

INTRODUCTION

KRISTIN E. HEYER AND MARK J. ROZELL

IN EARLY 2003 under the leadership of then-prefect Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued a “Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life.” The note asserts, “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.”¹ As the chapters in this volume indicate, the CDF’s call to moral coherence in Catholic politics, reflecting the integral unity of the faith and the issues upon which it touches, both shapes and tests Catholic political engagement in domestic and global contexts. In practice, given the complexities of political realities and the human nature of such institutions as church and government alike, we encounter a more fractured reality than the pure unity depicted in doctrine, disclosing fallible departures from a commitment to Catholic universalism and the transcendent nature of its values.

As social scientists and theologians alike have repeatedly noted, Catholic political identity and engagement defy straightforward categorization.² This book takes up the political and theological significance of this “integral unity,” the universal scope of Catholic concern that can make for strange political bedfellows, confound predictable voting patterns, and leave the Church poised to critique narrowly partisan agendas across the spectrum. This comprehensive, Catholic scope can be politically beneficial as well as divisive, depending on the context and one’s perspective. This volume integrates social scientific, historical, and moral accounts of persistent tensions between Catholicism and politics over the past generation, in the context of the Vatican as well as that of the United States. Its accounts of the implications of Catholic

universalism for voting patterns, international policymaking, and partisan alliances together reveal complex intersections of Catholicism and politics.

In the post-Vatican II era, public engagement of questions of Catholic identity, orthodoxy, and hierarchy of values indicates that Catholicism constitutes an evolving political force on the international scene. The ways in which Catholic organizations and members intersect with political life are shaped significantly by the fact that theirs is a global institution with a tightly organized hierarchy and clearly defined official Church teachings. Catholic political engagement benefits from institutional strength and the Catholic tradition's rich history of intellectually and socially engaging political issues.³ That said, there persists a significant degree of political and even moral pluralism amid believers, particularly in the U.S. context. Furthermore, the Catholic Church has a long and controversial history of political activity in the world. Some perceive that today the Church has lost some of its direction by involving itself so deeply in matters of state and politics, whereas others see such activity as a natural extension of the effort to propagate Catholic teachings.

Given the North American political landscape, this comprehensive scope does not provide Catholics with a comfortable home in either major political party. Many have noted that Catholic politics generally tend to defy strictly partisan boundaries, frequently serving as a bridge between liberal Protestant and Evangelical approaches to social issues, due in part to their positions on welfare and immigration, on the one hand, and abortion and sexual morality on the other. Mary E. Bendyna, RSM, refers to one result of this phenomenon as the "Goldilocks effect" in which Catholic positions serve to moderate political discourse and constrain extremism; her studies with Mark M. Gray in chapter 5 bear out these tendencies during recent years in Catholic political attitudes. The volume's social scientific analyses of political alliances (chapter 2) and of Catholic voting (chapter 6), along with its historical narratives of Catholics and U.S. politics (in chapters 9 and 10) that trace relationships to the White House and Supreme Court, bear out patterns of Catholic "political homelessness."

As Margaret Ross Sammon points out in chapter 1, on the politics of the U.S. bishops, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin—the Catholic architect of the influential seamless garment approach to a consistent life ethic—emphasized the ecclesiological and moral significance of preserving this comprehensive agenda as against a more reductionistic approach. Bernardin noted, "Morally, a single-issue strategy forfeits many of the resources of the moral teaching of the Church. To highlight one question as the primary and exclusive objective in the policy process is to leave too many issues unattended and risks distortion of the single issue itself."⁴ For in his view, while there are limits to both competency and energy that point to the wisdom of defining distinct functions, the Church "must be credible across a wide range of issues; the very scope of our moral vision requires a commitment to a multiplicity of questions."⁵ Gregory A. Smith's research (see chapter 3) demonstrates that Catholic parishioners are exposed to a variety of moral and social issues messages from the pulpit, depending on where they happen to attend services.⁶

Yet as Sammon's chapter emphasizes, the recent history of Catholic politics in the U.S. context is marked by disproportionate attention to and distinct modes of anti-abortion rights advocacy. This development in part has led to what Streb and Fred-

erick trace as a shift in alignment of the Catholic vote from Democratic to Republican leanings, the emergence of Catholic and Evangelical fledgling alliances (see chapter 2), and some authors' caveats regarding the single-issue litmus tests characterizing several highly publicized bishops' statements during the 2004 presidential campaign and in other election cycles as well (see especially chapter 1).

Hence, patterns of Catholic political engagement in recent decades have threatened to upset the delicate balance of "politically homeless" engagement. Reports in the Catholic press on the U.S. bishops' semiannual meetings in recent years suggest polarizing divisions between the "social justice" and the "pro-life" sides of the Church in their elections and deliberations. A tendency toward narrowly selective "cafeteria Catholicism" can be found on both the Left and Right, with leaders and laity alike becoming vulnerable to single- or narrow-issue politics and the distortion that ensues. The results of Gray and Bendyna's surveys in chapter 5 offer ample evidence of widespread selective adherence to Church teachings, at least in part linked to partisan divides in U.S. politics.

American Catholics' prioritization of any one issue can blind them to the cause of others and the inherent interrelatedness of "life" and "justice" issues: those who work with the poor may remain silent or even favor legalized abortion due to their "progressive" alliances on poverty issues; those who prioritize anti-abortion work may ignore socioeconomic factors that contribute to unwanted pregnancies or may support the use of force when a "pro-life" administration goes to war.⁷

For example, the director of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Office of Social Development and World Peace, John Carr, has argued that "Catholic progressives should be measured by how we stand up for human life, how consistently, how courageously, how persistently. And Catholic conservatives should be measured by how often, how consistently, how persistently, how courageously we stand up for human dignity. The consistent life ethic doesn't give anyone a free pass. It challenges all of us."⁸ As maintained in chapter 4, on the ethics of Catholic political engagement, single-issue agendas of any stripe can blind Catholics to the fact that Catholic social doctrine is rooted in the dual reality of human life. As Bernardin's consistent ethic emphasizes, humans are both sacred *and* social, so Catholics are called both to protect human life and foster its development at every stage *and* to ensure social institutions foster such development. As noted in chapter 4, despite the difficulties in practice, "Catholic political practices must embrace this comprehensive scope," due to the breadth and depth of the Catholic moral tradition and the ecclesiological significance of a multi-issue approach.

As several of the chapters indicate, however, it is not simply conventional partisan configurations that confound the Catholic range of issues or consistent ethic of life, but also the cultural ethos and operative philosophical framework that challenges Catholic politics in the U.S. context, in particular. In his discussion of U.S.–Vatican relations in chapter 11, Paul Christopher Manuel identifies "clashing ideologies" that impact the relationship between Catholicism and "American-style capitalism," such as a deeply engrained economic liberalism fundamentally at odds with Catholic commitments to human dignity and an option for the poor and vulnerable. Chapter 4 also emphasizes how the communitarian personalism that shapes Catholic political

engagement necessarily encounters a difficult reception in a democracy based on individual liberty, for while “the Catholic vision shares certain commitments of a democracy like the United States, it radically challenges a culture that prioritizes economic efficiency over solidarity with the weak and marginalized, or narrow national interest over global concern.”

For example, the Catholic commitment to peace and the hierarchy’s critique of most U.S.-led uses of military force in recent decades emerge throughout the volume as a point of contention in the midst of other areas of collaborative accommodation throughout administrations. Whereas some hail international peace as one of the Church’s best contributions, Thomas J. Carty’s historical narrative of White House outreach to Catholics, for example, in chapter 10, addresses clashes during the Cold War as well as fighting wars in Vietnam, Panama, the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, and contemporary Iraq in ways that highlight this influential stream of “clashing ideologies.”

Such dissonant philosophical currents may also help explain why American Catholics are more susceptible to influence by partisan loyalties than religious values. Streb and Frederick’s chapter, for example, traces the loss of a discernibly distinctive Catholic vote. As previous scholars have pointed out, Catholics were once a reliable part of the old New Deal coalition that anchored the Democratic Party for years. Some leading authors maintain that the Catholics who came to the United States found jobs in the inner cities, joined labor unions, and were a part of the American immigrant underclass attracted to the Democratic Party primarily due to economic issues. But over time, as the children and grandchildren of these immigrants became better educated, many joined higher professions, moved to the suburbs, and warmed up to the Republican Party.⁹ Thus, although much has been made of the impact on Catholic voters of the Democratic Party’s identification with abortion rights beginning in the 1960s and 1970s, recent scholarship demonstrates that religious values have not been the main factor in driving many Catholics to the GOP. This finding is compatible with the research on Latino Catholics by Adrian Pantoja, Matthew Barreto, and Richard Anderson (see chapter 7). Latinos may have socially conservative beliefs compatible with the Republican Party, but they still vote heavily Democratic. The authors demonstrate that nonreligious factors continue to drive the political behavior of Latinos in the United States.

Gray and Bendyna’s chapter 5 also confirms that ideology drives voting behavior more decisively than do religious values. Several other chapters shed light on patterns of cooptation of Catholicism for political ends, whether in the form of politicians’ opportunistic symbolic gestures or ecclesial leaders’ selective framing and shaming regarding properly “Catholic issues.” The dominant model of a “public church” that navigates between cooptation by and utter conflict with wider society is exemplified in the U.S. bishops’ characterization of appropriate Catholic political engagement as remaining “engaged but not used.” In their recent “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” document issued in late 2007, the bishops explicitly warn that Catholics must not let dialogue with political leaders and candidates devolve into mere “photo-ops,” but rather should work for policies that reflect Catholic values.¹⁰ Catholic religiopolitical engagement walks this fine line with some human failures and prophetic successes in American and global contexts alike.

Contextualizing the navigation of these tensions throughout the chapters in their historical sweep of post-Vatican II U.S. Catholicism, the volume's authors narrate American Catholics' passage "from ghetto to mainstream," employing historical, social scientific, and normative perspectives. Some would hail this account as a triumphant victory of immigrant outsiders over Protestant suspicions and various barriers; others would argue that such assimilation simply represents an inevitable stage in any immigrant wave's progression. Still others, however, have raised concerns that this transition signals a decline in coherent identity, risking un-Christian accommodation.

Those who critique the aforementioned dominating model of a public church from a radicalist perspective, for example, charge that once U.S. Catholicism moved into the mainstream, it succumbed more readily to temptations to subordinate the Church's ethic to the state's agenda. Such critics perceive the ghetto-to-mainstream "arrival" of American Catholicism as signaling failure rather than success, because Christian distinctiveness and purity become compromised and Catholicism's proper ends become subordinated to worldly political ends.¹¹

The chapters herein depict this ambivalent character of Catholics' mainstream "arrival" over the past forty years, analyzing both the new opportunities for influence and the risks of cooptation that have accompanied such shifts. Hence, for example, Streb and Frederick suggest that the shifts in the Catholic vote in this country indicate that perhaps Catholics have become like most Americans, for whom partisanship plays a greater role in shaping political behavior than group affiliation. Gray and Bendyna's confirmation that the link between party identification and ideology has strengthened over past generations may similarly point to the American indoctrination of Catholics.

While the analyses presented by Gray and Bendyna on the one hand and Streb and Frederick on the other depart somewhat in their overall alignment of Catholic voters and party preferences (with the former assessing the majority Catholic population as aligned with the Democratic Party platform and the latter emphasizing the population's Republican shift), they both conduct studies which show that partisanship and ideology influence U.S. Catholics' political decisions more than the Church's positions do. Specific findings herein seem to bear this out; for instance, Gray and Bendyna's studies reveal that abortion and the death penalty do not align as well as other issues. (The percentage of Catholics who state opposition to both abortion and the death penalty remains small). As they show, "If one factors in those who oppose each and who support social justice and welfare issues consistent with Church teachings, the number of Catholics in agreement with Church teachings and statements on these issues diminishes even further." This misalignment indicates not only a challenge to the Catholic Church's consistent ethic of life but also the priority of ideology or partisan affiliation to a comprehensive (if politically inconvenient) Catholic ethic.

The "mainstream" risk of religion becoming coopted for political ends is reflected not only at the level of Catholic voters in terms of the role of partisan ideology and cafeteria Catholicism of various stripes, but also on an institutional level in the Church's function as a mere interest group or in its manipulation by and susceptibility to symbolic overtures. Sammon frames much of the political activity of the U.S. bishops in chapter 1 in terms of protecting their own interests with respect to

abortion, and others differentiate the Church's strategic advancement of aid to parochial schools from broader, value-based advocacy, for example.

Carty's discussion of different administrations' outreach to Catholics (in chapter 10) showcases different politicians' appeals to Catholic figures and images to distinct effects, noting carefully orchestrated Notre Dame appearances, the "soft power" of president-pope exchanges, and the opportunistic employment of the presidential "bully pulpit." The relationship of symbolism to substance reflects long-standing tensions between partisanship and principles inherent in the machinations of politics, yet the landscape of recent U.S. Catholic history augurs some significant changes in the terrain. Perry's analysis of Catholics on the U.S. Supreme Court in chapter 9, tracing the recent move from a "Catholic seat" to a "Catholic court," for example, signals a broader shift on the Court from electoral considerations (via symbolism) to ideological ones (in terms of the priority of establishing a conservative majority). This trend in considerations for nominating new members of the "priestly tribe" arguably mirrors a shift from religious considerations to ideological ones, risking accommodation.

The ethical analysis in chapter 4 evokes the eschatological tensions facing Christians, such that Catholics' status "in the world but not of it" should leave them uncomfortable within neat partisan confines as major political parties are currently construed in the United States, much less with symbolic overtures manipulated for narrow ends or politicians' (long-standing or upstart) pandering to values voters. Thus, "the great importance of the church witnessing to transcendent values and remaining independent demands its nonpartisanship in intent *as well as in effect*." Hence there remain tensions between the Church operating as an institutional or moral actor, along with the ongoing temptations of cooptation.

As chapter 2 indicates, conservative, Protestant-led political organizations in the social movement known as the Christian Right have looked to so-called faithful Catholics as logical targets of political recruitment. Yet despite the shared values of these groups on some issues, such as abortion and federal aid for religious schools, even politically conservative Catholics have been hesitant about political recruitment by religious-based interest groups, and they maintain a somewhat distinctive identity within the Christian Right. Politically conservative Catholics who oppose abortion rights may vote for Republican candidates backed by the Christian Coalition or Focus on the Family, but they are not eager to join these organizations.

At a perhaps more basic level, these tensions highlight the complex interplay between sacred and secular matters, the mix of human and divinely inspired elements that comprise Catholic institutions and engagement. In chapter 12, on the organization of the Vatican throughout history, Thomas J. Reese, SJ, outlines concrete proposals for borrowing models from secular political practices as, he argues, the curia has done throughout its history. His insights reveal the limits of an all-too-human institution that could benefit from further incorporation of other secular practices such as the separation of powers. Given the inescapably human dimension of religion and politics and its ambivalent character, becoming informed about the complex realities regarding how Catholic values are actually perceived and shaped, as the social scientific chapters herein analyze, and how the landscape in the United States and

worldwide has shifted for Catholics, as the more historical chapters show, is invaluable for any lasting analysis of the present and future state of Catholic politics.

This ambivalence also indicates that prudential discernment of particular secular contexts is a crucial aspect of any Catholic political engagement.¹² For any assessment taken to its extreme—total cultural corruption leading to unrelieved countercultural identity or understanding any secular ideology as merely one path among other equally valid paths—is problematic.¹³ Catholic ethicist David Hollenbach, SJ, illustrates the ambivalence of context well. Citing the Barmen Declaration and *Dignitatis humanae* as examples of situations calling for distinct Christian responses, he notes that “an assessment of just what the larger culture is up to is essential to authentic Christian identity. There is no a priori way to determine whether resistance or learning is called for.”¹⁴ In theological terms, he frames this task of discernment as understanding “*when* the affirmation that ‘Jesus is Lord’ should lead to countercultural resistance and *when* ‘God is creator of heaven and earth’ should lead to cooperation with non-Christians in pursuit of a universalist agenda.” He continues, “Theologically, [both statements are] true. Both are scriptural; both were employed in the formation of Christian identity during the Apostolic age that is still normative. . . . It is not possible on theological grounds to grant absolute primacy to one or the other of these two stances on the relation of Christian identity to its intellectual, social and political environment.”¹⁵ In addition to Reese’s navigation of what secular political practices are worthy of adoption by the Vatican, chapter 4’s analysis outlines what prudential discernment amid human constraints demands of Catholic politicians, in particular.

This volume’s juxtaposition of more normative articulations of the integral unity of Catholicism and its political implications with social scientific and historical accounts of Catholic politics prompts questions for ongoing interdisciplinary research and reflection: Should all Catholic justices (and voters) properly constitute a swing vote? How should growing Catholic-Evangelical alliances (or Catholic-Republican tendencies) be assessed morally and politically? Were formerly Democratic Catholic tendencies simply self-interested politics of a different stripe even if more than Catholic socioeconomic status factors have contributed to partisan shifts? More broadly, does the shift from ghetto to mainstream signify arrival or failure? What gets sacrificed? What will be the role ideology plays relative to religion in the future? What does the changing role of religion in electoral politics mean for Catholics, shifting as they have from John F. Kennedy’s insistence in Houston that his Catholicism would not interfere with his ability to lead Americans, to pressure on John Kerry and other Catholic politicians to prove their voting records are sufficiently Catholic? What tactics should Catholicism use to evince reverence for life across the spectrum amid new threats? Does the Catholic political diversity exhibited in these pages and in elected officials’ postures across the spectrum threaten coherence of identity, imply a lack of orthodoxy, or appropriately reflect different applications of constant values in complex and evolving circumstances?

No one volume can definitely answer these questions. The essays that follow, however, offer a useful addition to academic understanding of key issues surrounding the dynamic tension between religion and politics in the Catholic community.

NOTES

1. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, "Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life," dated November 24, 2002 and released January 16, 2003, available in *Origins* 32, no. 30 (January 30, 2003): 537–43 at para. no. 21.
2. See, for example, William D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer, *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2001); John J. DiIulio, "The American Catholic Voter," Program for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society, University of Pennsylvania, 2006, available from http://www.prrucs.org/pdfs/PRRUCS_AmerCath.pdf; William Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999).
3. Kristin E. Heyer, *Prophetic and Public: The Social Witness of U.S. Catholicism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2006), xvii.
4. J. Bryan Hehir, "The Consistent Ethic: Public Policy Implications," in *Consistent Ethic of Life*, ed. Thomas G. Fuechtmann (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1988), 233.
5. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," in Fuechtmann, ed., *Consistent Ethic of Life*, 15.
6. See also Gregory Smith, "The Influence of Priests on the Political Attitudes of Roman Catholics," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 3 (September 2005): 291–306. Also available from <http://mutex.gmu.edu:2167/toc/jssr/44/3>.
7. Heyer, *Prophetic and Public*, 197.
8. John Carr, "The Church in the Modern World: Learning Lessons, Making a Difference and Keeping Hope" (plenary address, Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, February 21, 2005), available at <http://usccb.org/sdwp/carrspeech.htm>.
9. See Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter*, especially on this point.
10. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States* (Washington, DC: USCCB, 2007). Also available at <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf> (accessed November 30, 2007).
11. See Michael Baxter, "Writing History in a World without Ends: An Evangelical Catholic Critique of United States Catholic History," *Pro Ecclesia* 5 (Fall 1996): 465. For a fuller discussion of these trends, see Heyer, *Prophetic and Public*, esp. chapter 3.
12. See also Heyer, "Bridging the Divide in Contemporary U.S. Catholic Social Ethics," *Theological Studies* 66 (June 2005): 401–40.
13. David Hollenbach, "Response to Robert Gascoigne's 'Christian Identity and the Communication of Ethics'" (address, Catholic Theological Society of America Convention, San Jose, CA, June 9, 2000).
14. He does, however, insist that this excludes the possibility of viewing the Church as a self-contained narrative community, for it would bypass this necessary effort to discern and distinguish "cultural wheat from cultural chaff." Yet he admits that uncritical appeals to natural law, the universal human community, and reason are unacceptable as well. Hollenbach perceives this task as constitutive of life between the times. See Hollenbach, "Response to Robert Gascoigne."
15. *Ibid.*