About Those Unthinking, 
Backward Catholics
Abp Charles Chaput, OFM Cap.

Back in 2008, in the weeks leading up to the Obama-McCain presidential election, two young men visited me in Denver. They were from Catholics United, a group describing itself as committed to social justice issues. They voiced great concern at the manipulative skill of Catholic agents for the Republican Party. And they hoped my brother bishops and I would resist identifying the Church with single-issue and partisan (read: abortion) politics.

It was an interesting experience. Both men were obvious flacks for the Obama campaign and the Democratic Party — creatures of a political machine, not men of the Church; less concerned with Catholic teaching than with its influence. And presumably (for them) bishops were dumb enough to be used as tools, or at least prevented from helping the other side. Yet these two young men not only equaled but surpassed their Republican cousins in the talents of servile partisan hustling. Thanks to their work, and activists like them, American Catholics helped to elect an administration that has been the most stubbornly unfriendly to religious believers, institutions, concerns and liberty in generations.

I never saw either young man again. The cultural damage done by the current White House has — apparently — made courting America’s bishops unnecessary.

(Continued on page 2)
But bad can always get worse. I’m thinking, of course, of the contemptuously anti-Catholic emails exchanged among members of the Clinton Democratic presidential campaign team and released this week by WikiLeaks. A sample: Sandy Newman, president of Voices for Progress, emailed John Podesta, now the head of Hillary Clinton’s campaign, to ask about whether “the bishops opposing contraceptive coverage” could be the tinder for a revolution. “There needs to be a Catholic Spring, in which Catholics themselves demand the end of a middle ages [sic] dictatorship,” Newman writes.

Of course, Newman added, “this idea may just reveal my total lack of understanding of the Catholic church, the economic power it can bring to bear against nuns and priests who count on it for their maintenance.” Still, he wondered, how would one “plant the seeds of a revolution”? John Podesta replied that “We created Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good to organize for a moment like this . . . likewise Catholics United” (emphasis added).

Another Clinton-related email, from John Halpin of the Center for American Progress, mocks Catholics in the so-called conservative movement, especially converts: “They must be attracted to the systematic thought and severely backwards gender relations and must be totally unaware of Christian democracy.” In a follow-up, he adds “They can throw around ‘Thomistic’ thought and ‘subsidiarity’ and sound sophisticated because no one knows what . . . they’re talking about.”

On the evening these WikiLeaks emails were released, I received the following angry email myself, this one from a nationally respected (non-Catholic) attorney experienced in Church-state affairs:

“I was deeply offended by the [Clinton team] emails, which are some of the worst bigotry by a political machine I have seen. [A] Church has an absolute right to protect itself when under attack as a faith and Church by civil political forces. That certainly applies here . . .

“Over the last eight years there has been strong evidence that the current administration, with which these people share values, has been very hostile to religious organizations. Now there is clear proof that this approach is deliberate and will accelerate if these actors have any continuing, let alone louder, say in government.

“These bigots are actively strategizing how to shape Catholicism not to be Catholic or consistent with Jesus’ teachings, but to be the ‘religion’ they want. They are, at the very core, trying to turn religion to their secular view of right and wrong consistent with their politics. This is fundamentally why the Founders left England and demanded that government not have any voice in religion. Look where we are now. We have political actors trying to orchestrate a coup to destroy Catholic values, and they even analogize their takeover to a coup in the Middle East, which amplifies their bigotry and hatred of the Church. I had hoped I would never see this day — a day like so many dark days in Eastern Europe that led to the death of my [Protestant minister] great grandfather at the hands of communists who also hated and wanted to destroy religion.”

Of course it would be wonderful for the Clinton campaign to repudiate the content of these ugly WikiLeaks emails. All of us backward-thinking Catholics who actually believe what Scripture and the Church
teach would be so very grateful.

In the meantime, a friend describes the choice facing voters in November this way: A vulgar, boorish lout and disrespecer of women, with a serious impulse control problem; or a scheming, robotic liar with a lifelong appetite for power and an entourage riddled with anti-Catholic bigots.

In a nation where “choice” is now the unofficial state religion, the menu for dinner is remarkably small.

If you want to vote in this year's elections with a clear conscience, then this booklet was written for you. Many people want to fulfill their civic responsibilities without feeling they have to compromise their moral integrity. They want to take part in the political process, but not get morally stained in the process.

The good news is that you can fulfill your duty to vote and can also keep a clear conscience in the process! This booklet will tell you how.

1. Vote!

The first step toward voting with a clear conscience is to make sure you actually vote. Federal elections in the United States are held on the Tuesday after the first Monday of November, in even-numbered years. That day should be clearly marked on your calendar. Jesus calls you to change the world, and you can’t do that if you just sit on the sidelines while somebody else chooses your leaders who will then write the laws you have to follow! The duty to vote comes from our duty to build a better society.
The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory … to exercise the right to vote” (2240).

Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical letter Ecclesia de Eucharistia in 2003. In that document he teaches about how our faith in the world to come impels us to improve this world: “Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today. I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world” (n.20).

In 1998, the United States Catholic Bishops issued Living the Gospel of Life, their most comprehensive statement on the political responsibility of Americans. In that document they made this plea: “We encourage all citizens, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate in building the culture of life. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power” (n. 34).

To make sure you are on the road to fulfilling that duty, you need to keep a few things in mind:

a) Make sure you are properly registered to vote. At www.priestsforlife.org/states, we have a list of the states and the voter registration deadlines. If you have moved since the last election, you are probably in a different district. To be sure, contact your local Board of Elections. You certainly don’t want to arrive at the voting booth on Election Day only to find that you’re not registered!

b) Vote in the Primaries! Another step to voting with a clear conscience is to do everything in your power to get the right candidates on the ballot in the first place. While the General Election Day is the same nationwide, individual states have Primary Election Days on some earlier date. These are the elections in which we select the candidates who will be on the ballot in the general election. The Primary in your state may have already occurred for this year. Be sure you know when the Primaries are in your state (see www.priestsforlife.org/states) and vote in them. On Election Day, many people are not happy with any of the choices. Part of the problem is that not enough of them voted in the Primaries, where they had the chance to get the name of a better candidate onto the ballot!

c) Absentee Ballots. Think ahead, and if you are going to be out of town on Election Day because of work, vacation, family responsibilities, school, military service, or some other reason, get an absentee ballot well in advance and fill it out! Likewise, if you are homebound or in a nursing facility and will not be able to get to the polls, don’t let that make you lose your vote! Obtain an absentee ballot right away!

d) Early Voting. Some states allow early voting. (To see if yours is one of them, visit www.priestsforlife.org/states.) This means that even if you are going to be in town on Election Day, you can vote within a specific period of time before Election Day. If your state has early voting, then vote early! This will minimize the risk of unforeseen obstacles arising on Election Day, like illness, car trouble, bad weather, unexpected family or work obligations, or just forgetfulness.

e) Bring your voting decisions to prayer. Pray for wisdom and guidance, clarity and strength as you consider the candidates in the light of the principles explained here. Pray for the inner freedom to do the right thing in the voting booth.

2. Know the candidates.

It’s a terrible feeling to be in the voting booth and to feel like you’re tossing a coin, hoping that the individual you’re voting for stands for the right values.

Of course, you can vote with a clear conscience if you know for sure ahead of time where that candidate stands. It is a moral obligation to do your homework to learn about the candidate, and the time is now, long before Election Day.

Candidates have websites you can visit, campaign headquarters you can call, and literature you can

There are many issues, but some are more important than others. The US Bishops make this clear in Living the Gospel of Life when they explain that the right to life is like the foundation of a house. It holds up every other issue, because it is the principle at the heart and core of every effort for justice and peace.

Most disagreements between candidates and political platforms do not have to do with principle, but rather with policy. For example, it is a basic principle that people have a right to the safety of their own lives and possessions. That's why we have to fight crime. We don't see candidates campaigning on opposite sides of that principle, with some saying, “Fight Crime” and other defending “The Right to Crime.” Instead, there is agreement on the principle, but disagreement on the best policies to implement the principle. One voter concludes that one candidate has a better policy on crime than his opponent, while a second voter concludes the opposite. Both can vote in good conscience, because as long as the policy doesn’t break the principle, both policies may well be morally legitimate. It remains to be seen by trial and error which works best.

But when a policy dispute involves questioning whether people deserve that protection in the first place, the policy is the principle. To allow abortion, which is the killing of a human child in the womb, is to break the principle that every human life is sacred and to deny the principle that life deserves protection. In fact, to allow abortion establishes a different kind of government, namely, one that claims authority to tamper with human rights. The basic principle of our government is that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. -- That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men” (The Declaration of Independence).

When a policy breaks the very founding principle of government, that is more than an ordinary political disagreement. That’s why a candidate’s position on abortion is about more than abortion. It is about the kind of authority government has. It is about who is
ultimately in charge, God or government? It’s about the most fundamental political question there can be.

Candidates are supposed to advocate policies that advance the common good and the dignity of the human person. A candidate who advocates policies that violate those fundamental principles should not be elected to public office, because he or she violates the purpose of public office.

Following are examples of political disputes that are not mere policy disputes, but disputes about principle. (Note that this is not an exhaustive list.)

a) the killing of children through legal abortion;

b) the tiniest humans through destructive embryonic stem cell research;

c) the killing of infants already partially born (through partial-birth abortion);

d) the killing of the disabled, like Terri Schiavo, and the advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide;

e) the denial of religious freedom, such as the freedom of doctors and institutions to refrain from actions they hold to be immoral;

f) the denial of the natural institution of marriage as the union of one man and one woman;

g) the denial of the right to self-government. This denial occurs when candidates view judges and courts as the final arbiters of public policy, rather than the people themselves, acting through their duly elected legislators.

Candidates who advocate these errors are embracing positions that transcend normal political disagreements, and hence carry far more weight than positions on other policies.

5. Weigh other issues properly.

There are many issues that have to be considered in elections, but as we have already seen, not all have equal weight. Once voters have disqualified those candidates who violate fundamental principles, they need to look at the wide spectrum of issues affecting the proper care of human life and promotion of human dignity. The US Bishops mention these issues in Living the Gospel of Life as well as in the other documents they issue, as a group or as individual bishops, regarding how to be faithful citizens. The issues are not simply a list; some are more fundamental than others.

Living the Gospel of Life declares, “Any politics of human life must work to resist the violence of war and the scandal of capital punishment. Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care. Therefore, Catholics should eagerly involve themselves as advocates for the weak and marginalized in all these areas. Catholic public officials are obliged to address each of these issues as they seek to build consistent policies which promote respect for the human person at all stages of life. But being 'right' in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community. If we understand the human person as the "temple of the Holy Spirit" - - the living house of God -- then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, strike at the house’s foundation. These directly and immediately violate the human person’s most fundamental right the right to life. Neglect of these issues is the equivalent of building our house on sand” (23).

Reflecting the same theme, Living the Gospel of Life also states, “We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem” (n. 21)...“Abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others” (n. 5).
In particular, many voters have questions about capital punishment and the waging of war. The Church clearly urges us to avoid both, but also teaches that at times, both activities can be morally legitimate. Take, for example, what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in a letter in July 2004: “Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. …While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia” (Letter to Cardinal McCarrick, n.3).

The bottom line, in other words, is that support for war and capital punishment do not automatically or necessarily violate fundamental moral principles; support for abortion and euthanasia always do. Therefore, supporting these latter policies is worse.

6. Keep your loyalty focused on Jesus.

When you vote, you say something about where your loyalties are. There is nothing wrong with being loyal to a candidate or to a political party. But there is something very wrong if your loyalty to either is stronger than your loyalty to Jesus Christ. Ask yourself, "Is there a position that my party can take that would prevent me from voting the party line?" Framed in another way, the question is, "Is my loyalty to the Christian faith stronger than my loyalty to any political party?"

In Living the Gospel of Life, the US Bishops reminded us, "We get the public officials we deserve. Their virtue -- or lack thereof -- is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, we urge our fellow citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest" (n.34).

Sometimes people vote according to the party of the candidate, perhaps because that’s a family tradition, or because some group or friend has asked them to do so. But when is the last time you read the words of the platform of that party? Don’t you think you should? (Find the platform texts at www.PoliticalResponsibility.com.) Platforms change, and if the platform of that party today contradicts the platform of the Gospel and the moral law, you need to have the inner freedom to depart from personal, family, or community tradition and vote instead for the candidate and party that best reflect God’s law. We are free to belong to the political party of our choice, but first we belong to Jesus Christ. And belonging to Him means that there are certain things we can no longer assent to or go along with, including in politics and the voting booth.

7. Remember, the Party Matters.

Voting with a clear conscience also means that you consider how the outcome of the election in which you vote affects the balance of power. In other words, elections do not only put individual candidates into power; they put political parties into power. And it is not only the candidates who have positions. So do the parties.

The same questions, then, that you ask about the candidates’ positions on fundamental issues have to be asked of the party. What is the platform of that party? Is it possible that the balance of power might shift as a result of this particular race? Keep in mind that the party that is in power controls the committees responsible for initiating legislation. A pro-abortion party will not normally allow pro-life legislation to come forward, no matter how pro-life the individual lawmakers may be. Do not just look at whether the candidate is pro-life. Consider whether or not, if he or she wins, a pro-abortion party will come into power.

Note: Some people have asked whether this particular chapter constitutes an endorsement for a particular party. It does not. It is, rather, a teaching on one of the moral implications of voting. When we teach about the morality or immorality of human actions, we have to consider the foreseen consequences of such actions. When a race could shift the balance of power between parties, that is obviously a significant, foreseen consequence of one’s action of voting. If we are to teach about the moral aspects of
In the case described above, you would not be choosing evil. Why? Because in choosing to limit an evil, you are choosing a good. You oppose the evil of abortion, in every circumstance, no matter what. You know that no law can legitimize even a single abortion, ever. If the candidate thinks some abortion is OK, you don't agree. But by your vote, you can keep the worse person out. And trying to do that is not only legitimate, but good. Some may think it's not the best strategy. But if your question is whether it is morally permissible to vote for the better of two bad candidates, the answer -- in the case described above -- is yes.

Cardinal John O'Connor, in a special booklet on abortion, once wrote about this problem, “Suppose all candidates support 'abortion rights'? … One could try to determine whether the position of one candidate is less supportive of abortion than that of another. Other things being equal, one might then morally vote for a less supportive position. If all candidates support "abortion rights" equally, one might vote for the candidate who seems best in regard to other issues” (1990, “Abortion: Questions and Answers”).

In this context, the question also arises as to whether one is required to vote for a third candidate who does not have a strong base of support but does have the right position. The answer is, no, you are not required to vote for this candidate. The reason is that your vote is not a canonization of a candidate. It is a transfer of power. You have to look concretely at where the power is really going to be transferred, and use your vote not to make a statement but to help bring about the most acceptable results under the circumstances.

Of course, our conscience may be telling us, “Don’t say it’s impossible to elect the candidate who doesn’t have a strong base of support." Of course, it is possible to elect almost anyone if the necessary work is done within the necessary time. God doesn’t ask us to base our choices on "the possibility of miracles," but rather on solid human reason. The point is that if there’s a relatively unknown but excellent candidate, the time to begin building up support for
that person’s candidacy is several years before the election, not several months. What you have to ask as Election Day draws near is whether your vote is needed to keep the worse candidate (of the two, less acceptable but more realistic choices) out of office.

9. Support the candidate with more than your vote!

Another thing that will help you vote with a clear conscience on Election Day is to know that you did a lot of other things to help the candidate you are voting for. In other words, voting for the right candidate should be the culmination of a whole list of things you do to help get him or her into office. These things include donating to the campaign, volunteering for the campaign, handing out literature for the candidate, making phone calls and visits on the candidate’s behalf, sending emails, using yard signs and bumper stickers, and praying for the candidate.

Elections, after all, are not contests between two candidates. They are contests between two teams. And it is the team that has more active members doing all these things that, in the end, will bring in the most votes.

There is also a follow-up phase to elections, and that is to lobby those who are elected. When you vote for candidates, also resolve that you are going to keep the pressure on them after they are elected. You gave them power by showing up and voting. After they are in office, keep showing up to make sure they use that power the right way. If they don’t, then pressure them; if they do, then back them up.

10. Mobilize as many other voters as possible!

Each of us has one vote, but each of us can mobilize hundreds, even thousands of votes. That’s the secret to helping the right people win elections: you simply need to get more people to vote for them. Remember that many people are not paying nearly as much attention to the elections as you are, and even less attention to the candidates and their positions. Many who trust you will accept your guidance about the importance of voting for a particular candidate. Don’t be afraid to use that influence.

As Election Day draws near, focus on the “low-hanging fruit.” Remember, the numbers are what counts. You have a limited amount of time to try to garner as many votes as possible. It’s much like going into an orange grove, with the goal of gathering as many oranges as you can in a limited amount of time. It doesn’t make sense to expend time and energy climbing to the top of the trees to get the oranges there when you can get many more that are within arm’s reach with much less time and energy. Reach for the low-hanging fruit!

So it is with elections. Rather than spend hours trying to convince one person to vote the right way, spend that time and energy reminding dozens of people – who are already in agreement with you on the issues – to get out and cast their vote. Don’t go looking for the personal victory of catching the “hard to get” voter. Go catch the easier ones and bring the candidate to victory!

If you can take the day off on Election Day, do so. Spend the day contacting people by phone and email, reminding them to vote. Maybe a friend needs a ride to the polls or someone to watch the children while they go to vote. If you call a friend in the morning to remind him to vote, call him again later to verify that he did so!

Having done all this, rejoice in a clear conscience, and trust the Lord to bring about the victory for a Culture of Life!

Appendix: Some Relevant Quotes

The following quotes from various Church documents and Cardinals echo and develop the themes mentioned above.

Second Vatican Council: Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)

"At all times and in all places, the Church should have the true freedom to teach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task among men without hindrance, and to pass moral judgment even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it" (n. 76).
Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici), 1988:

"The inviolability of the person, which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights -- for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture -- is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination" (19).

Pope John Paul II: Encyclical Letter The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae), 1995

"This view of freedom leads to a serious distortion of life in society. If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another ... At that point, everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life.

"[A]t the level of politics and government: the original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of a parliamentary vote or the will of one part of the people—even if it is the majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the "right" ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism. The State is no longer the "common home" where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into a tyrant State, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part. ... Really, what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, is betrayed in its very foundations: "How is it still possible to speak of the dignity of every human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted? In the name of what justice is the most unjust of discriminations practiced: some individuals are held to be deserving of defense and others are denied that dignity?" When this happens, the process leading to the breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence and the disintegration of the State itself has already begun.

“To claim the right to abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, and to recognize that right in law, means to attribute to human freedom a perverse and evil significance: that of an absolute power over others and against others. This is the death of true freedom” (n.20).

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Doctrinal Note On some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life, 2002

“[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” (n.4).

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Vatican City): The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004

“The first right...is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, which is the condition for the exercise of all other rights” (155). “The dignity of the human person...is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church’s social doctrine” (160).

“It is difficult for the concerns of the Christian faith to be adequately met in one sole political entity; to claim that one party or political coalition responds completely to the demands of faith or of Christian life would give rise to dangerous errors. Christians cannot find one party that fully corresponds to the ethical demands arising from faith and from membership in the Church. Their adherence to a political alliance will never be ideological but always critical; in this way the party and its political platform will be prompted to be ever more conscientious in attaining the true common good, including the spiritual end of the human person” (573)

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deserve. Their virtue -- or lack thereof -- is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, we urge our fellow citizens to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest.” (34)


“Two temptations in public life can distort the Church’s defense of human life and dignity: The first is 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. It must always be opposed. “The second is the misuse of these necessary moral distinctions as a way of dismissing or ignoring other serious threats to human life and dignity.” (n.27-29)

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church reminds us, “it is necessary that all participate, each according to his position and role, in promoting the common good. This obligation is inherent in the dignity of the human person. . . . As far as possible citizens should take an active part in public life” (nos. 1913-1915). (n.13)

In our nation, “abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental
human good and the condition for all others” (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). (n. 22).


“Bishops have every right and duty to be involved in public policy, which is a different thing altogether from politics, both because they are bishops and because they are American citizens.

“All citizens should express themselves on the moral dimensions of public policy issues. Those citizens who are generally perceived as "moral leaders," such as the bishops, have a special obligation to do so. People expect bishops to denounce unjust war and aggression, to plead for the homeless, to denounce drug traffic, racism and so on. Bishops are criticized if they remain silent about such issues.

“Why are bishops criticized only when the public policy question involves abortion? Why would I be praised for encouraging the mayor, the governor, the Congress and the president to intensify the war on drugs, but criticized if I urge the same regarding abortion?

“Actually, many bishops find that local political leaders want to involve them, the bishops, in various public policy matters, rather than vice versa. Political leaders want bishops involved in community action. It is, again, only when abortion is involved that some political leaders complain about bishops.

“However, the question of the equality of the "single issue" question. Bishops are told they should not criticize a political candidate for simply being "proabortion," or favor a candidate simply for being "pro-life." It is argued that a candidate's entire record, his or her entire set of attitudes must be considered.

“Here are several things to be said about this. First, with the staggering increase in abortion in less than 20 years, other issues, important as they are, are secondary to this direct taking of human life.

“Secondly, in regard to many other issues, the question is one of public policy strategy, a question of the best way to do things. But abortion is not a question of mere strategy, or of how best to accomplish a particular public policy objective. Abortion—every abortion—is the destruction of human life. There is no "best way" of destroying human life. That is an absolute.

“For example, everyone can argue that we need a stronger police force. How is that achieved? That's a matter of strategy. For example, some might recommend raising taxes. Others believe that higher taxes will ruin the economy and result in a very high rate of unemployment. Are they right or wrong? That's an economic judgment more than it's a moral judgment. Many such examples could be given.

“In reality, aren't "single issues" always driving forces in American political life? Doesn't the state of the economy or employment strongly influence thinking? Could any candidate win office today who favored a return to slavery, even if he had a wonderful record in regard to all other issues? Could a candidate win who supports drug traffic? Suppose a candidate said the vote should be withdrawn from women? Clearly, these are "single issues" which many people consider serious enough that no other qualities of a candidate would compensate. Why is it wrong, then, to look at abortion in this light, if one believes that abortion is the taking of innocent life?

“As a matter of fact, an interesting development has taken place since the famous Webster decision of the United States Supreme Court, which gave states new latitude in restricting abortions. The very day the decision was announced, leaders of the pro-abortion movement were threatening political office holders on national television: "Take away our right (to abortion), and we will take away your job." That is certainly a "single issue" approach! We have seen a boycott threatened against a potato crop, then against an entire state because of proposed legislation restricting abortion. On May 28, 1990, The New York Times reported that the National Abortion Rights Action League "has jumped into" a certain state's gubernatorial race, vowing to defeat the only candidate who opposes abortion. This was generally perceived as a call for "single issue" voting. This phenomenon has clearly swept the country in the 1990 primaries.

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In a day in which it can prove very embarrassing to a candidate if it is learned that he belongs to a country club that excludes blacks or women, it should be reasonable enough to ask a candidate if he excludes the right to life to the unborn. Strange. He can not be "pro-choice" about a country club, but he can be "pro-choice" about human life (1990, “Abortion: Questions and Answers”)

Statements from Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, who was the chief spokesperson on the Consistent Ethic of Life.

In 1984, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, the most well-known spokesperson regarding the consistent ethic of life, had this to say about the role of the statements of the US Bishops’ Conference regarding faithful citizenship: "The purpose is surely not to tell citizens how to vote, but to help shape the public debate and form personal conscience so that every citizen will vote thoughtfully and responsibly. Our "Statement on Political Responsibility" has always been, like our "Respect Life Program," a multi-issue approach to public morality. The fact that this Statement sets forth a spectrum of issues of current concern to the Church and society should not be understood as implying that all issues are qualitatively equal from a moral perspective…As I indicated earlier, each of the life issues—while related to all the others—is distinct and calls for its own specific moral analysis" (A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue, The William Wade Lecture Series, St. Louis University, March 11, 1984).

Cardinal Bernardin also explained, "A consistent ethic of life does not equate the problem of taking life (e.g., through abortion and in war) with the problem of promoting human dignity (through humane programs of nutrition, health care, and housing). But a consistent ethic identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions" (Wade lecture, as above). "The fundamental human right is to life—from the moment of conception until death. It is the source of all other rights, including the right to health care" (The Consistent Ethic of Life and Health Care Systems, Foster McGaw Triennial Conference, Loyola University of Chicago, May 8, 1985).

On Respect Life Sunday, 1 October 1989, Cardinal Bernardin issued a statement entitled "Deciding for Life," in which he said, "Not all values, however, are of equal weight. Some are more fundamental than others. On this Respect Life Sunday, I wish to emphasize that no earthly value is more fundamental than human life itself. Human life is the condition for enjoying freedom and all other values. Consequently, if one must choose between protecting or serving lesser human values that depend upon life for their existence and life itself, human life must take precedence. Today the recognition of human life as a fundamental value is threatened. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of elective abortion. At present in our country this procedure takes the lives of over 4,000 unborn children every day and over 1.5 million each year."

This voter’s guide was produced by Priests For Life (Link)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REPUBLICAN PLATFORM</th>
<th>KEY ISSUE</th>
<th>DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>“The Constitution’s guarantee that no one can be deprived of life, liberty or property” deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence’s proclamation that “all” are “endowed by their Creator” with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections apply to children before birth.” (p.13)</td>
<td>Human Life</td>
<td>“Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally that every woman should have access to quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion—regardless of where she lives, how much money she makes, or how she is insured. We believe that reproductive health is core to women’s, men’s, and young people’s health and wellbeing…. We will continue to oppose—and seek to overturn—federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman’s access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment.” (p.37)</td>
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<td>“We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare.” (p.13)</td>
<td>Planned Parenthood</td>
<td>“We will continue to stand up to Republican efforts to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, which provide critical health services to millions of people.” (p.37)</td>
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<td>“We support the appointment of judges who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of innocent human life.” (p.13)</td>
<td>Judges</td>
<td>“We will appoint judges who defend the constitutional principles of liberty and equality for all, protect a woman’s right to safe and legal abortion, curb billionaires’ influence over elections because they understand that Citizens United has fundamentally damaged our democracy, and see the Constitution as a blueprint for progress.” (p.25)</td>
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<td>“We value the right of America’s religious leaders to preach, and Americans to speak freely, according to their faith. Republicans believe the federal government, specifically the IRS, is constitutionally prohibited from policing or censoring speech based on religious convictions or beliefs, and therefore we urge the repeal of the Johnson Amendment.” (p.11)</td>
<td>Religious Liberty</td>
<td>“Democrats know that our nation, our communities, and our lives are made vastly stronger and richer by faith in many forms and the countless acts of justice, mercy, and tolerance it inspires. We believe in lifting up and valuing the good work of people of faith and religious organizations and finding ways to support that work where possible.” (p.19)</td>
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<td>“We firmly believe environmental problems are best solved by giving incentives for human ingenuity and the development of new technologies, not through top-down, command-and-control regulations that stifle economic growth and cost thousands of jobs.” (p.22)</td>
<td>Climate Change/Global Warming</td>
<td>“Climate change is an urgent threat and a defining challenge of our time…. We believe America must be running entirely on clean energy by mid-century” (p.27)</td>
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<td>“We support options for learning, including home-schooling, career and technical education, private or parochial schools, magnet schools, charter schools, online learning, and early-college high schools. We especially support the innovative financing mechanisms that make options available to all children: education savings accounts (ESAs), vouchers, and tuition tax credits.” (p.34)</td>
<td>Education/School Choice</td>
<td>“Democrats are also committed to providing parents with high-quality public school options and expanding these options for low-income youth. We support great neighborhood public schools and high-quality public charter schools, and we will help them disseminate best practices to other school leaders and educators. Democrats oppose for-profit charter schools focused on making a profit off of public resources.” (p.34)</td>
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Continued On Reverse
## A Comparison of the 2016 Republican and Democratic Platforms

**A non-partisan guide on issues of concern to the electorate**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>KEY ISSUE</th>
<th>DEMOCRATIC PLATFORM</th>
</tr>
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<td>“We renew our call for replacing “family planning” programs for teens with sexual risk avoidance education that sets abstinence until marriage as the responsible and respected standard of behavior.” (p.34)</td>
<td>Sex Education</td>
<td>“We recognize that quality, affordable comprehensive health care, evidence-based sex education, and a full range of family planning services help reduce the number of unintended pregnancies.” (p.37)</td>
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<td>“Any honest agenda for improving healthcare must start with repeal of the dishonestly named Affordable Care Act of 2010: Obamacare....To simplify the system for both patients and providers, we will reduce mandates and enable insurers and providers of care to increase healthcare options and contain costs.” (p.36)</td>
<td>Obamacare</td>
<td>“Thanks to the hard work of President Obama and Democrats in Congress we took a critically important step towards the goal of universal health care by passing the Affordable Care Act (ACA), which has offered coverage to 20 million more Americans and ensured millions more will never be denied coverage on account of a pre-existing condition.” (p.34)</td>
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<td>“We condemn the Supreme Court’s ruling in United States v. Windsor, which wrongly removed the ability of Congress to define marriage policy in federal law. We also condemn the Supreme Court’s lawless ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges. ....In Obergefell, five unelected lawyers robbed 320 million Americans of their legitimate constitutional authority to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman.” (p.11)</td>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>“Democrats applaud last year’s decision by the Supreme Court that recognized LGBT people—like every other American—have the right to marry the person they love. But there is still much work to be done.” (p.19)</td>
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<td>“We call for expanded support for the stem cell research that now offers the greatest hope for many afflictions — through adult stem cells, umbilical cord blood, and cells reprogrammed into pluripotent stem cells — without the destruction of embryonic human life. We urge a ban on human cloning for research or reproduction, and a ban on the creation of, or experimentation on, human embryos for research.” (p.37-38)</td>
<td>Medical Research</td>
<td>“Democrats believe we must accelerate the pace of medical progress, ensuring that we invest more in our scientists and give them the resources they need to integrate our fundamental studies in the life sciences in a growing, stable, and predictable way....We recognize the critical importance of a fully funded National Institutes of Health to accelerate the pace of medical progress.” (p.36)</td>
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<td>“We consider the Administration’s deal with Iran, to lift international sanctions and make hundreds of billions of dollars available to the Mullahs, a personal agreement between the President and his negotiating partners and non-binding on the next president....Because of it, the defiant and emboldened regime in Tehran continues to sponsor terrorism across the region, develop a nuclear weapon, test-fire ballistic missiles inscribed with “Death to Israel,” and abuse the basic human rights of its citizens.” (p.46)</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>“We support the nuclear agreement with Iran because, if vigorously enforced and implemented, it verifiably cuts off all of Iran’s pathways to a bomb without resorting to war.” (p.43)</td>
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<td>“The integrity of our country’s foreign assistance program has been compromised by the current Administration’s attempt to impose on foreign recipients, especially the peoples of Africa, its own radical social agenda while excluding faith-based groups — the sector with the best track record in promoting development — because they will not conform to that agenda. We pledge to reverse this course....” (p.52)</td>
<td>Foreign Assistance</td>
<td>“We will support sexual and reproductive health and rights around the globe. In addition to expanding the availability of affordable family planning information and contraceptive supplies, we believe that safe abortion must be part of comprehensive maternal and women’s health care and included as part of America’s global health programming.” (p.46)</td>
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Continued From Page One

The full texts of the party platforms may be found at www.VotingInfo.net.

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Prayer to Mary, the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the United States

Most Holy Trinity: Our Father in Heaven, who chose Mary as the fairest of your daughters; Holy Spirit, who chose Mary as your Spouse; God the Son, who chose Mary as your Mother, in union with Mary we adore your majesty and acknowledge your supreme, eternal dominion and authority.

Most Holy Trinity, we put the United States of America into the hands of Mary Immaculate in order that she may present the country to you. Through her we wish to thank you for the great resources of this land and for the freedom which has been its heritage.

Through the intercession of Mary, have mercy on the Catholic Church in America. Grant us peace. Have mercy on our president and on all the officers of our government. Grant us a fruitful economy, born of justice and charity. Have mercy on capital and industry and labor. Protect the family life of the nation. Guard the precious gift of many religious vocations. Through the intercession of our Mother, have mercy on the sick, the tempted, sinners – on all who are in need.

Mary, Immaculate Virgin, our Mother, Patroness of our land, we praise you and honor you and give ourselves to you. Protect us from every harm. Pray for us, that acting always according to your will and the will of your divine Son, we may live and die pleasing to God. Amen.

A new documentary has been released about community organizer Saul Alinsky (1909-1972).

“A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” is the work of father and son team Richard and Stephen Payne and their company Arcadia Films. It’s available for purchase on streaming video and is airing weekly on EWTN through October.

The child of poor Russian Jewish immigrant parents, Alinsky was born in 1909. He majored in archaeology at the University of Chicago and later became a criminologist. In the late 1930s when worked as a labor organizer and focused his attention on organizing communities in places like Chicago’s depressed Back of the Yards neighborhood, made famous in the book “The Jungle” by Upton Sinclair.


During the 1960’s Alinsky set up institutes to train other organizers, and his reputation as an activist grew. In 1969 college student Hillary Clinton chose his work as the topic for a Wellesley College thesis. Clinton described Alinsky as “that rare specimen, the successful radical.”

“It’s amazing how unaware people are of these realities that have played such a major social role in the society in capturing the word liberal and then the term progressivist,” Richard Payne, who wrote and narrates the film - son Stephen directed - told CNSNews.com, “in order for people to not realize what was underneath. We attempt to peel back the onion.”

The “realities” Richard and Stephen Payne speak about are the various forms of Marxism that the film claims were central to Alinsky’s worldview and are prevalent today.

“Alinsky never admitted to being a communist,” Richard says, “but he never said that he wasn’t a socialist, in fact he embraced that term, and that derives from Marxist theory. In his early life, as you see in the film, he is very much taken with the social sciences which abstract out of the reality of God to deal with life in a secular way.”

Stephen adds, “He said himself, treat opponents not as persons, but as symbols.”

In the film Alinsky, played by actor Jim Morlino, says the following: “I knew plenty of communist in those days and I worked with them on a number of projects. Back in the 30s the communist did a hell of lot of good work. Anybody who tells you he was active in progressive causes in those days and never worked with the reds is a g**damn liar. Their platform stood for all the right things and unlike many liberals they were willing to put their bodies on the line.”

“A Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing” identifies three major movements of what Richard Payne calls “cultural Marxism that seek to infiltrated film, school, all of the different institutions.”

The first is the Frankfurt School, which was founded by German Marxists after the Russian Revolution (Continued on next page)
Men invent new ideals because they dare not attempt old ideals. They look forward with enthusiasm, because they are afraid to look back.

There is one metaphor of which the moderns are very fond; they are always saying, “you can’t put the clock back.” The simple and obvious answer is “You can.” A clock, being a piece of human construction, can be restored by the human finger to any figure or hour. In the same way society, being a piece of human construction, can be reconstructed upon any plan that has ever existed.

- GK Chesterton

Richard Payne sees Alinsky’s worldview as even originating before Marxism. “In some sense in the 19th century the rise of Marxism is very much in line with the French Revolution and what was behind it,” he says, “coming ultimately to a sense of the person focusing not on the reality God so much as being saved by ideas, even religious ideas, which we know as classic Gnosticism. It has its roots in original sin. It becomes a kind of worship of self, when we worship our higher faculty reasons over the reality of the persons of God, essentially the person of Jesus Christ.”

Stephen adds, “If you look at the history of Marxism and socialism that’s basically the way they’ve treated human beings since the beginning...with lack of respect of human life and the dignity of human life.”

Mark Judge writes for CNS News (Link)
“Frequently he made a special personal petition that God would deign to grant him a genuine charity, effective in caring for and obtaining the salvation of men. For he believed that only then would he be truly a member of Christ, when he had given himself totally for the salvation of men, just as the Lord Jesus, the Savior of all, had offered himself completely for our salvation. So, for this work, after a lengthy period of careful and provident planning, he founded the Order of Friars Preachers.”

Libellus de principiis O.P. Office of Readings, Aug 8

Let us, then, not light the lamp by contemplation and action, only to put it under a bushel - that lamp, I mean, which is the enlightening word of knowledge - lest we be condemned for restricting by the letter the incomprehensible power of wisdom. Rather let us place it upon the lampstand of holy Church, on the heights of true contemplation, where it may kindle for all men the light of divine teaching. -St. Maximus the Confessor

Mary, our mother
And mother of the Redeemer,
Gate of heaven and Star of the sea,
Come to the aid of your people,
Who have sinned,
Yet also yearn to rise again!
Come to the Church’s aid,
Enlighten your devoted children,
Strengthen the faithful throughout the world,
Let those who have drifted
Hear your call,
And may they who live as prisoners of evil
Be converted!

Pope John Paul II

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Editor – Mark Gross

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