, Catholic leaders were enlisted in the national rebuilding process. A noted historian and theologian, Fr. John Mary Waliggo chaired the constitutional commission that drafted the revised 1996 constitution. For his part, Museveni adeptly incorporated a range of Catholic politicians into the NRM, many of whom had been formerly associated with the Catholic-dominated Democratic Party. Museveni also cultivated generally positive relations with Nsubuga and his successor, Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala. The bishops issued several pastoral letters on the political process in Uganda, including “Towards a New National Constitution” (1989) and “Political Maturity: Constitutional Peace and National Unity in Uganda” (1995). As one can tell from the titles, the bishops’ overriding focus was on process, namely how to build a sustainable, morally-grounded constitutional system that would serve the common good and overcome the zero-sum politics of the Obote-Amin eras. One sees an example of this rhetoric in the bishops’ 2005 statement “Towards a Democratic and Peaceful Uganda Based on the Common Good.”

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<sup>1</sup> The Kabaka was so incensed at Kiwanuka’s statement that he arrested the parish priest of Rubaga Cathedral in lieu of Kiwanuka who was traveling out of the country. Catholic crowds gathered outside the Kabaka’s palace to protest, and the priest was ultimately released after an overnight interrogation.

With Uganda's nasty past the destructive role of the army in politics cannot be taken lightly . . . Transparency in the whole political transition process is crucial if we are to avoid a repeat of mistakes of the 1980 and 2001 general elections . . . The self-seeking politics that has characterized Uganda's politics for several years since independence should be shunned (UEC 2005: 13-14).

As we will see, the Ugandan bishops' continuing emphasis on political *process* parts ways with the U.S. bishops' consistent focus on *policy* issues, a contrast that emerges strongly in each episcopal conference's most recent pastoral letter on politics. Let us turn now to these 2015 statements.

### The USCCB's 2015 Statement on Faithful Citizenship

In November 2015, the USCCB reissued "Forming Consciences to Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility." As previously noted, the first of these statements was released for the 1976 presidential election cycle, and subsequent statements have followed in the run-up to each successive American presidential election. A major revision was released in 2007 prior to the 2008 elections, and a lightly modified version of "Faithful Citizenship" was unveiled in 2011. The basic text of the 2015 statement is similar but not identical to these earlier statements; I will highlight several subtle but important changes vis-à-vis the 2011 document.

Conveying a generally negative rhetorical tone, the 2015 USCCB Faithful Citizenship document begins by listing an array of policy issues threatening the American people. In order of priority, these include: 1) "the ongoing destruction of over one million innocent human lives each year by abortion"; 2) "physician assisted suicide"; 3) "the redefinition of marriage"; 4) "the excessive consumption of material goods and the destruction of natural resources"; 5) "deadly attacks on fellow Christians and religious minorities throughout the world"; 6) "a narrowing redefinition of religious freedom"; 7) "economic policies that fail to prioritize the poor"; 8) "a broken immigration system and worldwide refugee crisis;" and 9) "wars, terror and violence" (USCCB: 6-7).<sup>2</sup> The picture of American policy here is uniformly dark; the bishops appear to be interpreting their prophetic task as "naming the sins" of the people and especially their political leaders. In fact, no positive approbations are offered about recent American political or policy developments.

The bishops then offer a brief defense of the Church's public engagement and demand principled Catholic participation in public life. Lay participation in political life is not an optional add-on. Rather "responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation . . . rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do" (USCCB: 13). The bishops admit that "Catholics may feel politically disenfranchised, sensing 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" (USCCB: 16). But this difficult reality should only inspire more

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, the issues of materialism, environmental destruction, and attacks on Christian minorities are new in the 2015 document, likely reflecting both recent world events and Pope Francis's influence.

Catholics to engage in political life, applying insights from Catholic social teaching in the public square and within their political parties.

The bishops go on to frame this call for participation within terms familiar to moral theology, invoking the language of conscience, prudence, doing good and avoiding evil, and making moral choices. The controversial language of “intrinsic evil” arises in this context (the controversy stemming from which policy issues are classified as nonnegotiable “intrinsic evils” and which belong to more negotiable areas of policy implementation). As in 2011, abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, embryonic stem cell research, racism, genocide, torture, and the targeting of noncombatants in war are classified as “intrinsically evil.” However, the 2015 document expands the list of intrinsic evils to include “treating workers as mere means to an end, deliberately subjecting workers to subhuman living conditions, treating the poor as disposable, or redefining marriage to deny its essential meaning” (USCCB: 16). The bishops recognize that in situations where “morally flawed laws already exist,” leaders must engage in “the art of the possible,” and Catholic politicians and voters must utilize prudential judgment in their policymaking and voting decisions.

After synthesizing Catholic Social Teaching under the four major headings of human dignity, subsidiarity, the common good, and solidarity, the U.S. bishops in the second half of the document apply these four principles to specific public policy issues in the United States (USCCB: 26-37). In order, these include:

- *Protecting human life.* This includes combating abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty; genocide, torture and the targeting of noncombatants are also listed as supplementary examples. One wonders why abortion takes precedence over genocide, but this likely reflects the American political context that dominates the entire document.
- *Promoting peace.* Here the bishops critique a broad acquiescence to war, call for the protection of Christian minorities, reject torture, call for halting the spread of nuclear and biological weapons, and advocate for the reallocation of resources from armed conflict to addressing the needs of the poor and the root causes of violence.
- *Marriage and family life.* This is a frequent USCCB emphasis that goes back to the nineteenth-century pastoral letters. The 2015 document includes a new emphasis on the dangers of “gender ideology” that contradicts the bishops’ preferred vision of gender complementarity and duality.
- *Religious freedom.* Here the bishops emphasize the link between protecting religious freedom in the U.S. and offering hope to those suffering violent persecution abroad. The horizon for the first is the Catholic Church’s ongoing battle with the U.S. government over contraceptive mandates and gay marriage; the latter reflects a surge in recent violence against Christians in the Middle East, India, and Africa.
- *Preferential option for the poor and economic justice.* Here the bishops repeat their longstanding support for union organization, just wages, welfare, social security, affordable housing, and food security.

- *Healthcare.* The bishops emphasize the importance of affordable and accessible care that does not violate the moral and religious convictions of employers. They acknowledge a recent “increase in the number of people insured” but do not give any direct credit to President Obama’s Affordability Care Act.
- *Migration.* This is another common emphasis in USCCB policy advocacy, emphasizing the gospel call to “welcome the stranger.” Compared to 2011, however, the categories here are expanded to include unaccompanied children, refugees and asylum-seekers, border detainees, and victims of human trafficking. The bishops repeat their longstanding call for comprehensive immigration reform.
- *Catholic education.* This new category emphasizes parental choice and calls for the expansion of school vouchers and the universal right to a quality education.
- *Promoting justice and countering violence.* Here the bishops repeat their opposition to the death penalty within what they describe as a “growing culture of violence,” and they call for reforms to the “broken” criminal justice system.
- *Combatting unjust discrimination* on the basis of race, religion, sex, ethnicity, disabling condition, or age. Sexual orientation is not mentioned as a category of discrimination, and no specific reference is made to recent controversies surrounding police brutality or the Black Lives Matter movement.
- *Care for our common home.* This new section calls for the U.S. to address global climate change, support sustainable development, and reduce poverty without “coercive population control programs.”
- *Communications, media and culture.* Here the bishops offer guidance on how to protect children from the vagaries of modern technology, focusing in particular on the threat of internet pornography.
- *Global solidarity.* The bishops conclude with an exhortation to address the “scandal” of underdevelopment, humanize globalization, promote the rights of religious minorities, and find a political solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Surprisingly, this is the only international context named explicitly; previous references to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2011 document were cut for 2015.

In a brief conclusion, the USCCB repeats their “top ten” list of policy goals for 2016 presidential candidates, highlighting abortion, marriage, immigration reform, poverty, healthcare, prejudice, care for creation, military force, and economic justice. They close by reminding Catholics that “not all issues are equal . . . some involve intrinsically evil acts, which can never be approved” (92). One could argue that these rhetorical shifts reflect the longstanding tension between the “abortion only” and the “seamless garment” perspectives, reflecting deeper conservative-liberal ideological fissures that have increasingly dominated the U.S. Catholic Church.

### The Ugandan Catholic Bishops' 2016 "Free and Fair Elections" Statement

The Ugandan Episcopal Conference's (UEC) August 2015 statement "Free and Fair Elections: Our Common Mission to Consolidating Democratic Gains in Uganda" was the third episcopal document in five years to address Ugandan politics, following the 2010 "Building a Peaceful, United and Prosperous Uganda through Free and Fair Elections: Consolidating Electoral Democracy in Uganda" and the 2012 "Fifty Years of Independence: Celebrating our Heritage." Although my focus here is on the 2015 statement, it should be noted that the 2012 letter emphasized the Catholic Church's "Good Samaritan" contributions to sociopolitical development and social harmony, the Church's role as the "conscience of society," and the Church's hopes to collaborate with the state to foster the common good of all Ugandans (UEC 2012: 20).

"Free and Fair Elections" continues these themes but focuses predominantly on the issue of process, namely how to establish a genuine electoral democracy in Uganda. As the Ugandan bishops state on their opening page, "in this [pastoral letter] we pay more attention to the critical issues in the journey towards the 2016 elections, in particular how citizens and various institutions concerned with this *process* should conduct themselves during this period" (UEC 2015:, emphasis added). This emphasis reflects Uganda's bitter political history and the lack of a peaceful transition of political power since 1962, including rigged elections in 1980 that led directly into civil war. The bishops' concern with process is carried forward in the challenges they see facing electoral democracy in Uganda, such as internal strife within political parties, lack of popular trust in the electoral process, the commercialization of elections, voter apathy, political intolerance, and the inappropriate use of force by police and military against the political opposition (UEC 2015: 6-14).

The Ugandan bishops then reflect on the principles and values that should guide political participation in Uganda. These include humility and servant leadership, an active, engaged citizenship, unity in diversity, patriotic love and respect for country, and justice and fairness. The final section of the document offers brief guidelines for ensuring "free and fair elections" in the February 2016 presidential race, addressing in turn the government, political parties, candidates, media, the electorate, and clergy and lay leaders. There is a particular concern here with avoiding behavior and words that could "arouse hatred and violence" (UEC 2015: 25-26). The government bears particular responsibility for ensuring free and fair elections through the National Electoral Commission, and there are repeated mentions of the risk of "security services" and paramilitary militias intervening in elections. Voters are encouraged if not threatened to vote on polling day, and clergy and lay leaders are expected to guide their flocks while remaining nonpartisan, keeping churches free from electioneering and politicking. Strikingly, there is little to no policy guidance throughout the document; the Ugandan bishops convey little sense of Catholic social teaching's views on economics, human dignity, or foreign or social policy. This enables the bishops to write a document about one-third the length of the USCCB's "Faithful Citizenship."

### Comparative Analysis

In comparing the USCCB's "Faithful Citizenship" and the UEC's "Free and Fair Elections," I would highlight three key points of contrast. First, whereas the Ugandan

bishops appear to be advising the nation, the U.S. bishops seem more focused on advising Catholic voters. Second, if the Ugandan bishops are primarily focused on political process, the U.S. bishops place a heavy emphasis on government policies. Finally, the U.S. bishops ground their document in the recent papal magisterium, whereas the Ugandan bishops establish a more biblical foundation for their teachings. After explaining each of these contrasts, I will then critically engage three common emphases in both documents, namely a shared didactic style that emphasizes the formation of consciences, the limited political imagination of the nation-state, and a related tendency to overly sacralize the democratic process itself.

First, the Ugandan bishops appear to be advising the nation, whereas the U.S. bishops seem to be advising Catholic voters and candidates. In their opening lines, the U.S. bishops frame their document in terms of the “political responsibility of Catholics” (USCCB: 6), whereas the Ugandan bishops open their document by writing of their responsibility to “guide the nation” (UEC 2015: 2). This reflects the contrasting church-state histories and political imaginations in these two countries. Namely, the history of Catholic marginalization in the U.S. and the American mythos of “separation of church and state” still limit the Church’s ability to “speak to the Nation.” In contrast, religious language retains a central role in public discourse in Uganda. And even though Uganda is far from a monolithically Catholic nation, the percentage of Catholics is about two times higher than in America (21% Catholic in the U.S. versus 42% Catholic in Uganda). In turn, the Ugandan Catholic bishops gained considerable national credibility for their prophetic witness during the 1980s civil war. Their rhetoric in 2015 reflects this heritage as the Ugandan bishops adopt the Old Testament “prophet” model, speaking truth to power on behalf of the people. Interestingly, there is no mention anywhere in the document of “Catholic voters.” In contrast, the USCCB seems much more concerned with convincing Catholic Democrats and Catholic Republicans to support the bishops’ own policy positions, a challenge compounded by the fact that the USCCB’s policy positions cannot be neatly categorized as either liberal or conservative.

Second, the USCCB focuses largely on policy, whereas the UEC focuses primarily on process. As evidenced above, the U.S. bishops double-down on nearly every conceivable policy issue, framing their document within the language of moral theology (e.g., prudence, justice, and making individual moral choices). Not surprisingly, the U.S. bishops continue to prioritize abortion as their top public policy issue. But in comparison to their 2011 statement on faithful citizenship, there is stronger language in the 2015 document on environmental and poverty issues that likely reflect the influence of Pope Francis. In stark contrast, the Ugandan bishops do not advocate for any specific policy issues. Rather, they emphasize the type of democratic process that could consolidate the common good in Uganda. If the U.S. bishops adopt the language of moral theology, the Ugandan bishops seem more comfortable in the discourse of political science, namely how to run a successful democratic election in a modern nation-state. It seems that both sides could learn from each other. One wonders why the Ugandan bishops eschew any policy commentary, especially concerning Uganda’s endemic poverty and the continuing challenges of economic development, environmental degradation, and political corruption. On the other hand, one wonders why the U.S. Catholic bishops are so silent on the “process” of modern American democracy, especially in light of the American public’s widespread distrust of the political system, the gerrymandering of

“safe” congressional districts, the post-Citizens United influence of super-PACs, extremist political rhetoric on the right wing, and growing calls for a “political revolution” on the left.

Third, the USCCB grounds its argument in modern papal teaching, whereas the Ugandans appeal to a biblical framework. Both invoke the language of Catholic Social Teaching, but the Ugandan bishops are fonder of biblical metaphors. The UEC frames “Free and Fair Elections” around the passage from Acts 1:23-26 concerning the apostles’ election of Matthias as the new twelfth apostle, arguing that this is a good example of seeking God’s guidance in selecting leaders. Later they reference God’s liberation of the people of Israel from oppression in Exodus and Joshua, highlight Jesus’s teachings on servant-leadership, and echo the New Testament epistles’ frequent calls to “cultivate a spirit of unity, tolerance and coexistence” (UEC 2015: 17, 21-22).<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the U.S. bishops heavily emphasize the recent papal magisterium from John Paul II to Francis. In comparison to their 2011 statement, the U.S. bishops excerpt much longer sections of papal speeches on key public policy issues, including Pope Francis’s calls to participate in public life in *Evangelii gaudium*, the importance of forming lay consciences from Vatican II’s *Gaudium et spes*, and Benedict XVI’s exhortation to maintain a broad “Eucharistic consistency” on various policy issues (USCCB: 12, 14, 19). The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* is also excerpted on multiple occasions. But when it comes to biblical metaphors or references, “Faithful Citizenship” is oddly silent. Again, this could be an area for mutual enrichment with U.S. bishops borrowing more liberally from biblical motifs and Ugandan leaders incorporating more recent magisterial teaching.

Whatever their differences, the recent political statements of the Catholic bishops of the U.S. and Uganda also share striking convergences. In particular, I would point to three shared emphases that also reveal underlying weaknesses in the Catholic magisterium’s approach to modern politics.

First, both documents are notable for an overly didactic style that seems limited by the language of conscience. Both the U.S. and the Ugandan bishops come across as scolds, telling Catholics, politicians, and/or the media how to comport themselves. There are few if any notes of self-critical humility or accountability.<sup>4</sup> The U.S. bishops’ target audience appears to be the private consciences of U.S. Catholic citizens. For their part, the Ugandan bishops envision themselves as the “conscience of society” and lambast efforts to “silence the Church’s prophetic role” (UEC 2012: 20). There is not much reflection on the obvious reality that politics is not just about consciences but also involves the formation – and often the destruction – of visible social and individual bodies (Cavanaugh; Katongole). Rather, for the bishops politics is something “out there” in society or “in there” within the mind to

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<sup>3</sup> The Exodus motif is developed even more in the UEC’s 2012 “Fifty Years of Independence: Celebrating our Heritage” in which the bishops reflect on God’s guidance through their own “Exodus as a nation” through independence and post-colonial rule (UEC 2012: 3-4). The bishops here also compare the Church’s role in Uganda to that of the Lukan “Good Samaritan,” staying close to the suffering in a spirit of compassionate charity (UEC 2012: 43).

<sup>4</sup> An exception can be found in the Ugandan bishops’ 2012 statement on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence in which they “humbly acknowledge our responsibility both as individuals and as a Christian community in the evil which befell our country” (UEC 2012: 62)

which the Church can contribute through forming “the nation” or “lay consciences,” respectively.

I would point to multiple dangers with this approach. First, the rhetoric here is highly didactic, making it easy to confuse a well-formed conscience with blind obedience to Catholic authorities. The legacy of the recently canonized martyr Franz Jägerstätter – an Austrian farmer who disobeyed his own bishop in refusing to serve in the Nazi army – offers an important counter voice here (Budde: 168-72). Second, there is little reflection on what Budde terms the Catholic Church’s “abysmal failure to form consciences in harmony with the gospel” (99), especially among politicians and public servants. Why are there so few pro-life, progressive U.S. Catholic politicians who adhere to the breadth of Catholic social teaching? Why is there so much lamenting in Uganda of the dearth of honest Catholic public servants, at least since the 1972 assassination of Benedicto Kiwanuka?<sup>5</sup> Third, more reflection on “bodies” could also serve as an important reminder that Catholics are not just members of the body politic of their nation but also members of the transnational Body of Christ. To their credit, the USCCB invokes Benedict XVI’s notion of “Eucharistic consistency,” but they never connect this to the powerful political imagination of the Body of Christ. This could have particular resonance in the area of immigration where every Sunday Eucharist crosses national borders, creating a community where there is “neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free person, male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Is there Eucharistic consistency in Anglo-Americans sharing the Body of Christ with undocumented Catholic immigrants within the gathered Body of Christ, and then voting for politicians who want to deport their brothers and sisters, break up families, and build border walls?

On this note, both documents assume the nation-state as the framework for the common good, and the political imagination of national borders seems far more important than the Christian imagination of the “borders of baptism.” This bias is perhaps best symbolized by the image on the front of “Faithful Citizenship” – a waving American flag blending into a cross. Not surprisingly, this document includes little reflection on if or how national interest supports or undermines either the broader global common good or what Budde has termed “ecclesial solidarity” among the global communion of Christians. The U.S. bishops briefly mention how Catholics should be “citizens in the heavenly Kingdom” (USCCB: 6), but this metaphor remains ethereal. I do not think that national identities can simply disappear, and Dorian Llywelyn may have a point in rehabilitating national identity as part of the incarnational reality of modern human life (285). But a genuine Christian theopolitical vision should at the very least “relativize” our national identities and commitments within the transnational Body of Christ (Llywelyn: 288; Budde: 3). Pope Benedict XVI’s comments on the eve of a 2006 visit to Auschwitz should chasten the perennial modern tendency to idolize the nation: “We must always learn that we are

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<sup>5</sup> A devout Catholic and daily Mass attendee strongly shaped by Catholic social teaching, Ben Kiwanuka emerged from a peasant background to become the leader of the Catholic-dominated Democratic Party between 1958 and 1964. He served as Uganda’s first prime minister in 1961-62, and he was later appointed as the first African chief justice of Uganda’s Supreme Court. Amin assassinated Kiwanuka when he refused to cooperate in a highly politicized trial of a British expatriate in 1972. His cause has recently been introduced for canonization, in part to inspire more Catholic politicians in Uganda to imitate his witness.

Catholic, and that one's nationality is inserted, relativized, and carefully located in the great unity of the Catholic communion" (16).

Finally, both documents overly read the moral obligation of political participation through the lens of voting, leaving little space for what one could call "tactical disengagement" (e.g., abstention, write-in-votes, or even voter boycotts). In a flourish of theological hyperbole, the U.S. bishops at one point posit 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" (USCCB: 19). (One can imagine St. Peter at the Pearly Gates, determining your entrance based on local precinct voting records; let us hope there are no "hanging chads" in the afterlife.) The U.S. bishops admit that "Catholics may feel politically disenfranchised," unable to match Catholic social teaching with the political platforms of either major U.S. party. They reluctantly allow that voters may decide to take the "extraordinary step of not voting for any candidate" (USCCB: 19, emphasis added), never admitting that this would seem to be the *de facto* position for any U.S. Catholic who takes seriously the pro-life and progressive emphases of Catholic social teaching. For their part, the Ugandan bishops restate the "need to remain patriotic" (UEC 2015: 22) and never float the option of abstention in the face of a rigged political system. There is little reflection on what the Ugandan theologian Michael Mukasa describes as the legitimizing role of voter participation in African elections, and the potential for a voter boycott to help "delegitimize" a corrupt electoral system (53-58). Such a tactic is increasingly necessary within Museveni's and the NRM's one-party, pseudo-dictatorship in Uganda.

Let me close with the words of Pope Francis before he was Pope Francis. Although Francis follows his papal predecessors in advocating for active political participation, Jorge Mario Bergoglio never voted between 1960 and 2013. He attributed this in part to his frustration with the "displacement of the essential with the aesthetic," namely how polling and marketing came to overshadow actual political platforms. Bergoglio also argued that "at the end of the day I am father of all, and I cannot be wrapped in a political flag" (Bergoglio and Skorka: 141). You and I are not the pope, but there may be some wisdom in this witness.

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