

Faithful Citizenship

Principles and Strategies to Serve the Common Good

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History, Context, Directions, Dangers

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Introduction

Right Place, Right Topic

[1] I am honored to be a part of this impressive gathering. My grandmother always warned against mixing “Religion and Politics.” She had a point: if we treat this combination badly, it can be dangerous. It can explode into ignorance, intolerance, inter-religious conflict and ideological and partisan combat. And we’ve seen a lot of that over the years.

[2] It is good to be here because of where we are – at a university, a Catholic and Jesuit university. The topic of faithful citizenship, with its academic and moral dimensions, is at the heart of the mission of Creighton University as articulated in its documents on mission and values:

- “*Our Jesuit vision commits us to form women and men of competence, conscience and compassion. . . We do this in service of a faith that does justice.*” I would suggest that faithful citizenship is about producing people of “competence, conscience and compassion . . . who put their faith to work in the service of justice.”

- Your Mission Statement says Creighton is dedicated “*to the pursuit of truth . . . guided by the living tradition of the Catholic Church.*” That is one description of faithful citizenship.
- As a Jesuit university you “*offer an integrating vision of the world that arises out of a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ.*” A Creighton education “*is directed . . . towards the promotion of justice.*” “*Service to others, family life, the worth of each individual . . . ethnic and cultural diversity*” are called core values for the mission of this university. These values are part of the substance of faithful citizenship.
- At this university, the faculty does “*research to enhance teaching, contribute to the betterment of society, and provide ethical perspectives for dealing with an increasingly complex world.*” Political life is one of the parts of this complex world that desperately needs ethical perspectives.

[3] So we are at the right place and this is the right topic.

Perspectives

[4] My credentials in this academic setting are quite modest. When it comes to Catholic education, I am a product of it. And I pay for it. My youngest daughter Molly is a junior at Loyola College in Maryland, a Jesuit institution. I tell my Jesuit friends that the way that the Jesuits there practice the option for the poor is that they are making me poor. Despite that, I am happy to be here.

[5] I am happy to be out of Washington. Washington is a sad place. It is a polarized place. It is a paralyzed place. Recall the inconclusive, divisive, demonizing immigration debate. Congress couldn't agree on health care for children. There is no common policy on Iraq. Part of the reason Washington is polarized and paralyzed is that the Capital is preoccupied with the coming elections.

[6] These are some of the perspectives I bring to this discussion:

[7] *Professional:* This is not an easy time to work for the Bishops' Conference. We have experienced some of the downsizing and some of the stresses that the rest of the Church has experienced, and that's only right. However, it is still a great place to see the strength and vitality of our Church's social mission. I have the privilege to go to other lands and see leaders, like the people in this room, standing up for life and dignity in a way that makes you proud to be a part of this family of faith. In my service at the Bishops' Conference, I have had the opportunity to watch and contribute to the development of these statements through the years. I may be the only person who worked on the first Faithful Citizenship statement in 1976 and worked on the latest one in 2008.

[8] *Personal:* I have been involved in public life. As a young man, I ran for office. There are worse things than running and losing, and standing up for what you believe in. One message I have is more of us ought to run for office. I worked for the White House Conference on Families. I worked with Coretta King at the National Committee for Full Employment. But for me, the best place to advance this mission and my values is helping our Church share this message of Faithful Citizenship.

[9] *Political*: I am going to talk a lot about politics, so I think I had better tell you where I come from. I am a product of a mixed marriage. Both my parents are Minnesota Catholics. My mother is from St. Paul and my dad is from Minneapolis, which, as you may know, is a big deal. However, for purposes of this discussion, my mother was an absolutely committed Republican. Her brother, my uncle, was Republican leader of the Minnesota Senate. My dad is still a die-hard Democrat, a proud, pro-life Democrat. My grandfather, his father, was Hubert Humphrey's finance chairman when he first ran for mayor. So I learned at an early age that we can act on our faith in different ways and in different parties.

[10] *Parent*: When we talk about Faithful Citizenship, my passion comes in part from being a parent. What kind of politics, what kind of country, and what kind of Church are our children going to inherit? The hardest thing I have done is not help the bishops apply Catholic teaching to Iraq, although that is hard. It is not testifying on climate change before the Senate, although that is challenging. The hardest thing I have ever done is helping to raise kids with Christian values in this culture. And part of what I want to communicate to my children is a passion for politics that reflects our faith. And that is hard work.

What I Will Do and Will Not Do

[11] In this presentation, I *will* outline the history and some of the ways that *Political Responsibility/Faithful Citizenship* has developed over time. I *will* try and summarize some of the principles and some of the ideas that guide this document. I *will* offer some reflections on directions and dangers for religious engagement in public life, especially in our Catholic community.

[12] I *will not* tell Catholics – or anybody else – whom they should vote for or whom they ought to vote against. I *will not* be offering my own commentary on the campaign. I come from Washington where everyone's a pundit. Washington's a place where everyone knows everything and everything they know is wrong. I once read that the least credible sentence in the English language is: "I'm from Washington and I'm here to help." I will try to make the case for the positive role of government and politics I will try to contribute to this conversation we are going to have over the next day and a half about the role of the Church and Catholics in public life.

Mission of the Church in Public Life

[13] We are a Church, not a lobby; a community of faith, not another interest group or Political Action Committee. What brings us together is not politics not ideology. We are not the Democratic Party at prayer. We are not the Religious Caucus of the Republican Party. Creighton University is a community of faith and learning. What brings us together is the Word of God and the teaching of His Church.

[14] The most countercultural thing our Church teaches may be not that all life is sacred, that war ought to be a last resort, that the poor ought to come first, (although those are countercultural positions). It is that politics is a good thing. Politics is where we make decisions about some of the most important parts of our lives.

[15] All eight versions of the faithful citizenship/political responsibility document over these 32 years have said something like "responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in the

political process is a moral obligation.” You cannot be a faithful Catholic and sit on the sidelines of political life. It is an essential part of being an American and being a Catholic. I would also suggest it ought to be an essential part of being part of the family of Creighton University, whether you are a faculty member, staff member, student, alumnus or just a friend.

Foundations

[16] This mission is not new. It is as old as the Hebrew Scriptures and the prophets. It is as central as Jesus’ mission on earth. It is as clear as Matthew 25, and it is as urgent as what our Holy Father said yesterday on the White House lawn.

- *It is as old as the Hebrew Scriptures:* “Choose life, so that you and your descendents might live” (*Deuteronomy 30:19*). “Woe to you who enact unjust statutes and who write oppressive decrees (*Isaiah 10:1*).
- Why did Jesus come: “*I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full*” (John 10:10). What was Jesus’ mission on earth? He began his public life in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth, reading this passage from Isaiah: “*The spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has sent me to bring Good News to the poor, liberty to captives, new sight to the blind, and to set the downtrodden free*” (Luke 4:18; Isaiah 61:1-2; 58:6). This was Jesus’ mission on earth; it is our task in political life today.
- It is as clear as Matthew 25: We have only one description of the Last Judgment, and there is really only one question: What did you do “for the least of these?” (Matthew 25:31-46). The measure, the moral measure of our lives, of our society, of every institution, is how they touch “the least” among us.
- Yesterday on the south lawn of the White House the Holy Father said: “The preservation of freedom calls for the cultivation of virtue, self discipline, sacrifice for the common good, and a sense of responsibility towards the less fortunate.” This does not sound like “Are you better off now than you were four years ago?”
- Benedict XVI goes on to say: “It also demands the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one’s deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate.” This is what faithful citizenship is: “the courage to engage in civic life and to bring one’s deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debate.”

[17] What does it mean to “choose life” and to “bring life to the full” in a nation with a million abortions a year? In a world where more than 30,000 children will die, today, because of hunger and its consequences? How do we bring “good news to the poor” – in a country with such incredible and growing gaps between rich and poor? How do we “bring liberty to captives” when we know how we and others can be enslaved, by discrimination or dependency or addiction?

[18] What does it mean to bring “new sight to the blind,” when we know how we can be blinded by indifference or ignorance or prejudice or partisanship? I would suggest that “bringing new sight to the blind” is a good description of the mission of the Catholic university.

[19] How do we “set the downtrodden free” in a nation and in a world where hope, as our Holy Father has suggested, is what is most at risk, in least supply? How do we “bring one’s deepest beliefs and values to reasoned public debates” in the middle of this campaign, this election?

Church and State

[20] This kind of talk makes some people nervous. They cite “separation of church and state.” They lift up the First Amendment. The First Amendment is essential and important. In its simplest terms, it means we cannot have a state religion and it also protects the right of religious groups and people to participate in public life. I believe that when some people talk about “the wall,” they are less worried about the Constitution and more worried about us. They would just as soon see us be quiet and mute our voices.

[21] Some suggest that there is a danger for our Church and our faith and for our government and our nation country if religion and politics are linked. In fact, we have the same rights, no more, no less, as any other group in society, any other citizens. We should expect neither favoritism nor discrimination in the exercise of our public roles. I believe that when people bring their deepest convictions into public life, we enrich, not diminish political life. When we bring our principles and values we contribute to public life, we are the “pluralism” that they celebrate, and we celebrate.

[22] This is what Benedict was talking about yesterday at the White House: how public life is deepened and strengthened when people bring their most fundamental values, including those formed by faith. I fear that if public life is not about our most fundamental convictions, then it can be mostly about power or ego or money or special interests.

What Faithful Citizenship is Not

[23] Faithful citizenship or political responsibility is not about the *religious practices of politicians*. It is not about whether they were “an altar boy,” or whether they were “born again.”

[24] Faithful citizenship is not about the *political clout of religious groups*. It is not about “the Catholic vote.” I believe people who talk about “the Catholic vote” do not know many Catholics.

[25] Faithful citizenship is not about our *pastors telling us how to vote*. We don’t need Catholic Jesse Jacksons or Jerry Falwells. I believe it is pastorally inappropriate and ecclesially divisive, theologically unwise and politically counterproductive. Partisan politics in churches also happens to be illegal.

[26] If Faithful citizenship is not these things, what is it? Faithful citizenship, according to the U.S. bishops is how “we bring together principles and our political choices, our values and our votes, to help build a society more respectful of human life, a more just nation, and a more peaceful world.”

The Political Message of Deus Caritas Est

[27] Benedict, in his remarkable letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, said that there are three things that make the Church the Church: proclaiming the Gospel, celebrating the sacraments, and caring for “the least of these.” Benedict also wrote what I believe is the clearest description

of the Church's role in public life which we have. These words helped shape the bishops who were most involved in writing about faithful citizenship,

It is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life, and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest (no. 28, a).

Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity" (no. 29).

[28] We used to discuss which is more important, charity or justice, caring for those in need or trying to deal with the structures that leave them in need. Benedict breaks down those walls. He insists that the practice of charity must inform our entire lives and we have to carry that charity, that love, into political life. And he gives this political activity a name: "social charity." So what does it mean to practice "social charity"? It means to form consciences, to act differently, to bring "good news to the poor," to "choose life."

Context for Faithful Citizenship

[29] The Church talks of the "signs of the times," but I have a different metaphor. I think we are white-water rafting. There are lots of currents that are pushing us along. There are a lot of rocks in the way. We need to know where the currents and rocks are if we are going to get where we want to go.

[30] We are a *challenged Church*. Part of our challenges is affirmative. How do we share the faith? Today, the Holy Father met with the leaders of Catholic Higher Education. What is the identity of Catholic universities: how are we truly Catholic? Truly Jesuit? And truly a university? How do we pass on the faith? How do we find and form leadership? How do we attract sufficient vocations to priesthood and religious life?

[31] The Church is challenged by the harm done and burdens we bear as a result of the sex scandals. I not only work for the bishops, I am a parent. Trust was broken; lives were destroyed. Horrible damage was done. Our Church has to own those terrible costs and we have to fix what was broken. Part of these necessary efforts is new protections and policies and reaching out to victims. Part of fixing what is broken is carrying out our mission persistently and effectively.

[32] Another challenge is polarization. I fear the intense polarization in political life is seeping into ecclesial life. Does your politics shape your faith? Or is it the other way around? During the last election, there was a brochure I call "Some Catholic Answers," and it had *some* of the answers. There's a website called "Faithful America." Unborn children do not make the agenda for Faithful America. There is the non-negotiables people and the everything-is-negotiable people. My concern is that some of these efforts are more about winning elections than it is about living our faith.

[33] *We are a wounded nation.* I think we are still wounded. Benedict will be going to Ground Zero on Saturday. I think we are still wounded by what happened there. We are at war. I desperately wish our leaders had listened to Pope John Paul and considered the questions our bishops raised. They did not, and we're paying a terrible price. Frankly very few of us have sacrificed for this war. The only sacrifice I have made is I can't take my shampoo on an airplane. Four out of five Americans believe we're headed in the wrong direction. So we are a wounded nation.

[34] We are part of a *divided economy*. We are still the most powerful, productive economy on earth. However, it is pushing us forward in some ways and it is pulling us apart in other ways. Some people are moving ahead making dramatic gains. Other people are left behind, homeless and hungry. There are a lot of us in the middle, working harder for less, spending less time with our kids; we're squeezed. And there is another economy where people live in the shadows without the right papers, without the right status, where they can be exploited or demonized.

[35] We are part of a *broken world*. Imagine tonight if we were in Baghdad, where in some neighborhoods Christian families are given three choices and 72 hours: you can leave, you can convert, or you can be killed. Imagine we were in Bethlehem today – in some ways the holiest place on earth, in some ways the saddest place on earth. Imagine we were in Beijing tonight talking about how our faith should shape our public participation. If we were meeting about religion and politics in Beijing, someone would go to jail. Half the world lives on \$2.00 a day, and we need not just a better world, not just a safer world, but a more just world, a more peaceful world.

[36] The bishops have talked about a *culture of violence*; Pope John Paul talked about a *culture of death*. I think we are a society in moral disarray. We are tempted to solve our most difficulty problems with violence: a million abortions a year. The Supreme Court yesterday said we could proceed with executions again. We have growing advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide in our country and we resort to war to deal with international problems. Our bishops have said that a nation that destroys its young abandons its old and relies on violence and vengeance is in fundamental moral trouble.

[37] So we turn to public life as a way to address some of this. I think *Washington is demoralized* in the sense that it can not get its act together. It is polarized, paralyzed, can not handle a hurricane, can not fight the war, and can not pass an immigration bill. Our priorities are mostly missing. Nobody is really talking about unborn children in this campaign. There is not much talk about "the least of these," little real discussion of immigration. I was up in New Hampshire, and there, if you listened, it is "whatsoever you do for 'the forgotten middle class' you do unto Me."

[38] Part of the problem is too much of two different kinds of individualism. On some parts of the right, it's "economic individualism." The market will solve every problem. You are on your own in many ways. For some on the left, it is "lifestyle individualism," which makes "choice" the ultimate criterion in public and personal life. Progressives better not have any reservations about abortion on demand.

[39] The good news is there is a renewed focus on faith in public life, on religion and politics. The bad news is it is often superficial or simplistic. It can be misused. I personally find the “religious right” sometimes more right than religious. I wonder where “the least of these” fits in their agenda. On the other hand, we all know what I would call “politically correct Christians” who will defend the eggs of endangered species, but not the lives of unborn children.

[40] Very often the language of faith is about the poetry, not the policy. It is too often about the rhetoric, not the realities in public life.

[41] Swing Constituencies: They used to be Soccer Moms and NASCAR Dads. Now they may be:

- Dismissed Hispanics, taken for granted by some Democrats and now some Republicans demonize Hispanic immigrants.
- Disappointed Evangelicals who signed up for the family and the unborn, and got the war and the tax cuts.
- Disconnected Catholics, of which I am one.

[42] There is a lot of focus on Catholics. In eight out the last nine elections, the candidate who won the Catholic vote won the election. E. J. Dionne says that Catholics are not monolithic, but we are important. He suggests that about 40% of Catholics are predictable Republicans; about 40% of us are predictable Democrats, and about 20% of us are up for grabs. And that 20% often decides who wins.

A New Moment

[43] There is a sense that our most fundamental problems are not economic or political, or technical or military. They are moral, ethical, spiritual. They are questions of life and death, war and peace, and who moves ahead and who gets left behind.

[44] Through the years, the U.S. bishops have said we need a “new kind of politics, focused more on moral principles than on the latest polls, more on the needs of the weak than on the benefits for the strong, and more on the pursuit of the common good than on the demands of the special interests.”

[45] Jim Wallis has a different way of describing it. He says when so many people, so many of our leaders, have their finger to the wind that we need to “change the wind.” That is what this university ought to be about, that is what faithful citizenship is about.

Assets for Faithful Citizenship

[46] Where do you go to help “change the wind?” You come to a place like this, to people like those in this room, to a community of faith. We have unique assets. We do not make endorsements or contributions. We have a set of ideas, experience, structures, and people.

[47] We have a set of principles, a *moral framework*. We do not make up what we believe based on the polls and focus groups. We can not abandon the unborn because they are politically incorrect, or forget about immigrants because they do not vote. Our Church has been called a lot of things; it has never been called “trendy.”

[48] We do not make it up as we go along. We have a set of ideas about life and dignity, about work and workers, about human rights and responsibilities. These are not pious platitudes; they are not bumper sticker endorsements of any party's agenda. Our framework is often politically incorrect; it does not easily fit the partisan categories – Democratic or Republican, liberal or conservative. It is both clear and it is complex. With all due respect to our evangelical sisters and brothers, this framework it is a lot more complicated than “What Would Jesus Do?”

[49] There is another way to describe our message. It is a simple word – *and*:

Human Life *and* Dignity

Human Rights *and* Responsibilities

Family *and* Community

Priority for Poor *and* Vulnerable

The Dignity of Work *and* the Rights of Workers

Solidarity *and* Subsidiarity

Care for the Planet *and* for the People on the planet

And the Common Good, which is really all the *ands* put together.

[50] *Human Life and Dignity*: Human life comes first. Without life, nothing else is possible; no other rights have meaning. But without dignity, life is not truly human. In today's politics, some people try and pull apart life and dignity, choose one or the other. That's not who we are. This is the core of our teaching on abortion and euthanasia – and in different ways, on the death penalty, war and health care.

[51] *Human Rights and Responsibilities*: We start with, we insist on the right to life. Without the right to life no other rights have meaning. We also insist on the right to those things that make life truly human – faith and family, work and education, housing and health care. For us, 47 million people without health care coverage is not a sound bite, it is a moral challenge. It is a test of our faith. We believe we have the *responsibility* to secure those rights not only for ourselves, but for all of God's children.

[52] *Solidarity and Subsidiarity*: Solidarity insists we are one human family; we belong to each other. Subsidiarity insists large institutions should not overwhelm small institutions. For example, government should not interfere with family life. On the other hand, when families cannot meet their needs, they have the right to look for help from the larger institutions of state and society. Think about hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The response was a great example of solidarity and a terrible example of subsidiarity in action. We took a natural disaster and turned it into a man-made catastrophe.

[53] There is also the Catholic BUT. All life is sacred *but* not all issues are equal. A million abortions a year are not the same as a cut in the WIC program. The culture of life begins with the protection of unborn children, *but* it does not end there. The children in Africa dying of hunger are just as precious to us as children being destroyed in America. We believe in faith-based institutions, *but* government still has an essential role. We believe the market is the best way to organize the economy, *but* there are some things the market does not address adequately, health care might be one, the environment another.

[54] This set of ANDs and BUTs lead us to different questions. It is not just “The economy, stupid.” It is not just “are you better off now than you were?” It is not just “who is ready on day one” or who will bring the most “change” or who can cut taxes.

[55] Another Catholic asset is *our everyday experience*. It is not just what we believe that matters; it’s what we do. Who feeds the hungry? Who shelters the homeless? Who cares for the sick? Who educates the young? We are the largest non-governmental provider of education, health and human services in the country.

[56] We have *structures*. We have this university and dozens more. We have thousands of parishes and schools. Catholic Relief Services is in a hundred countries, serving the poorest people on earth. We were globalized before globalization was cool.

[57] We have *leaders*. The witness and word of Pope Benedict on his journey of hope is the preeminent contemporary example.

[58] We have *people*. We are realizing just a portion of our potential. Think of the people of this university: the students, the faculty, the staff, and the alumni. What difference can we make?

[59] Scripture says, “Without a vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18 KJV). It is also true that without a people, the vision is invisible. How do we put together the vision and the people? An organizer friend of mine said, “if you ever got your act together, you would be dangerous.” How do we get our act together? How do we carry out our mission?

Political Responsibility/Faithful Citizenship: Continuity and Change

[60] While faithful citizenship is the work of the whole Church, it is especially the mission of laymen and laywomen to be the “salt, light and leaven.” However, I have been asked to address the work of the bishops. For 32 years, through eight elections they have offered a statement on political responsibility and faithful citizenship. It is a most widely used – and occasionally misused – statement.

[61] The first thing to say about the Bishops’ Conference is that it is the “Bishops’ Conference.” People who do not like what the bishops do want to blame staff. This ignores the structures of accountability and belittles the work of the bishops. In preparing this Faithful Citizenship statement, a special group of bishops who chair committees of the USCCB reviewed every amendment, line by line, over tens of hours.

[62] I have a staff perspective that is a limited perspective. However, I was a part of the process when they wrote the first one, and I was a part of the process when they wrote the last one. I had no idea when this started how visible, how controversial, how important this effort would be. I would emphasize that when this started, this was not a big deal. This statement was intended to be a simple summary of what the Church taught and what the Conference had advocated. It drew on the Second Vatican Council’s document *Church in the Modern World*, and Paul VI’s Letter *Octogesima Adveniens: A Call to Action on the Eightieth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum* (1971). It went to the Bishops’ Administrative Committee and it was passed without much controversy.

[63] Over the last 32 years, there has been both continuity and change. It has always been a summary of Catholic teaching. It has always talked about the role of the Church and emphasized the responsibility of the laity. It has always tried to lift up our assets. It has always tried to apply the principles to specific policy. It has always emphasized participation. The statements never told Catholics how to vote; it has never been a voter's guide. It has always tried to focus on the common good. It has always, but in different ways, placed a priority on human life and dignity. The first time, it listed issues in alphabetical order; abortion came first. Over time, the place of human life has been expressed in different ways: "preeminent," "fundamental," and now its violation as "intrinsic evil."

[64] What has changed? The key phrase in the title has gone from "political responsibility" to "faithful citizenship." Everyone wants the statement to be shorter and everyone wants to add six paragraphs. So it started short, got longer, got shorter, got longer, and now is shorter.

[65] The initial part of the statement always offered a current context, citing relevant events, encyclicals and papal visits.

[66] The process has changed significantly. Originally, it was quite mechanical, and then it was the work of two committees with other committees and staff contributing specific issue language.

[67] The current document is the result of the broadest, most inclusive process ever. It has involved every key committee in the Conference. It has involved every bishop in the Conference. They reviewed three drafts. They debated it, discussed it, amended it and they voted for it by a margin of 201 to 4. There is some doubt a description of the Trinity could pass with only four negative votes.

[68] Through the years, there has been greater clarity on the distinctions between issues and the links among them. From the very beginning, it always talked about affirmation of human rights and denunciation of their violation. This document talks about the obligation to oppose what is intrinsically evil and the similar obligation to pursue what is good.

[69] Over time the "consistent life ethic" became a major framework and metaphor. This document never referred to the "seamless garment." It has regularly talked about the "consistent ethic of life," which does not treat all issues as morally equivalent, nor does it reduce Catholic teaching to one or two issues. I would argue that the seamless garment is neither. It is not "seamless"; it involves different issues with different moral reasoning and different consequences. It is not a single "garment"; it is not a way to throw a cloak over all the decisions we made. It is not a menu, a scorecard. It is not an escape or excuse for those who want to ignore abortion or want to ignore the poor. Cardinal Ratzinger, before he became our Holy Father, offered a summary of what the consistent ethic calls us to:

A well formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals...The Christian faith is an integral unity and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility

toward the common good (*Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, no. 4).

The Substance of Faithful Citizenship

[70] The essence of the recent statement can be outlined as follows:

- Two Foundations:
 1. Conscience
 2. Prudence
- Two Duties:
 1. Resist Evil
 2. Pursue Good
- Two Temptations:
 1. Make No Distinctions
 2. Nothing Else Matters

[71] It is built around two foundations: Conscience and Prudence. The statement quotes the Catechism:

Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act. . . . [Every person] is obliged to follow faithfully what he [or she] knows to be just and right (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1778).

When conscience is cited in our culture, it is sometimes a way to justify doing what we want to do. “I am going to follow my conscience.” Rightly understood, conscience challenges us. Conscience requires us often to do the hard things, what we don’t want to do, to sacrifice, to restrain ourselves, to defend the weak and vulnerable, to side with the poor and powerless, instead of the rich and powerful.

[72] The statement encourages Catholics to develop the virtue of *prudence*, which enables us to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1806).

Prudence shapes and informs our ability to deliberate over available alternatives, to determine what is most fitting to a specific context, and to act. Prudence must be accompanied by courage that calls us to act.

[73] The statement outlines two complementary duties: to resist what is evil and to pursue what is good. That sounds easy. However, it is not easy to resist what is evil in this culture: the destruction of unborn children, torture. It is not always easy to pursue good. It is often not easy to stand up for the poorest people in this country or to sacrifice to protect God’s creation. The statement cites Pope John Paul II:

That negative commandments oblige always and under all circumstances does not mean that in the moral life prohibitions are more important than the obligation to do good indicated by the positive commandment (*Veritatis Splendor*, no. 52).

In his visit, Pope Benedict XVI offers a strong affirmative message insisting the Church be clear that the Gospel is “Good News.”

[74] The statement warns against two temptations: One temptation is to adopt a *moral equivalence* that makes no ethical distinctions between different kinds of issues involving human life and dignity. The 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.

[75] A second temptation is to misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity. These include racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, or an unjust immigration policy. According to the document, these are serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act and not optional concerns that can be dismissed.

[76] The statement calls Catholics to more, not less involvement. It describes a sense of politically homelessness. However, political homelessness is not a virtue; it is a condition that needs a remedy. We need to build a home. We need to build structures, at least shelters. We need more people, more Catholics involved in running for office, active in both parties, standing up for what we believe, lobbying the legislature, being present in the campaigns.

[77] This document was generally well received, but it disappointed some people on the extremes. “Catholics” for a Free Choice and the American Life League, for different reasons, expressed their disappointment opposition. The *New York Times* said it was a road map for voting for a pro-choice candidate. And the *Washington Post* printed an article that said you would go to hell, according to the bishops, if you voted for a Democrat. The message is a lot more complicated than that. According to the statement, “In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.”

[78] Finally, it is important to recognize that partisan political activity is not all of politics. What we do between elections is also important, in Catholic legislative networks, Right to Life, or Bread for the World. Some of the best work is done in community organizations funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development to make real change in human lives.

[79] In the end, what our Bishops say about the Church is, I think, a good description of what the task is for Catholic institutions:

- We are called to be *political, but not partisan*, not to be cheerleader for any candidate, chaplain for any party or advocate for any administration – but to challenge them all.
- We are to be *principled, but not ideological*. We are not going to compromise on the fundamentals: on life, on war, on peace. But we can work with others to advance these principles in different ways.
- We need to be *civil, but not soft*. We need to make our case clearly, but not impugn anyone’s motives. We shouldn’t be calling people baby killers or war criminals. We are in the persuasion business, and that is probably not the best way to persuade.

- We need to be *engaged but not used*. We need to have relationships with our political leaders, but they ought to be around our priorities and principles, not their political needs. We need opportunities to discuss our concerns for the unborn, poor children and families and immigrants, not just pose for a photo op.

Conclusion

[80] How we practice Faithful Citizenship is very important. It is important for our country. It is important for our Church. It is important for our world.

[81] I was part of a pilgrimage to Ground Zero where the Holy Father is going on Saturday. It was an overwhelming physical, spiritual emotional experience. The fires were still burning; the smoke was still rising. Twice while we were there, everything stopped while they brought out pieces of people. One priest grabbed me by the shoulder and said, “John, the only way we’re going to overcome this hate, this horror is what we were talking about last night – respect for human life, for human dignity a sense of solidarity, some sense of justice, some sense of concern for one another.” He said, “The work you do is more important than ever.” And I turned to him and said, “Father, the work you do, to preach the Gospel, build the community, to help us act on our faith is more important than ever.”

[82] This is a really important time for our country, in the middle of a very important election, with a lot of tough choices, in a time of real opportunity and real trouble for our Church, a time of real promise for this university. This is the time to put what we believe, what we do, what we know, and what we can accomplish together into the practice and pursuit of genuine Faithful Citizenship.