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By

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Abortion and Religion: The Politics of the American Catholic Bishops

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Prior to the 1960s, the American Catholic bishops avoided political involvement unless it directly impacted the Church. Initially, the bishops' main priority for their flock was protection from anti-Catholic discrimination and assuring the nation that Catholics were loyal and patriotic Americans. After *Roe v. Wade*, the bishops engaged in politics more directly by denouncing the Court's decision, thus laying the foundation for decades of debate over the issue of abortion. By 1976, candidates had recognized the importance of the Catholic vote and both parties began courting the bishops. Since then, the bishops have amassed significant political leverage, primarily due to their near-singular focus on abortion.

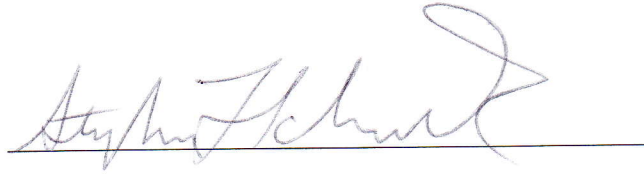
This dissertation will be the first to examine how the bishops' decision to focus primarily on abortion has been the wellspring of their increased political power. I will discuss the history of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its political involvement through 2008. This includes an examination of the relationship between the Catholic Church and both the Democratic and Republican parties, including a discussion of

the presidential elections from 1976-2008. I will also analyze the changing attitudes toward abortion among key subgroups of the American electorate.

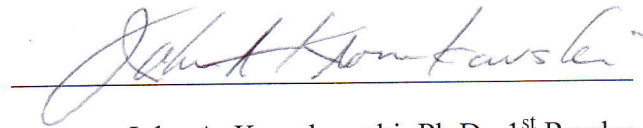
My research shows that abortion has been the critical element of the bishops' political power for several reasons: (1) abortion attracts a significant amount of attention; (2) no American bishop favors legalized abortion; (3) the bishops have not been forced to endorse one party over the other; and (4) the tactics of some bishops (i.e., denying communion) have allowed the Church to guide parishioners toward preferred candidates without explicit endorsements.

While abortion has not always been a major issue for voters, it has been critical in the expansion of the bishops' political power. As leaders of a major swing-voter group, candidates recognize the bishops' influence and actively court their endorsement. Even without abortion as a major issue in an election, a pro-choice candidate still faces major hurdles in winning the bishops' approval. As was evident in the 2004 election, without agreement on abortion, no amount of agreement on other social issues will earn a candidate episcopal approval.

This dissertation by Margaret Sammon Parsons fulfills the dissertation requirement for the doctoral degree in American Politics approved by Stephen Schneck, Ph.D., as Director, and by John A. Kromkowski, Ph.D., and Mark J. Rozell, Ph.D. as Readers.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Stephen Schneck", written over a horizontal line.

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To my grandparents, Mille Damiani Ross and the late Charles G. Ross, Sr.

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Introduction

When the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, the American Catholic bishops released a statement that was uncharacteristic of the organization. The Committee for Pro-Life Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops stated:

Although as a result of the Court decision abortion may be legally permissible, it is still morally wrong, and no Court opinion can change the law of God prohibiting the taking of innocent human life. Therefore, as religious leaders, we cannot accept the Court's judgment and we urge people not to follow its reasoning or conclusions.¹

This simple statement set the stage for decades of political debate within the Church over the issue of abortion. What is most striking is that for many years, the American Catholic bishops refrained from systematic and direct political involvement unless the issue at hand directly affected the Church, such as aid to Catholic schools. Moreover, the bishops had a history of supporting the U.S. government in all of its endeavors. Yet in the face of legalized abortion and abetted by changes in the political landscape and in the social and economic status of American Catholics, the political role of the bishops changed. Among the issues for which the bishops came to advocate after 1973, opposition to abortion was preeminent. The question that this dissertation seeks to answer is whether the current political leverage that the bishops possess is a result of their decision to focus primarily on abortion.

This dissertation will show how the decision to focus on abortion as the Church's primary social justice cause was a critical step in attaining increased political leverage for

1. This statement of the Committee for Pro-Life Affairs National Conference of Catholic Bishops is reproduced in *Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), 59.

the American Catholic bishops. Significant study has been done of the bishops' role in the pro-life movement and their political involvement generally. Yet little research has examined the decision to focus on abortion as the key element in the bishops' significant gains in political power. This dissertation will discuss the history of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its political involvement through 2008. It will also discuss the relationship between the Church and both the Democratic and Republican Parties, including a discussion of the presidential elections from 1976-2008. This dissertation will analyze the changing attitudes toward abortion among key subgroups of the American electorate. It will reveal emerging political differences between those who attend church regularly and non-churchgoers, as well as the political differences among those at various income levels. The first chapter of this dissertation will discuss the history of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and examine its early political involvement through 1973. It will also provide an examination of the situation of early American Catholics.

The fact that the bishops would choose to focus the majority of their energy on abortion is not surprising. The Church's social and moral teachings have consistently advocated for those individuals who are unable to help themselves. While the Church had traditionally linked itself to more "Democratic" causes such as poverty and war, it has always demonstrated underlying support for the sanctity of life. During the 1960s and 1970s, the American Catholic bishops became concerned with the increasing moral

ambivalence of not only Catholics but Americans in general. They released statements outlining their displeasure over the use of birth control and their disapproval of abortion. When the *Roe v. Wade* decision was announced in 1973, the bishops went from talking about the evils of abortion to taking action to end it. It was this court decision that propelled the bishops to new heights of influence in the political process. Suddenly, leaders of the Church who had been hesitant to speak up about political issues were sought out by political leaders and candidates.

The bishops' expanded political role was not an immediate development. Over several decades the unique nature of the abortion issue created a special role in the political world for the American Catholic bishops. Additionally, the decision to make it a primary focus did not come without internal debate. Despite some members of the hierarchy questioning the prudence of focusing primarily on abortion, the bishops made the fateful choice. Why was it such an important decision, and why did it fundamentally change the bishops' political activity? Its importance lies in the following: (1) abortion attracts a significant amount of attention, (2) despite their differing opinions on other issues, no American bishop favored legal abortions, (3) it gave the bishops the latitude to differ on other issues, meaning that they could not be accused of endorsing one party over another, and (4) the tactics employed by some bishops, such as denying communion to pro-choice candidates or banning pro-choice candidates from speaking at Catholic institutions,

allowed the Church to guide parishioners toward preferred candidates without actually dictating whom to elect.

The bishops' first venture into electoral politics came in the 1976 presidential election. It was during that election that (1) they refused to support any candidate who advocated a pro-choice position, and (2) they became inextricably linked with the abortion issue. Even though abortion was not a significant campaign issue in 1976, both candidates attempted to appease the bishops with their respective positions. Jimmy Carter attempted to compensate for his pro-choice position by claiming that he was personally opposed to abortion. Carter also tried to highlight areas of agreement with the bishops. His attempts ultimately failed, as the bishops publicly announced their disappointment with his position on abortion.

While Carter and Ford saw the bishops' support as a means to electoral victory, the bishops saw the attention bestowed upon them as a way to bring attention to the abortion debate. For the bishops, abortion was inextricably related to other social and moral problems. They reasoned that if society could not protect an unborn child, then there was little hope for solving other issues such as poverty. In 1975, the bishops released *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*, which has been called the most “focused and

aggressive political leadership' ever exerted by the American Catholic hierarchy."² The

Pastoral Plan stated:

Basic human rights are violated in many ways: by abortion and euthanasia, by injustice and the denial of equality to certain groups of persons, by some forms of human experimentation, by neglect of the underprivileged and disadvantaged who deserve the concern and support of the entire society. Indeed, the denial of the God-given right to life is one aspect of a larger problem. But it is unlikely that efforts to protect other rights will be ultimately successful if life itself is continually diminished in value.³

This statement is crucial to understanding the evolution of the bishops' power. It illustrates that although there were many important issues for the Church to address, failing to end abortion would negate any efforts aimed at solving those issues. It also meant that both the Democratic and Republican Parties could try to obtain episcopal support because neither adhered to all of the Church's teachings. Republicans stressed their support for ending legalized abortion, while Democrats stressed how many of the issues they supported were in accordance with Church teachings.

The 1976 presidential election showed that the bishops were not afraid to take a strong position against abortion and make clear that in order for a candidate to obtain their support, he must be pro-life. Studying the presidential elections from 1976 to 2008, the

2. Timothy A. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 58.

3. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* is reproduced in *Documentation on Abortion and the Right to Life II* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), 46.

relationship between the bishops and the political parties, and public opinion makes it clear that abortion was a major factor in the increased political power of the bishops.

First and foremost, the bishops were continually sought out by candidates in order to obtain the Catholic vote. Even candidates who were strongly dedicated to social issues such as poverty could not escape the bishops' disappointment over a pro-choice position. One of the more recent examples of how American bishops have used the abortion issue to their advantage was the 2004 presidential election. Senator John Kerry, a Catholic and an outspoken critic of the Iraq War, was singled out by several prominent bishops for his pro-choice record. Several bishops publicly announced that they would deny Kerry communion. Even Catholics who were pro-choice were bothered by the combination of Kerry's identification as a Catholic and his position on abortion. Many felt that if he claimed to be Catholic he should be willing to support Catholic ideals. Kerry's battle with the bishops over abortion highlighted several important aspects of the centrality of abortion as an electoral issue: (1) George W. Bush was not subjected to the same level of episcopal criticism, despite the fact that the Vatican and the American Catholic bishops opposed the war in Iraq; (2) George W. Bush had a long history of supporting the death penalty as governor of Texas, a practice that the Church opposes; and (3) abortion was not a major issue for voters in 2004; they were more concerned with the Iraq war and the economy.

The 2004 election illustrated what this dissertation is attempting to prove: that abortion, despite being a relatively insignificant electoral issue, gained a great deal of

attention and thus gave the bishops significant political leverage. Between 1976 and 2008, the bishops' political profile steadily increased, and candidates actively sought their support. The bishops had a clear advantage in focusing primarily on abortion, because such a focus freed them from supporting one party over the other. Also, no bishop supported legalized abortion. In contrast to some other issues, the bishops were unified in their message that abortion was wrong. And while some bishops may have disagreed about whether it was wise to focus on abortion, none of them stated that the Church's position was wrong.

Episcopal unanimity on the evils of abortion forced candidates to face a stark reality: whatever their position on other issues, being pro-choice was a major obstacle to obtaining the support of the American bishops. Even if a pro-life candidate did not win a particular election, the bishops' abortion stance created a major hurdle for pro-choice candidates. Over several decades, the bishops have made it clear that a pro-choice position on abortion will not be tolerated, regardless of positions taken on other social issues. This reality has not been lost on American politicians, and many have gone out of their way to obtain the support of the bishops in the hopes of garnering Catholic votes.

Literature Review

Despite the large amount of literature regarding the political involvement of the American Catholic bishops, none traces the evolution of their political power back to their decision to focus primarily on abortion. This dissertation contends that it was this decision

that gave rise to the unique political leverage of the American Catholic bishops. The literature regarding the American Catholic bishops can be divided into several groups: the history of Catholics in America (which shows the early leadership of the bishops); the history of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops; the bishops and their political activity (including presidential elections); public opinion and public policy; and the relationship between religion and politics.

History of Catholics in America

The history of Catholics in America provides an explanation for the bishops' reluctance to become politically involved. James T. Fisher's *Catholics in America*,⁴ James S. Olson's *Catholic Immigrants in America*,⁵ and Patrick W. Carey's *Catholics in America*⁶ all give encyclopedic descriptions of the arrival of Catholics in the U.S. Each discusses facts and figures, as well as a summary of the reception that Catholic immigrants received from Protestants. Moreover, such historical works document the limited political involvement of the early Catholic bishops in America.

This dissertation picks up where the historical studies have traditionally finished their work. It offers a narrative of Catholics in America today, comparing and contrasting their current experiences, economic prosperity, and social status with those of the past. In order to understand Catholics of today, it is important to understand their station in life

4. James T. Fisher, *Catholics in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5. James S. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987).

6. Patrick W. Carey, *Catholics in America* (Westport Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2004).

when they arrived in the U.S. in the mid-1800s. Scholarly works such as *Catholic Immigrants in America* explain why Catholics clung to their faith and why the leaders of the Catholic Church initially refrained from most types of political activity. One critical aspect of all three of the aforementioned works is the detailed accounts they offer of the historically contentious relationship between Catholics and Protestants. This relationship did not improve when Catholics arrived in the United States. Catholics were often the target of native-born Americans who were hostile toward or suspicious of these immigrants. The hostile reaction to the arrival of Catholics was compounded by the sad reality that most Catholics did not want to leave their home countries, but were forced to leave for economic reasons. Their faith was one part of their former lives that they could bring with them, and Catholic immigrants clung to their faith as a way to retain a sense of identity. Catholic priests understood the situation of Catholic immigrants and provided them with access to the Church and protection from anti-Catholic nativism. Part of this protection entailed avoiding involvement in political activities unless it directly affected the Church. This observation constitutes a critical part of the dissertation because it provides a window into how far the bishops, and Catholics generally, have evolved politically.

My research attempts to build upon the historical studies of the political activities of the bishops by assessing the causes and effects of episcopal influence in presidential elections from 1976 to 2008, as well as the economic and social progress of Catholics in

America. Once outsiders, Catholics are now equal to other Americans in all respects: economically, socially, and in terms of education. Just as Catholic immigrants emerged from social isolation to fully participate in American society, so too have the American bishops emerged to become central figures in national politics. My research will fill in the timeline between the historical accounts of Catholics in America and their present situation.

History of the USCCB

In discussing the history of the USCCB, authors have taken several approaches: (1) general discussions of how the USCCB began; (2) discussion of the bishops' involvement in specific areas; and (3) descriptions of the history, origins, structure, and function of the USCCB. Each of these approaches is important in understanding the nature of the bishops' political activity. To show how the bishops' political activity has evolved, it is important to know how they behaved in the past. For what issues did they advocate? Why did they avoid political activity? What was the impetus for their current political involvement?

From my research, it is apparent that the change in perception toward American Catholics was a key factor in the bishops' comfort with political involvement. In *Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994*,⁷ Michael Warner examines how World War I played an important role in changing public opinion about American Catholics, as

7. Michael Warner, *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994* (Washington, D.C., Grand Rapids, and Cambridge: Ethics and Public Policy Center and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995).

well as how the war set the stage for a formative involvement of the bishops in governmental affairs. The bishops had always been aware that native-born Americans were suspicious of the patriotic loyalty of Catholic immigrants. The leaders of the Church were adamant that Catholics would be involved in the war effort. In an effort to show loyalty, the National Catholic War Council was created to support the war. It was later renamed the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which, in turn, became part of what is today known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In his discussion of the origins of the hierarchy, Warner writes of the NCWC's transition from a liaison to the U.S. government during World War I to a vehicle for expressing Catholic social concerns. The Social Action Department of the NCWC was the headquarters for the application of the various papal encyclicals and American episcopal statements. A central theme of Warner's work is that the bishops learned very early that the best way to influence national policy was to make their position known well before any important legislation was voted upon. This observation provides some insight into how the Church operates presently, and also illustrates how the more at ease Catholics felt about their position in the U.S., the more likely the bishops were to take national positions on specific issues.

While Warner's work offers a broad discussion of the origins of the USCCB, Thomas J. Reese, S.J.'s *A Flock of Shepherds*⁸ offers a thorough examination of the creation of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops/United States Catholic

8. Thomas J. Reese, *A Flock of Shepherds* (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1992).

Conference, or what is today known as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Reese's work describes the USCCB's creation, hierarchical structure, committees, voting process, funding, and institutional strengths and weaknesses. Reese's book is indispensable to understanding how the bishops operate and what is involved in the American Church's political engagement with contemporary issues. The level of detail in the discussion of how the bishops make decisions is a critical aspect of his work. It shows that one or several bishops do not control the hierarchy and that there are specific rules for making decisions and voting on pastoral statements.

Leslie Tentler's *Catholics and Contraception: An American History*⁹ discusses the Church's early involvement in the contraception debate. Tentler examines the problems that the Catholic Church faced because of its opposition to birth control. She echoes a theory set forth by Michael Warner: that during the 1920s the bishops were worried about anti-Catholic hostility; because of this fear, they tried to be as low-key as possible in the birth control debate. The bishops tried to convey the idea that opposition to birth control was a hallmark of Christianity, and they enlisted the Catholic laity in the fight against birth control. Their fear of anti-Catholic hostility and their discomfort with the subject left the bishops with few resources. The fact that (1) many religious denominations had changed their position on birth control because of the Great Depression and (2) a significant portion

9. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

of the Catholic laity ignored the Church's teaching on birth control led the bishops to rethink how best to exert their authority over American Catholics.

The available scholarly work regarding the history of the USSCB has been valuable to this dissertation. Yet it is of limited utility because it does not discuss the critical role that abortion has played in the political involvement of the bishops. My research employs the available historical information as a framework for mapping the bishops' current political involvement. I accomplish this aim through a thorough examination of the bishops' writings, which are an important source for examining the influence of the abortion issue on the bishops' accumulation of political power. The USCCB has published a multivolume collection of its letters and statements, *Pastoral Letters of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops*,¹⁰ which is a comprehensive collection of the American Church's statements on issues ranging from racial discrimination to the death penalty. *Pastoral Letters* also shows the evolution of the bishops' political activity. Initially, the bishops sided passively with the U.S. government and refrained from any harsh criticism; however, they would speak on issues that involved social justice and morality. The writings echo the sentiments of Warner and Tentler that the nature of the bishops' political activity ran in tandem with the position of Catholics in America. After the 1960 election, the status of American Catholics had improved to the point where the bishops felt more

10. Hugh J. Nolan, ed., *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*, vol. 3, 1962-1974 (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 1983).

freedom to express their positions on controversial issues like abortion. The bishops' writings and statements are used to show an evolution of political involvement and to compare and contrast the tone of the statements on specific issues.

Political Activity of the Bishops

Much of the literature on the political activity of the bishops focuses on the bishops' tactics and strategies, but has not discussed the significance and impact of abortion on that activity. One of the most prolific authors on the subject of the bishops' political activity is Timothy Byrnes. In *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*,¹¹ Byrnes discusses the American Catholic bishops from the 1790s until the late 1980s. Byrnes studies the bishops' political involvement in numerous issues, including nuclear weapons and abortion. He also studies their involvement in the presidential elections of 1976, 1980, 1984, and 1988. In his examination of presidential elections, Byrnes discusses how the involvement of the bishops in 1976 spurred the creation of the New Right, as well as the involvement of conservative Christians in electoral politics. The New Right was a sect of the Republican Party whose goal was to focus on a specific social issue: abortion. Byrnes' work includes a discussion of the conservative Christian movement that was actually spurred by the bishops. My research reexamines the relationship between conservative Catholics and conservative Christians and updates it with accounts of more recent attempts

11. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*.

at forming alliances between the two groups. As is the case with the historical information about the USCCB, my research aims to fill in the gaps with present-day information.

An interview with Deal Hudson, who worked with George W. Bush's Catholic Outreach team, suggests that attempts to create alliances between conservative Catholics and conservative Christians have continued to struggle. Hudson recounted the failed attempts to form a Protestant-Catholic alliance in the 1990s. He felt that the difference in the structure and function of Protestant and Catholic churches was too great to overcome. However, Michael Cromartie, Vice President of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, noted in a conversation that there seemed to be hope on the part of scholars that the two groups could come together to advocate on behalf of certain moral issues such as abortion. These findings are important because they point back to the 1976 presidential election, which was studied by Timothy Byrnes and Gene Burns.

Gene Burns has suggested that the political involvement of the bishops has been characterized by "non-commitment," or avoidance of issues that would create conflict over church-state relations. His work includes a discussion of the history of Catholics in America and the bishops' relationship with Rome. According to Burns, the disagreement over church-state relations was a key reason for the bishops' avoidance of political involvement. Burns outlines how Rome's hard-line stance on church-state relations was a major reason for the open hostility toward American Catholics. According to Burns, the American bishops historically adopted a balancing act between loyalty to Rome and

creating an American identity for Catholics. This balancing act usually meant that the bishops refrained from involvement in political matters unless it directly affected the Church. In Burns' analysis, the 1960s brought changes in Catholics' economic and social standing, changes within the Catholic Church due to Vatican II, and societal changes, all of which allowed the bishops more freedom to become politically involved.

Both Burns and Byrnes have studied the bishops' involvement in presidential elections; however, the studies end with the 1980s and do not specifically address the importance of the abortion debate. Research for this dissertation includes a study of the presidential elections from 1976-2008, with special attention paid to the role of the abortion issue. This is particularly important because the 2000 and 2004 elections featured prominent roles for Catholics, the bishops, and abortion. Interviews with various scholars have shown the depth of the bishop's involvement, as well as the role that the abortion debate played in recent elections.

Other authors have focused on the relationships between the American Catholic bishops, Catholic voters, and the Republican and Democratic Parties. William B. Prendergast, in *The Catholic Voter in American Politics*,¹² discusses how Catholic voters have moved away from the Democratic Party. Prendergast suggests that Catholics have moved away from the Democratic Party for a variety of reasons, including improved

12. William B. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1999).

economic and social status and changes in political ideology. One particular area of concern that Prendergast mentions is communism. Many Catholic immigrants from Eastern Europe were all too familiar with communism and felt that the Democrats were not tough enough on communist governments. Prendergast's characterization of the Democratic Party as not being in touch with what Catholics want is evident in most of the research that was conducted for this dissertation. In interviews, both Michael Sean Winters and Amy Sullivan echo that sentiment. Both suggest that the Democratic Party is out of touch with religiously motivated voters.

Public Opinion and Public Policy

Other scholarship regarding the bishops' role in the abortion debate includes discussions of public opinion as well as public policy. Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, in *Abortion and American Politics*,¹³ look at abortion through the lens of public policy and public opinion. Their work covers the major Supreme Court cases involving abortion, notably *Roe v. Wade*, *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, and *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*. The authors give a detailed account of the abortion debate beginning with the *Roe* decision and ending in the 1990s after the *Casey* decision. Their work includes public opinion polls taken at the time the decisions were released, as well as public opinion polls that coincided with several

13. Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1993).

presidential administrations. These polls include questions about when it would be acceptable for women to have abortions, and they illustrate how public opinion on abortion ebbs and flows, tending to change with each administration; public support for abortion decreases with more conservative administrations and increases with more liberal administrations.

Craig and O'Brien provide a detailed discussion of several administrations and what each has done regarding abortion, including nominations, appointments, activities of the Justice Department, and legislation. However, like other works, the information is limited to a specific time period and does not include present-day information. My research includes more current public opinion polls and an analysis of more recent presidential administrations.

Public opinion polls have also been conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Zogby, and various news organizations such as *The New York Times*. Other scholars have also studied the various subgroups of the American electorate. John C. Green and his co-authors (James L. Guth, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and Corwin E. Smidt) have organized the American electorate into several categories, including different religious groups and groups based on frequency of church attendance. Their analysis suggests that the more orthodox a person is, the more likely she or he will be to vote for a pro-life candidate. Conversely, the more heterodox a voter is, the more likely he or she is to vote for a pro-choice candidate. In both the 2000 and 2004 elections, George W. Bush was the

overwhelming winner among traditional orthodox voters and among those who attended church at least weekly. Green's work effectively links religious practices with behavior in the voting booth. Moreover, it makes a compelling case for a correlation between the pro-life movement and traditional, church-attending voters of all faiths. Green's breakdown of the American electorate in religious terms is helpful in evaluating the influence of the bishops. In my research, I try to illustrate a correlation between church attendance and voting behavior.

Relationship Between Religion and Politics

One final area of scholarship necessary to understanding the significance of the abortion debate is the relationship between religion and politics. In *The Transformation of American Religion*,¹⁴ Alan Wolfe details the changing religious landscape of the United States. One of his most interesting observations is the changing emphasis on sin. For instance, the practice of confession or the Sacrament of Reconciliation, once a defining characteristic of the Catholic faith, has declined significantly. Aside from the practice of confession, changes have occurred in the perception of sin itself. The Church has tried to move away from measuring sins on a scale ranging from venial or less serious to mortal or most serious and has instead adopted an emphasis on God as loving, compassionate, and forgiving. The unwillingness to admit to sin is part of a larger social movement in which

14. Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003).

any religion that “insists on the stain of human depravity, upholds a commanding and authoritative God as an alternative, and demands of ordinary believers that they look into their hearts in order to correct their sinful ways” will not be able to sustain a large following. Wolfe finds this movement away from sin and judgment troubling for society, “for the ease with which American religious believers adopt nonjudgmental language and a psychological understanding of wrongdoing is detrimental to anyone, religious or not, who believes that individuals should judge their actions against the highest possible ideals of human conduct, however those ideals are established.”¹⁵

The idea that Americans have redefined their religions in terms more fitting to their lifestyles is evident in *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment*.¹⁶ William V. D’Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hoge, and Katherine Meyer examined the changes in Catholic attitudes toward the Church. In 1987, 1993, and 1999, lay Catholics were asked a series of questions about the definition of a “good Catholic.” From 1987 to 1999 the number of Catholics who believed that one could be a “good Catholic” without performing certain actions (such as attending Mass weekly or following the Church’s teachings on birth control) increased.¹⁷

15. Wolfe, 184.

16. William V. D’Antonio, et al., *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press, 2001).

17. William V. D’Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 47.

In their subsequent study, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*, D'Antonio et al. determined that the overall level of commitment to the Church among Catholics has gradually declined. The authors define church commitment as “the degree to which a person entrusts a significant part of his or her beliefs, values, and behavior to the institutional Roman Catholic Church.”¹⁸ Church commitment declined from 27 percent in 1987 to 21 percent in 2005. The authors also show that a high level of commitment to the Church does not necessarily translate to obedience toward the teachings of the Vatican or the American bishops. For instance, 31 percent of those most highly committed said that one could be a good Catholic while not obeying the Church’s teaching on abortion, and 64 percent said the same about birth control.¹⁹

What is important about these findings is that moral ambivalence among American Catholics was a key reason that the American bishops felt the need to become involved in the abortion debate. Catholics had begun to accept “mainstream” ideas about birth control and abortion. These findings also highlight the cleavages that have developed over the past several decades between those who attend church frequently and those who do not. Those who attend church more frequently are more likely to adhere to Church teachings on issues such as abortion.

18. Ibid.

19. D'Antonio et al., 47.

In *Souled Out*, *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne explores the need to create a moral or religious link between social and political responsibility. He writes of how Christian conservatives may view the importance of morality in the same light that liberals may view the issue of social justice. This idea is important because it sheds some light on the disagreements that Republicans and Democrats have over the issue of abortion. For most Republicans, abortion is a critical moral issue that demands attention. Yet for many Democrats, poverty or world peace may be more important.

What I have tried to accomplish in my research is an analysis of what each party feels are its moral obligations. Based on various interviews, it is evident that Republicans and Democrats define morality in different terms. Most importantly, I wanted to determine how much of a role abortion has played in the integration of religion and politics. I approach this question by analyzing the bishops' statements and actions on a variety of issues. The examination involves an inquiry into why issues such as capital punishment have not motivated the bishops to the degree that abortion has.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 – History of the USCCB

The economic, social, and cultural events of the 1960s brought many changes to the Catholic community, including levels of Catholic political involvement. Nineteenth-century Catholics were largely isolated from U.S. society, and the bishops were their representatives to the local government. Yet by the 1960s, Catholics were more

prosperous and well-educated, and they no longer relied on the bishops for political leadership. However, government policy on education, housing, abortion, and other issues gave the bishops an opportunity to become politically active at the policy level. In part, this reflected diminishing anti-Catholic discrimination, as Americans no longer feared the Church's political participation. During the 1970s and 1980s, the bishops became part of a political movement to mobilize new coalitions and to emphasize issues that cut across party lines. Candidates and strategists actively sought the participation of the bishops in the political process, and they recruited them to take part in the redefinition of the national political agenda.²⁰ The recruitment and involvement of the bishops signaled a movement away from their traditional avoidance of political issues.

One reason for the bishops' willingness to take a political stand was a change in the Church's own position on church-state relations. Prior to Vatican II, the Church viewed political theories that advanced religious toleration and pluralism with some suspicion.²¹ The American bishops had experienced problems integrating Catholics into American society—problems that were not made easier by the Vatican. Historically, the American bishops pursued a path of greater distance between church and state than did their European counterparts, often to the consternation of the Vatican. The bishops, meanwhile,

20. Timothy A. Byrnes, "The Politics of the American Catholic Hierarchy," *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (Autumn 1993): 497-500.

21. Gene Burns, "Commitments and Non-Commitments: The Social Radicalism of U.S. Catholic Bishops," 704.

felt that the Vatican did not understand the difficulties involved in leading a minority religion of poor immigrants in a non-Catholic country.

In 1899, the tenuous relationship was strained even further when Pope Leo XIII sent a letter entitled *Testem Benevolentiae* to Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore, regarding the issue of so-called “Americanism.” The main impetus for the letter was a French translation of *Life of Father Hecker*. The controversy stemmed from the book’s thesis on leading a Christian life. The Vatican took issue with the book’s suggestion that the Church should change its philosophy to respond to the times. Leo XIII responded by quoting from the *Constitutio de Fide Catholica*:

For the doctrine of faith which God has revealed has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention to be perfected by human ingenuity, but has been delivered as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared. Hence that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother, the Church, has once declared, nor is that meaning ever to be departed from under the pretense or pretext of a deeper comprehension of them.²²

The translation caused greater distance between the Church in Europe and the Church in America because the “Americanists” attempted to defend the separation between church and state. The scathing letter from Leo XIII only added to the tension between the two camps. While some dispute the degree of harm it caused to the relationship, others believe

22. *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, encyclical of Pope Leo XIII promulgated on January 22, 1899, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/113teste.htm> (accessed November 2, 2009).

that it largely killed American Catholic intellectualism for the first half of the twentieth century.

As a result of the many problems facing the American bishops, and in order to reconcile their loyalty to Rome with the hostility toward Catholics in the United States, the American Catholic bishops adopted a position of non-engagement, thus avoiding all issues that would create conflict over church-state relations.

Despite the bishops' avoidance of controversial issues, they still danced a fine line between loyalty to Rome and assimilation in America. The bishops tried to remain loyal to the principles of Roman Catholic doctrine, which caused them to become further isolated within American society. Perhaps the most important outcome of "faithful isolation" was the American Church's effort to create its own Catholic institutions to parallel those of the American public square. Catholic schools, Catholic hospitals, Catholic social services, and Catholic universities all emerged with the direct encouragement of the bishops to create faithful Catholic environs separate from the American state and public square. Yet the need for such separation ended in the 1960s, when American Catholics were able to enjoy the economic prosperity that occurred in the United States after World War II. The many Catholics who fought in World War II were afforded an education through the GI Bill of Rights, allowing them to leave the city and raise a family in the suburbs. Also, the openly

hostile attitude toward Catholics had lessened considerably, and by the 1960s Catholics had essentially achieved socioeconomic parity with Protestants.²³

Vatican II brought about changes that allowed the American bishops to participate more broadly in the political process. One such change was the Vatican's call for the Church to be a "progressive force for social change."²⁴ The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* outlined this plan and placed a special emphasis on social issues, particularly those developed by Popes Leo XIII, Pius XI, and John XXIII. *Gaudium* did not outline any specific plans on how to accomplish these goals, but it did enunciate a desire to see that social reforms were enacted.

The bishops' political leverage changed gradually after Vatican II. In the 1970s and 1980s, they had much more power within the Church hierarchy than within U.S. society. For that reason, the American bishops tended to align themselves with Rome. When the bishops commented on an issue, they tended to draw upon church traditions rather than from American society.²⁵

By the 1970s, the American bishops had moved beyond their longstanding worries about the disenfranchisement of Catholics in American life. Indeed, the worry was now over too much assimilation. The bishops were increasingly concerned about perceived moral ambivalence among American Catholics. Outrage over the 1973 *Roe* decision

23. Prendergast, "The Catholic Voter," 117.

24. Burns, "Commitments," 718.

25. Ibid., 719.

sparked a cascade of criticism from the bishops. While the bishops released numerous statements on issues such as economic justice, warfare, and third-world development, their most pointed and insistent statements were reserved for the fight against abortion. One way in which the bishops planned to overturn legalized abortion was by establishing a permanent organization in Washington, D.C. This organization, now called the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, is an assembly of the hierarchy of the U.S. and the U.S. Virgin Islands that jointly exercises certain pastoral functions on behalf of American Catholics. It comprises bishops and a staff of 350 laypeople, priests, deacons, and religious in Washington, D.C. Chapter 1 will discuss the origins and early political activities of the USCCB.

Chapter 2 – USCCB: 1973 to 2004

Chapter 2 discusses the bishops' movement into the abortion debate, beginning with the adoption of the *Pastoral Plan*. In November 1975, the bishops approved the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life*. It was subsequently updated and reapproved in 1985 and 2001. The *Pastoral Plan* is a three-pronged program in defense of human life, focusing on education, pastoral care, and public policy. The *Pastoral Plan* outlines a strategy for dealing with various pro-life issues such as euthanasia and capital punishment, but it states that abortion is the most important problem facing American society:

To focus on the evil of deliberate killing in abortion and euthanasia is not to ignore the many other urgent conditions that demean human dignity and threaten human rights. Opposing abortion and euthanasia "does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. 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" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23). We pray that Catholics will be advocates for the weak and the marginalized in all these areas. "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" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23).²⁶

The *Pastoral Plan* focuses on three specific areas: (1) an educational/public information effort to inform, clarify, and deepen understanding of the basic issues; (2) a pastoral effort addressed to the specific needs of women with problems related to pregnancy and to those who have had or have taken part in abortions; and (3) a public policy effort directed toward the legislative, judicial, and administrative areas so as to insure effective legal protection for the right to life.

The bishops' hope was to involve Church-sponsored organizations on the national, regional, diocesan, and parochial level. Their strategy contained several long- and short-term goals: passage of a constitutional amendment to protect unborn children's right to life; federal and state laws and administrative policies to restrict the practice of abortion; continual challenging of the scope, and ultimate reversal, of the decisions of the United States Supreme Court; support for federal and state legislatures that provide morally

26. The *Pastoral Plan* is reproduced on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops under the Committee for Pro-Life Activities, <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoralplan.shtml>.

acceptable alternatives to abortion; support for federal and state legislation that promotes effective palliative care for those who are chronically ill or dying; support for efforts to prevent legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide by legislation or referendum; and support for efforts to end the death penalty. The American Catholic bishops planned to accomplish these goals through lobbying, testifying before Congress, and releasing statements.²⁷

Chapter 2 discusses the role of public opinion in the abortion debate. One reason that abortion is such an important political issue is that it is easy to form an opinion without a great deal of knowledge. In 1980, seven years after abortion was legalized in *Roe v. Wade*, many people believed that abortion was only legal in the cases of rape, incest, or if the mother's life was endangered. Many people did not know the position of the Democratic Party regarding abortion, nor did they know either candidate's position in the 1980 presidential election. Surprisingly, the National Election Study 2000 found that one in five people said that abortion was an extremely important issue. Generally, Americans are willing to allow an abortion for a teenager in the first trimester, and they make a distinction between medical and surgical abortions. There is a small group of Americans that favor abortion with virtually no restrictions, a smaller group that opposes

27. USCCB website: <http://www.usccb.org/whoweare.shtml>.

abortion for almost all reasons, and a large majority that would allow abortions for medical reasons. Americans are still divided regarding abortions for social or economic reasons.²⁸

Support for and opposition to abortion ebbs and flows. In 1973, after the *Roe* decision, support for abortion increased. It decreased in the 1980s and increased again in 1989 after the *Webster* decision allowed for greater state regulation of abortion; by the 1990s support had again declined. In 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that support for abortion had slipped and that a majority of Americans now call themselves pro-life. The results of the survey showed that 41 percent of Americans now favor making it more difficult for women to get an abortion.

Chapters 3 and 4: The Democratic Party and the Catholic Church, and The Republican Party and the Catholic Church

Chapters 3 and 4 will discuss the relationship between the Catholic Church and the Democratic and Republican Parties. Historically, Catholics as a group leaned toward the Democratic Party. The majority of immigrant Catholics' values were reflected in the reform-minded agenda of the Democratic Party. Catholics desired the elimination of poverty and unemployment and sought the improvement of urban society. It was often Catholic immigrants who were behind political machines like Tammany Hall. Such machines devised a patronage system of granting jobs and food to the poor, and eventually

28. Ted Jelen and Clyde Wilcox, "Causes and Consequences of Public Attitudes toward Abortion: A Review and Research Agenda," *Political Research Quarterly* (2003): 489-491.

became the cornerstone of the Democratic Party. Immigrant Catholics felt comfortable with the class and ethnic occupational connections of the Democratic Party.²⁹

Additionally, the American Catholic Church's support of labor unions created another area of agreement for working-class Catholics and the Democratic Party.

The values and ideals of the Democrats closely resembled the mutual aid societies that were created in Europe. When the peasant economy failed, peasants formed benevolent societies that provided economic assistance.³⁰ Following this model, German immigrants formed the Central Verein, which promoted social reform, provided English-language schools, and created employment agencies and welfare programs. In the eyes of Catholic immigrants, the Democratic Party mirrored these groups. Immigrants also envisioned a positive role for large institutions (like the state) in directly promoting the public welfare and advancing the aspirations of the working class.

Catholics today are as likely to vote Democratic as they are to vote Republican. White Catholics have become more educated, their economic status has improved, and they have long since migrated to the suburbs. Anti-Catholic prejudice has all but disappeared. The demographics of American Catholics have changed, and so have their voting behaviors. As Catholics became more fully assimilated, or "Americanized," their voting reflected the patterns of Americans in general. Catholic voting patterns now follow

29. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America*, 235.

30. Ibid.

those of American society as a whole. Today, economic, social, and education levels are far better predictors of Catholic voting patterns than denominational identity.

Yet upward social mobility alone did not create the shift in Catholic voting patterns. Several major issues may have influenced some Catholics to vote for Republican candidates. After the Second World War, for example, the specter of international communism led many Catholics to endorse GOP foreign policy initiatives that placed significant emphasis on anti-communism. Catholics began a pattern of voting based on specific issues or specific individuals.³¹

Pollsters have devised ways to categorize and identify various groups among Catholic voters. In 2004, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life placed Catholics into three categories: traditionalists, modernists, and centrists. Traditionalists are those with orthodox theological beliefs and who attend church regularly. Modernists have the least orthodox beliefs and have very little involvement in the Church. Centrists lie somewhere between traditionalists and modernists. Traditionalist Catholic voters are also more likely to indicate that “moral issues” matter most to them in the voting booth. According to the survey, there was a deep religious divide among these three groups in the 2004 election.

Catholics closely mirror the American electorate; however, they are often forced to prioritize their electoral choices in the voting booth. Rarely does a candidate’s position correspond completely with Catholic moral or social teachings. Sometimes the candidates

31. Ibid., 235.

running for office are not clear-cut Catholic choices. Some may be pro-life yet have little policy interest in poverty. Some may be pro-choice, and many Catholic voters may not agree with the bishops' decision to deny them communion. These different groups will be discussed further in chapters 3 and 4.

Bishops and Presidential Elections

In the 1972 election, Richard Nixon increased his margin of Catholic voters by 33 percent from the 1968 election. His election was an indication of many changes. It signaled the loss of a major electoral group for the Democratic Party and the end of the New Deal coalition. These changes, coupled with the legalization of abortion, brought the American bishops to the center of the political stage.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 brought the issue of religious values to the center of American politics. Reagan often used religious rhetoric in his speeches and stated that "faith and religion play a central role in the political life of the nation and... always have."³² Reagan's belief in the integration of faith and public policy brought the American bishops a new dilemma: where did the integration of religious morality and public policy begin? In answering this question, particularly with regard to abortion, the bishops found themselves becoming prominent on the political map, allowing them to support platform elements of both parties.

32. Byrnes, "The Politics of the American Catholic Hierarchy," 507.

In 1984, the bishops had to decide what their policy agenda would be in light of the religious debates during the presidential campaign. Some, like Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago, did not want the Catholic Church to be associated only with abortion. Bernardin stated in 1983 that the “pro-life position of the church must be developed in terms of a comprehensive and consistent ethic of life... the viability of the [pro-life] principle depends upon the consistency of its application.”³³ Bernardin attempted to prevent the bishops from being associated only with abortion and the Republican Party by advancing his consistent-ethic-of-life theory. Despite the logic behind Bernardin’s plan, some members of the NCCB did not agree with it and believed that ending legalized abortion was the higher priority. Archbishop John O’Connor of New York publicly stated that he could not understand how a Catholic could vote for a candidate who supported legal abortion. The debate among the bishops helped some Democratic candidates who were courting Catholic voters. Candidates such as Mario Cuomo and Geraldine Ferraro argued that abortion was not the only important moral issue for Catholic voters to consider. Although the Democratic Party and the bishops differed on abortion policy, there were other pro-life issues on which they both agreed.

In the 2004 election, the abortion debate came to a head when John Kerry, a pro-choice Catholic, became the Democratic nominee for president. The public announcements by several prominent bishops that they would deny communion to Kerry

33. Byrnes, “Politics,” 507.

sparked an intense debate about the place of abortion in the hierarchy's agenda and abortion's place in American politics.

The 2008 presidential election presented the bishops with the problem of Catholic organizations supporting a pro-choice presidential candidate. Several organizations, such as Catholics United, urged Catholics to vote for Barack Obama because of his support for social justice issues. The bishops were undaunted by this and reminded Catholics of their duty to vote for the pro-life candidate.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the bishops' decision to focus primarily on abortion, its impact on the political process, and the future role of the bishops. It will begin with a summary of the bishops' political involvement from the early nineteenth century to the 2008 presidential election. The topics discussed include the possible ways in which the bishops will work with the Obama administration in their continuing efforts to end legalized abortion.

Chapter 1 – The History of the USCCB

The American Catholic bishops have not always been as involved politically as they are today. Hostility from native-born Americans and suspicion that Catholics were too loyal to Rome initially made the American Catholic bishops cautious about stepping beyond local reach. Additionally, in the early periods of Catholic immigration, the Catholic Church in America was less hierarchical than it is today. Lacking unity and organization, any political involvement of the Church was restricted to the local level and to issues that directly impacted Catholics.

The massive migration of Catholic immigrants to the United States presented the bishops with the challenge of easing immigrant transition to America and appealing Roman doctrine. The majority of Catholics arriving in the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were poor and uneducated, and they faced a hostile reception from Protestants due to the traditions' historically contentious relationship. Immigrant Catholics often clung to their national identities, resulting in a national patchwork of ethnic Catholic parishes and organizations. The American bishops, worried about gaining a Catholic foothold in America and determined to avoid confrontation with the country's existing cultural sensitivities, steered clear of active political engagement. They made a conscious decision to stay out of politics unless it involved the direct interests of the Church. They allowed each local bishop to conduct their affairs according to what was best for the diocese. As Catholics became more accepted and established in American society, the American bishops gradually branched out into broader political involvement.

Catholics arrived in the United States in three waves: the 1840s and 1850s, the early 1900s, and a third wave from the 1990s to the present. The third wave includes Catholic immigrants from Latin America, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Central Africa. For the purposes of this dissertation, only the first two waves will be discussed. The Potato Famine in Ireland and the economic crisis in central Europe brought a large number of Irish and German Catholic immigrants to America. In the years between the end of the nineteenth century and World War I, another influx of immigrants arrived from Italy, Poland, France, Canada, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Croatia.¹

The majority of Catholics settled in the northeast quadrant of the United States, primarily in urban areas. They often settled in ethnic enclaves or ethnic parishes, which fueled nativist fears among Americans, especially Protestants. Differences among ethnic groups constituted a key challenge for the American Catholic bishops. While these ethnic groups shared a common heritage of the Roman Catholic faith, they all possessed different religious and cultural traditions. Each group also harbored resentments related to their various national and ethnic identities that they had brought with them to the New World.

When most of the Irish Catholics arrived in the U.S., various Protestant denominations defined America's religious and politico-religious cultures. In New England, for example, many Americans viewed the arrival of Catholics (Irish in particular) as a threat to Anglo-Saxon civilization and heritage. The Roman Catholic faith aroused

1. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter*, 3-4.

concern, in part because it seemed unthinkable to most Americans that a religion would vest so much authoritarian power in the pope and the priestly hierarchy. Many Americans questioned the patriotic allegiance of Catholics and doubted whether their loyalty to Rome and to their homelands could allow them to truly integrate as Americans. In order to protect their Catholicism and achieve freedom, Catholic immigrants often made their parish the center of their lives, frequently straining their limited resources in the 1850s and 1860s to build chapels, rectories, schools, and convents in their neighborhoods.²

Despite their differences, all ethnic groups shared a desire to build parishes reflecting their national heritage. Immigrant Catholics were fearful that the loss of language and culture would result in a loss of faith. For these reasons, the different ethnic groups were adamant that they each have their own nationality parish, complete with a priest who spoke their native language. During the 1870s, the leadership of the Catholic Church in the U.S. was predominately in the hands of Irish- and German-born bishops; this was especially true in the cities of the East and the Midwest. Groups such as the Poles negotiated with the bishops to establish nationality parishes that were led by priests from their homeland. The establishment of nationality parishes followed a consistent pattern. As immigrants began to settle within the boundaries of a territorial parish, the bishop assigned a foreign priest as an assistant pastor to minister to them. When the membership reached a certain number, the immigrants would be given part-time lease of the parish

2. Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter*, 21-22.

chapel. In time, the immigrants would ask for their own nationality parish. In the spirit of compromise, some bishops tried to create mixed-nationality parishes, such as St. Alphonsus in New York, which joined English and German immigrants. Such “mixed” parishes were rarely successful.³

The nationality parish was crucial to Catholic success in the New World, as it was the starting point for adjustment to American society. Parish life filled the void of identity and community experienced by many immigrants. With the nationality parish and parochial schools at the center of the community, the immigrants survived the emotional stress of migration. The various patterns of ethnic religious associations were a reflection of the small-town and village life that was so familiar to many nineteenth-century immigrants. The parish was the social and emotional center of the neighborhood. The commitment to the establishment of the nationality parishes displayed the immigrants’ devotion to religious values. The differences in liturgy, sacramentalism, parish governance, and practice of individual piety separating ethnic Catholics in the Old World became even more distinct in America because of the close proximity of one ethnic parish to another. The commitment to the parish church was the major social and cultural focus of ethnic parish dwellers’ lives, playing a key role in their adjustment to urban society in the U.S. Nationality parishes allowed immigrants to create a familiar world of traditional holidays, ceremonies, and saints in their churches. The nationality parish was also the

3. James S. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987), 102-105.

single most important institution in deflecting the conversion campaigns of evangelical Protestants and containing the centrifugal forces of nationalism and language. This phenomenon allowed the Church to maintain its Catholic identity in the U.S.⁴

The dominance of Protestant culture and discrimination against Catholics were the two main obstacles to acculturation and the growth of the American Catholic Church. Fear of Protestant retribution kept the Catholic Church in America from establishing its Old World institutional structure. Priests serving in America were so worried about anti-Catholic hostility that they opposed the appointment of a bishop for America, especially a French bishop. Father John Carroll, an American-born priest from the prominent Carroll family of Maryland, was named Superior of the Mission to the United States in 1784; however, he communicated to the Vatican that American priests should be allowed to elect their own bishops to lessen Protestant suspicion about “papal interference in America.”⁵

Open hostility toward American Catholic immigrants shifted the central focus of the American Catholic bishops from assimilation to helping Catholics make the transition to America without a loss of their Catholic identity. Because of this shift in focus, the American bishops’ involvement in the American political system developed differently from that of their European counterparts. The American bishops refrained from criticizing

4. Ibid., 113.

5. Ibid., 6.

the U.S. government in order to avoid appearing unpatriotic, yet their refusal to become politically involved caused significant tension with Rome, which had vastly different views regarding church-state relations. Roman doctrine stated that the Catholic Church should receive special state privileges and other religions should be suppressed, which in many ways was a major source of anti-Catholic hostility in the United States.⁶

Church-State Relations

Immortale Dei, an 1885 encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, outlined the basic tenets of Roman church-state relations. Leo XIII acknowledged that there are two powers, the church and the state, each with its own purpose and end. For the church, the “proper” end is the eternal end of man: his salvation. The “proper” end of the state is the temporal end of man, securing the common good and supporting political, economic, and cultural welfare.⁷ *Immortale Dei* states:

...God has divided the governance of the human race between two powers, the ecclesiastical and the civil. One of them is set in charge of divine things, the other of human things. Each of them is supreme in its own order; both of them are confined within certain limits, set by their respective nature and purpose. Hence, there is a certain defined area in which each may act by native right.⁸

While *Immortale Dei* acknowledges that both have their jurisdiction, it also states that the vocation of the Church supersedes the state because the end of the Church is of a higher order than that of the state; state authority is deemed “primatial.” While the state is

6. Burns, “Commitments,” 704.

7. Thomas T. Love, “The Two Principles of Roman Catholic Church-State Relations,” *Ethics* 76 (October 1965): 57.

8. *Ibid.*, 57.

subordinate to the Church, it does have a proper role in maintaining the common good of man. A harmonious and orderly relationship between the Church and the state is necessary because the two powers rule the same man. Because humankind is legitimately ruled by both, conflict between church and state must be avoided, lest such conflict cause trouble for the individual's conscience. Yet, because divine law is of a higher order, its law is ultimately supreme.⁹

The argument that the Church had supreme rule over the state did not help immigrant Catholics in America. The Roman doctrine on church-state relations only helped to reinforce Protestant fears of papal interference in American life, causing problems for the bishops. They trod a fine line between transitioning Catholics into American society and remaining loyal to Rome. Rome had viewed the American Catholic Church as a land of backwater theology and did not approve of how the bishops conducted themselves. In order to appease both sides and to achieve their ultimate goal of full Catholic acceptance in the United States, the American bishops adopted a policy of non-commitment, or avoidance of controversial issues.¹⁰

The main aspect of the bishops' political involvement at this time was as the leaders of an embattled minority. For them, their role was simple: they offered leadership, protection, and help to promote Catholic advancement in American culture and society.

9. Ibid., 57-58.

10. Burns, "Commitments," 704.

The bishops did have some involvement in the political process; however, this involvement remained at the local level. The actions of the bishops were also reserved for issues that affected the interests of the Church, namely education, public morality, and the social and welfare needs of their own flocks. The local nature of the bishops' political role allowed them to develop strong relationships with mayors, party bosses, and political leaders. The bishops also served as apologists for Catholics regarding Catholic doctrine and American political principles. Mainly, the American bishops expressed the belief that good Catholics could be good Americans; they defended the separation of church and state, emphasized their political independence from Rome, and assured Americans of the patriotic loyalties of Catholics.¹¹

John Carroll, bishop of Baltimore and the first bishop in the United States, was an exemplar for early ecclesial roles. He was passionate in his belief that a person could be a good Catholic as well as a good American. Carroll set many precedents for the American hierarchy with his political involvement. His approach was two-pronged: he asserted that the hierarchy would not involve itself in the partisan political struggles of the day and maintained an unwavering devotion to American war aims. Carroll's avoidance of partisan political struggles was tempered by his determination that the hierarchy would become involved with politics only in order to defend the interests of the Church. Yet he was

11. Timothy Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11-12.

unwavering in his patriotic devotion to the United States. During the War of 1812, Carroll put aside his personal displeasure with the policies that led to the war, but once hostilities began, he pledged his wholehearted support. Carroll believed that the best way to show how loyal American Catholics were was to display “enthusiastic patriotism among the hierarchy at time of war.”¹²

Carroll’s death in 1815 resulted in a loss of unity for the Catholic Church’s hierarchy. After his death, the Church was divided into five dioceses, a move that led to a long period of local episcopal authority and local political activity for the American bishops, harming the image of the Catholic Church among Americans. John England, bishop of Charleston, South Carolina, became the “first apologist of the Catholic faith.”¹³ Bishop England became the voice of the hierarchy, authoring several statements released from their meetings. His *Pastoral Letter of 1837* addressed the “misrepresentation and persecution” of the Catholic Church. Stating that Catholics did not suffer from loyalties split between the Church and the state, England said:

We owe no religious allegiance to any state in this Union, nor to its central government. No one of them claims any supremacy or any dominion over us in our spiritual or ecclesiastical concerns...Nor do we acknowledge any civil or political supremacy or power over us in any foreign potentate, though that potentate might be the chief pastor of our church.¹⁴

12. Ibid., 13.

13. Ibid., 14.

14. Ibid., 15.

While England was the chief author of these defensive proclamations, the bishops led by England became a strong local political presence. As stated previously, the bishops were not active in national politics but instead focused on local issues, some more actively than others. For the most part, they limited their activity to “Catholic” issues. In 1841, Bishop John Hughes of New York entered a Catholic ticket in the New York State legislature elections. He urged Catholics to vote for his ticket over the Democratic and Whig tickets. The major issue of the election was the education of Catholic children. Hughes objected to the daily reading of the Protestant King James Version of the Bible in public schools and asked for state funding of Catholic schools in order to educate Catholic children according to their own traditions. Hughes was defeated, as was his attempt to halt the reading of the King James Bible, but he did convey that the Church would respond at the local level if it felt that the interests of the Catholic Church needed to be defended.¹⁵

The local authority of the bishops was evident in the response to nativist riots in Philadelphia and New York. Because these incidents directly involved Catholics, some bishops did not see a problem with involving themselves in the situation. In both cities, anti-Catholic groups burned or threatened to burn Catholic churches and convents. Bishop Francis Patrick Kenvil of Philadelphia responded by leaving the city and placing it under the care of the municipal authorities. Bishop John Hughes of New York responded to the threat of riots by warning city hall officials that the Catholics of New York would retaliate

15. Ibid., 16.

and burn the city if even one Catholic building was harmed. This pattern was noted by John Tracy Ellis, who stated that “bishops of this period became politically involved and defended their dioceses ‘according to their own lights and temperaments.’”¹⁶

As the country moved toward the Civil War, the American bishops became more concerned with establishing the loyalty of Catholics. The bishops remained silent on the issue of slavery; however, once the war began, they instructed Catholics about their duties as loyal patriots. One bishop stated, “There is but one rule for a Catholic, wherever he is...to do his duty there as a citizen.”¹⁷ The bishops’ tactics during the Civil War illustrated how the hierarchy had devolved power to the local level and how the bishops had devised a two-pronged approach to church-state relations. They combined defense of the Church’s interest with strong support of American principles of democracy and military efforts.¹⁸

Relations with the Vatican

Table 1.1 shows the enormous growth of the Catholic population between 1820 and 1920. The majority of these new immigrants settled in large urban areas. The large population of urban Catholics was both a plus and a minus for the American bishops. Urban Catholics became an important constituency, and Irish Catholics in particular became increasingly important by taking control of political machines. The importance of

16. Ibid., 16.

17. Ibid., 17.

18. Ibid.

Catholics as a political constituency was reflected by the significant role of the local bishops as a political force. However, the mix of urban Catholics was so expansive and ethnically diverse that the bishops encountered problems retaining authority. They also had to develop new strategies for protecting the mostly working class Catholics by building episcopal support for organized labor.

Table 1.1 Growth of the Catholic Population

Year	Number of Catholics	% of U.S. Population
1860	3,103,000	9.8
1880	6,259,000	12.5
1890	8,909,000	14.1
1900	23,041,000	15.8
1910	16,363,000	17.7
1920	20,000,000	18.8

Source: William Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith*.

The task of gaining support was not an easy one, as evidenced by the Vatican proposal to condemn the Canadian Knights of Labor. Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore helped to avert this crisis by emphasizing the importance of not appearing un-American. Gibbons wrote a “memorial” to the Vatican opposing the condemnation and warned that “to lose the heart of the people would be a misfortune for which the friendship of the few rich and powerful would be no compensation.”¹⁹ Gibbons was successful in securing the friendship of the labor movement and the continued loyalty of working-class Catholic immigrants. Gibbons’ battle with the Vatican regarding organized labor signaled

19. Ibid., 18.

a deep and long-lasting division among the American bishops regarding how best to defend the interests of American Catholics.²⁰

The large number of Catholic immigrants sparked violent responses from some nativist groups. For example, the American Protection Association (APA) was an anti-Catholic organization founded in 1887 that publicly denounced the pope and the Catholic Church. Its constitution stated explicitly that no subject or supporter of ecclesiastical power should hold any form of government office.²¹ Two factions of the hierarchy had differing opinions on how to deal with such discrimination. One side, which was represented by bishops such as James Gibbons, was known as the Americanist, accomodationist, and transformationist. This group believed in giving a Catholic direction to the contemporary way of life by accommodating Catholicism to the New World while still preserving the main principles of the faith. The second faction, led by Archbishop of New York Michael Corrigan, was known as anti-Americanist, traditionalist, intransigent, and refractaire. This group accepted the material achievements of the modern age but believed that the spirit behind them was hostile to faith and religious authority. They felt that the Church could not accommodate itself to modernism, especially American modernism, without losing its integrity.²² And the differences complicated efforts to develop a plan for proper pastoral approaches to immigrants, labor unions, and social

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid., 19.

22. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 56.

justice; the establishment of a Catholic university; the relationship between parochial and public schools; the presence of a Roman apostolic delegate; cooperation with and participation in interdenominational activities; religious liberty and church-state relations; and the relationship between religion and the new sciences.²³

The two factions clashed over how best to deal with the problems facing immigrant Catholics. The American faction believed that the Catholic Church needed to become more American in order for it to succeed. The traditionalist faction worried about a perceived loss of Catholic culture and in response tried to develop a closer relationship with the Vatican. Both sides lobbied the Vatican to side with them, resulting in greater Vatican involvement in the American Catholic Church and the appointment of an apostolic delegate from the pope to the United States.

The disagreements between the two factions were heightened by a papal encyclical released by Pope Leo XIII on January 22, 1899 and often referred to as the “letter against Americanism.” It was addressed specifically to Cardinal James Gibbons, Archbishop of Baltimore and one of the leading Americanists. The Americanist faction felt that the Vatican did not understand the unique situation American bishops faced in leading a minority religion of poor immigrants. The Vatican, perhaps accustomed to the majority status that the Catholic Church enjoyed in Europe, felt that the American Church should be more forceful in promoting Catholic identity and in advocating public policies that

23. Ibid., 55.

reflected Catholic concerns. The main impetus for the papal letter was a French translation of *Life of Father Hecker*. Isaac Thomas Hecker, a Roman Catholic priest, was the founder of the Paulist Fathers. The controversy stemmed from the book's views on leading a Christian life. The translator of the book expressed the opinion that the Church should change its philosophy to accommodate changing times. Additionally, the Vatican did not appreciate Father Hecker's views on the Holy Spirit. Hecker believed that spirituality was centered largely on cultivating the actions of the Holy Spirit within one's soul and being attuned to how the Holy Spirit was prompting movements in one's life. Pope Leo XIII questioned Father Hecker's view of the Holy Spirit and feared that it would jeopardize the role of the Church as the guarantor of the Holy Spirit. Pope Leo XIII responded by stating:

The underlying principle of these new opinions is that, in order to more easily attract those who differ from her, the Church should shape her teachings more in accord with the spirit of the age and relax some of her ancient severity and make some concessions to new opinions. Many think that these concessions should be made not only in regard to ways of living, but even in regard to doctrines which belong to the deposit of the faith. They contend that it would be opportune, in order to gain those who differ from us, to omit certain points of her teaching which are of lesser importance, and to tone down the meaning which the Church has always attached to them. It does not need many words, beloved son, to prove the falsity of these ideas if the nature and origin of the doctrine which the Church proposes are recalled to mind. The Vatican Council says concerning this point: "For the doctrine of faith which God has revealed has not been proposed, like a philosophical invention to be perfected by human ingenuity, but has been delivered as a divine deposit to the Spouse of Christ to be faithfully kept and infallibly declared. Hence that meaning of the sacred dogmas is perpetually to be retained which our Holy Mother, the Church, has once declared, nor is that meaning ever to

be departed from under the pretense or pretext of a deeper comprehension of them."
- *Constitutio de Fide Catholica*, Chapter iv.²⁴

Pope Leo XIII expressed his fear that the Americanists would alter the Vatican's position, which stressed the idea of tradition as a "deposit" that was to be safeguarded by the magisterium. He worried that the Americanists would pass over or soften certain doctrines so that they might not have the same meaning.²⁵

The American response to the letter consisted of emphatic denials by Gibbons, Ireland, and their followers that any American held these condemned positions. The disagreements between the Americanists and the Vatican caused deep rifts that lasted for years. Despite the efforts of the Vatican, Church issues, particularly education, remained local matters settled by individual bishops on the state and local levels. The disagreement, however, did not result in a rebellion on the part of the American Church. The American Church did not openly disagree with Rome and avoided statements that might bring a strong reaction from the Vatican. At their core, the American Church's disagreements with Rome centered on church-state relations and religious tolerance. They did not call into doubt either papal authority or the hierarchical structure of the Church.

24. *Testem Benevolentiae Nostrae*, Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, January 22, 1899, <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Leo13/13testem.htm>.

25. Gerald P. Fogarty, "Reflections on the Centennial of 'Testem Benevolentiae,'" *U.S. Catholic Historian* 17 (Winter 1999): 7.

Origins of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

World War I forced the American bishops to put aside some of their differences in order to show the patriotism of American Catholics. The American bishops had their hands full convincing Americans that Catholics would support the war effort. The archbishops met and proclaimed their support of World War I, stating, “Our peoples, now as ever, will rise as one man to serve the nations. Our priests and consecrated women will once again, as in every former trial of our country, win by their bravery, their heroism and their service to the new administration and new approval.”

The leaders of the American Catholic Church were keenly aware of the importance of Catholic involvement during World War I. Because many Americans questioned the patriotism of Catholic immigrants, World War I offered a chance to alleviate those fears. German Catholics had a more ambivalent attitude toward faith and identity. Because of their geographic isolation in Germany, most German Catholics desired to be left alone.²⁶ The Irish carried with them a deep resentment toward the English and sometimes felt that America offered an atmosphere no different from the oppression they suffered at the hands of the British in Ireland.²⁷ Many Americans questioned the allegiance of the Irish and wondered how they could be so loyal to both Rome and Ireland. When the United States declared war against Germany in 1917, Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore assured President

26. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America*, 53.

27. *Ibid.*, 20.

Woodrow Wilson that Catholic resources would be mobilized in support of the war effort. Gibbons and the other bishops formed the National Catholic War Council (NCWC), based in Washington, D.C., which coordinated Church-sponsored service and relief activities.²⁸

The NCWC served as a liaison to the federal government from the American Church. The success of the NCWC stemmed from a mutually beneficial arrangement: the government wanted the bishops to encourage their members to join the war effort, and the bishops wanted to support the war so as to not appear unpatriotic. The NCWC comprised an administrative committee of seven bishops who were allowed to act for the body of the American bishops between annual meetings. The committee of bishops dealt with education, laws and legislation, social action, lay organizations, and the press. The NCWC issued pamphlets on social and educational issues, attended congressional hearings, and formed associations with other national and international organizations.²⁹

Cardinal Gibbons was pleased with the success of the NCWC and wanted to ensure that it continued after the war. Gibbons wanted to continue the gains made by the NCWC and maintain its access to policymakers as a way to express Catholic social concerns to the government. During the Golden Jubilee celebration of Cardinal Gibbons' episcopal consecration, held in February 1919 at the Catholic University of America, the papal delegate expressed the wishes of Pope Benedict XV that the American bishops establish a

28. Michael Warner, *Changing Witness: Catholic Bishops and Public Policy, 1917-1994* (Washington, D.C., Grand Rapids, and Cambridge: Ethics and Public Policy Center and William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 26.

29. *Ibid.*, 26.

national office to promote Catholic interests. In response, the American bishops organized the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC), which began its work in 1919 with Paulist Father John Burke appointed as the first general secretary. The new NCWC continued in peacetime the work that the National Catholic War Council had begun during the war. The bishops announced the formation of the National Catholic Welfare Council in September 1919 through a pastoral letter—the first collective pastoral letter composed since the Baltimore Plenary Council of 1884. The new encyclical, which was simply entitled “Pastoral Letter,” laid the theoretical foundation for American Catholic social analysis for the next fifty years.³⁰

Despite the eagerness expressed at the beginning of the NCWC, controversy soon arose over the authority of the new organization. Some bishops, such as Cardinal O’Connell of Boston and Bishop Charles McDonnell of Brooklyn, believed that the NCWC would usurp the authority of local bishops. They led an effort to discredit the organization, suggesting that the papal communiqué endorsing the organization had been forged. Some bishops secretly complained to the Vatican about the NCWC, leading Pope Benedict XV to threaten to ban the organization if it did not clarify its functions. Benedict passed away before the issue had been resolved, and his successor, Pius XI, signed a decree dissolving the NCWC, indicating that Benedict had made the decision shortly before his death. Rather than resolving the rift created by the NCWC, the decree in fact

30. Ibid., 28.

deepened American episcopal support for the American bishops' organization. A delegation of Americans was sent to Rome with a petition from two-thirds of the U.S. bishops, asking the Vatican to reverse its decision. They argued that the NCWC's dissolution by Rome would lend support to general American suspicions about the "autocratic" nature of the Catholic Church. The decree was revoked in June 1922, but with some limitations. The American bishops agreed that (1) membership would be voluntary, (2) the organization could not involve itself with a diocese unless invited by the local bishop, (3) NCWC decisions would have no legal authority, and (4) the name would be changed. The new name, the National Catholic Welfare Conference, signified that the organization had no power of law. The NCWC became the headquarters for the application of the ideals outlined in papal encyclicals and pastoral statements.

Father Burke, a Paulist Father and the first general secretary of the NCWC, had discovered that the best way to influence national policy in Washington, D.C. was to make one's position on issues well known before relevant legislation came to a vote. The NCWC continued to follow that model of issue advocacy, and the secretariat of the NCWC began working on social problems before the organization had received full approval. Within the secretariat, the Social Action Department was charged with the application of the various papal encyclicals and American episcopal statements. The Social Action Department was dissolved in 1968, but until that time it was led by John A. Ryan, author of the "Program for Social Reconstruction" in 1919; Raymond McGowan, who established

the Catholic Conference on Industrial Problems; and George Higgins, an integral supporter of the farm labor movement, with the assistance of John F. Cronin, a vocal opponent of communism during the McCarthy era. The four wielded heavy hands in constructing the bishops' statements and translating them into social action.³¹

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) allowed the NCWC to flourish. Vatican II advocated the use of episcopal conferences to bring about reform within the Catholic Church. Episcopal councils were thought to be the best way to implement the sweeping Vatican II changes administering church issues. Vatican II decreed that all bishops of a nation would be members of such organizations; however, only diocesan bishops and coadjutor bishops were allowed to vote. Each national conference would draw up its own statutes and provide for officers, committee, and a secretariat, all subject to approval by the Vatican. Moreover, such conferences were granted only limited juridical authority.

In 1966 the American bishops returned from the Second Vatican Council and reorganized the NCWC to conform to the new mandates. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) was created as the canonical body to deal with church matters. The former NCWC was renamed the United States Catholic Conference (USCC) and was charged with handling issues of public policy. The NCCB and the USCC retained the basic structure of the NCWC, as well as its Washington-based staff, its assembly, and its

31. Ibid., 29-31.

committees. The NCCB established an administrative committee, and the USCC adopted an administrative board. An elected president, vice president, and several new committees were added to the NCCB. The bishops formed committees on liturgy, canonical affairs, doctrine, priestly life and ministry, priestly formation, pastoral research, and practices. The NCCB's new committees dealt only with Church issues and comprised exclusively episcopal members, whereas the USCC committees included lay, religious, and clerical members, all with equal votes.³²

The Second Vatican Council reformed the code of canon law to bring it in line with the changes stemming from the Council. This reform included important changes dealing with episcopal conferences. The 1983 Code of Canon Law treated episcopal conferences as vehicles for releasing pastoral communications and facilitating coordination among the bishops; the Code allowed the bishops to exercise some legislative authority. As such, certain actions of the conference could be legally binding, subject to Vatican review. There were 84 canons in the Code of Canon Law that permitted legislative action by episcopal conferences. The code was implemented by Bishop Anthony Bevilacqua, chair of the Committee on Canonical Affairs.³³

Within the NCCB/USCC designated cardinals and archbishops have no special authority or privileges, yet the NCCB/USCC does have a leadership system. Leaders are

32. Reese, *Flock of Shepherds*, 30-31.

33. *Ibid.*, 32-33.

elected for three-year nonrenewable terms. These leaders include a president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, chairs of committees, and other members of the Administrative Committee/Board. The bishops also elected members to the boards of their related organizations: Catholic Relief Services (CRS), the Catholic Telecommunication Network of America (CTNA), and the North American Colleges in Rome and Louvain. The NCCB also elects American representatives to the bishops' synod, held in Rome.³⁴

The president of the NCCB/USCC was the spokesperson for the organization tasked with speaking to the press, the president of the United States, and the pope. The president also chaired meetings of the NCCB/USCC, the Administrative Committee/Board, the Executive Committee, the Committee on Priorities and Plans, the Bishops' Welfare Emergency Relief Committee, the Committee on Boundaries of Dioceses and Provinces, and the Committee on Selection of Bishops. The president served as an ex officio member of all conference committees, and appointed the chairs and members of ad hoc committees. The vice president was chair of the Committee on Personnel and Administration, and the treasurer chaired the Committee on Budget and Finance. The Executive Committee comprised the president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, and members elected by the Administrative Committee/Board.³⁵

34. Ibid., 36-39.

35. Ibid., 38-39.

In addition to the president, a general secretary headed the NCCB/USCC staff. The general secretary hired, fired, and directed the staff of the bishops, as well as attending Administrative Committee/Board meetings. He served on the Committee on Budget and Finance and the Committee on Priorities and Plans. The general secretary sat next to the president during conference meetings and advised him on how best to serve the will of the bishops. The president, with the approval of the Administrative Committee/Board, nominated the general secretary, who was elected by all of the bishops for a five-year term. Serving under the general secretary were three associate general secretariats. These were appointed by the general secretary pending approval of the Executive Committee and had responsibility for three specific areas: finances and administration, supervisor of NCCB staff, and supervisor of the USCC staff.³⁶

The NCCB/USCC consisted of 62 committees, 49 in the NCCB and 13 in the USCC. The committees were divided into executive and general membership. Executive-level committees dealt with administrative issues primarily including budget, finance, personnel, priorities, and plans, whereas the general membership-level committees dealt with substantive policy issues. Membership-level committees were either standing or ad hoc. The function of each committee varied: administrative committees might prepare budgets, nominate committee chairs, and set the agenda for assembly meetings, while ad hoc committees might assess national collections. If a committee's function was oversight,

36. Ibid., 77.

its duties might include serving as the board of governors for the American College at the University of Louvain or the North American College in Rome. Some committees were issue- or policy-oriented and tasked with drafting and approving pastoral letters, statements, guideline, reporters, pastoral programs, liturgical texts, and other documents.³⁷

The NCCB/USCC tried to operate under a system of consensus rather than majority rule. However, in 1968, the bishops required a two-thirds majority vote of the entire membership for approval of joint pastorals and statements. Special messages, resolutions, and other brief statements only required that two-thirds of the bishops attend the relevant meeting. In 1974 the NCCB/USCC began to rely entirely on *Robert's Rules of Order* and added a parliamentarian to its staff. In 1972, the conference voted to allow the press into their meetings; however, the bishops went into executive session without press coverage at least once every time they met.³⁸

One important function of the NCCB/USCC was to set legislative priorities. The purpose of this process was:

- 1) to identify issues of concern to the bishops that were likely to be addressed by the new Congress, as well as identify which of their legislative interests ought to be promoted in Congress;
- 2) to prioritize these issues in order of importance for the NCCB/USCC agenda; and

37. Ibid., 105-109.

38. Ibid., 144-175.

3) to assess the level and intensity of activity to which the conference staff had to commit in order to influence congressional action on these issues.³⁹

Beginning with the 101st Congress (1989-1991) the bishops attempted to define four levels of legislative priorities. A “Priority One” issue was likely to be enacted by Congress. A “Priority Two” issue was likely to be seriously considered by Congress, and the USCC expected to take a formal position and perhaps commit additional efforts to influence the congressional decision.⁴⁰ A “Priority Three” issue was likely to be seriously considered by Congress, and often prompted the USCC to take a formal position, but did not necessarily include a plan to commit additional efforts to influence Congress. The fourth priority was not actually called a priority; rather, it was listed as “important.” It included issues that “m[ight] or m[ight] not be taken up by Congress” and that the USCC intended closely to monitor and track to determine what the USCC commitment might be.⁴¹

The NCCB/USCC also served as a communication point between the American bishops, other bishops around the world, and the Vatican. Because of this role, the NCCB’s actions had to be consistent with those of Rome and the rest of the college of bishops. Through regional conferences such as CELAM (Consejo Episcopal Latino-Americano), the NCCB kept in contact with episcopal conferences around the world. The general secretary attended the annual meeting of the general secretaries of the European

39. Ibid., 206.

40. Ibid., 207-208.

41. Ibid., 205.

Conference. Each of the U.S. bishops also visited the Vatican every five years for *ad limina* visits, during which certain members of the hierarchy present themselves before the pope and give an account of the state of their dioceses. During the bishops' visits to Rome, they brought up areas of concern or interest to them. The Vatican might deal with the entire conference en masse to avoid the expense of communicating with each bishop individually. The Vatican requested that the American bishops discuss important issues with representatives from other conferences. Rome and the NCCB/USCC communicate through visits, correspondence, and through the American pro-nuncio.⁴²

On July 1, 2001, the NCCB and the USCC were combined, forming the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. The USCCB does all the work done previously by the NCCB and the USCC, and has the same staff. The bishops formed seventeen committees, and the staff is overseen by the general secretariat, which is led by Reverend Monsignor David J. Malloy, General Secretary.⁴³

The Rise of Catholics

Between World War I and the Vatican II Council (1962-1965), changes within the Catholic Church and in the United States impacted the role of the Church in American politics. These changes allowed the American Catholic bishops to chart a more independent course. Despite some remaining hostility toward Catholics in America, such

42. Ibid., 229.

43. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "A Brief History of the USCCB," <http://www.usccb.org/comm/source/history.shtml> (accessed March 26, 2008).

as was evidenced in the unsuccessful and ill-received 1928 presidential run of Catholic Al Smith, several events helped to improve the perception of Catholics in the United States. The death of Pope Pius X in 1914 halted the attempt to “Romanize” the U.S. church. During the early part of the twentieth century, the Vatican directed most of its attention to political and military turbulence in Europe. The Vatican also ended its obsession with its former temporal kingdom in old Europe, which led to a lessening of doctrinal orthodoxy in church-state relations. The Vatican realized that because of World War I, any hope of restoring its temporal sovereignty was virtually impossible; as such, church governance in temporal matters became less relevant, lessening the need for the American bishops to reconcile their identity with Rome and allowing them gradually to engage more directly in American politics and policymaking.⁴⁴

Vatican disengagement from temporal politics, and the subsequent liberation of American bishops from Rome’s temporal concerns, gave the bishops a newfound legitimacy within American society and politics. Several bishops, particularly Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York and George Mundelein of Chicago, had very public friendships with President Franklin Roosevelt. The bishops were, however, reserved in their support of the New Deal. The bishops worried about the independence of the Church and were suspicious of widening government control.⁴⁵ Such suspicions caused the

44. Burns, "Commitments," 715.

45. *Ibid.*, 716.

bishops to retain their hesitation toward political engagement, but they remained attentive to Catholic political interests. For example, the bishops opposed some child labor laws because of their fear that the government might next try to regulate the education of Catholic children. Moreover, because the Vatican had given the American bishops freedom to conduct their own affairs, their tenuous relationship with the Vatican began to grow stronger. In fact, the American bishops' ties to Rome were stronger than their ties to American politicians. The American bishops were just as likely to support a social program as they were to criticize the U.S. government for their failure to defend the Catholic Church in Mexico. These efforts were greatly appreciated by the Vatican, and they relied on the American bishops as a liaison between themselves and the U.S. government, as the Vatican and the U.S. government did not have official relations. Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York was especially important in this capacity. He was closely associated with Eugenio Pacelli, Pope Pius XI's secretary of state, who became Pope Pius XII in 1939. In fact, Cardinal Spellman came very close to being named Pius XII's secretary of state.⁴⁶

In the years following World War II, American Catholics enjoyed tremendous prosperity. The Catholic population increased from 23.9 million to 45.6 million. There was also a 58 percent increase in the number of archbishops and bishops, a 52 percent increase in clergy, and a 30 percent increase in the number of female religious, as well as a

46. Ibid., 716-717.

127 percent increase in the number of seminarians. Enrollment in Catholic elementary and secondary schools increased by 3.1 million (120 percent), and, due mainly to the GI Bill of Rights, enrollment in Catholic colleges and universities increased 300 percent.⁴⁷

Not only did Catholics increase in number and economic status, but the disproportionately high number of Catholics who had enlisted in World War II also helped to lessen anti-Catholic hostility in the United States.⁴⁸ David O'Brien has called this period the "climax of American Catholic history," because second- and third-generation suburban Catholics succeeded their foreign-born and urban parents and grandparents. Sociological studies conducted by Andrew Greeley show that in the 1974 National Opinion Research Center Survey, Catholics had moved ahead of, or were even with, Lutherans and Methodists regarding education. However, Catholics still lagged behind Jews, Episcopalians, and Presbyterians in the same arena.⁴⁹ Although Catholics' occupational prestige (scoring individual occupations according to the social status associated with them) was below the national average, Catholics had managed to move ahead of all Protestant denominations in terms of annual income. Compared with Episcopalians, who may have had more prominent professions, Catholics out-earned them by two dollars per year (\$11,324 to \$11,032 respectively).⁵⁰ According to Greeley, "If parity with national performance is a mark of acculturation, then American Catholics are

47. Carey, *Catholics in America*, 93.

48. Ibid., 35.

49. Ibid., 36.

50. Ibid., 36.

now thoroughly acculturated to American society.”⁵¹ Lastly, the election of John F. Kennedy in 1960 as the first Catholic president signaled to American Catholics that they were finally part of the American mainstream. At the same time, the American Catholic Church was enjoying improved status within the international Catholic Church.⁵²

Relations between Rome and the American bishops steadily improved as well. The changes made during the Vatican II Council (1962-1965) helped to make permanent these improved relations. Some of the changes made during Vatican II, including acceptance of the ideals of religious liberty and the statement that the Church’s role in the world does not involve participation with temporal government, constituted significant reasons for the improved relations.⁵³ The moderating of the Vatican’s attitude toward church-state relations and its new religious tolerance was due to the loss of its ability to align with and receive protection from confessional states.⁵⁴ Equally important was a series of encyclicals that signaled the Church’s theological acceptance of democratic and liberal models of state governance.

Although the American Church was still considered a minority compared to the Old World and Third World churches, Vatican II guided the Church in a direction more favorable to Americans. By the time Vatican II had convened, the American Church had improved its status within the international church and had become of interest to the

51. Ibid., 36.

52. Ibid., 35-36.

53. Burns, “Commitments,” 717.

54. Ibid., 717-718.

Vatican. The American Church was no longer considered a theological backwater, its episcopal delegation at Vatican II was second in size only to Italy, and the American bishops were vocal participants, especially in the adoption of *Dignitatis Humanae*, the “Declaration on Religious Freedom.” Another benefit of Vatican II was the heightening of the importance of all bishops within the Church’s power structure. According to the Council, all bishops ruled the Church collegially with the pope. Also, the importance of episcopal conferences was emphasized and given official canonical status.⁵⁵

Call to Action

A major result of Vatican II was the international Church’s call for reform in the world political and social order. The Council expressed a heightened concern about poverty, state repression, and the arms race. Building on the writings of John XXIII (*Mater et Magistra*, 1961 and *Pacem in Terris*, 1961) and Paul VI’s *Populorum Progressio*, Vatican II urged the Church to be a progressive force for social change instead of a reactionary partner to it. One of the most important documents produced by Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, emphasized social issues that were first identified by Pope Leo XIII, Pius XI, and John XXIII. *Gaudium* did not lay out exact details for carrying out changes, but it did express a profound commitment to political and social reform. *Gaudium* stated:

Therefore, this sacred synod, proclaiming the noble destiny of man and championing the Godlike seed which has been sown in him, offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which

55. Ibid., 718.

corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.⁵⁶

The principles set forth by *Gaudium*, the lessening of anti-Catholic hostility, and the improved economic and social status of American Catholics enabled the bishops to take a more active role in political affairs and public policy. Yet, because their authority existed within the international hierarchy, they tended to draw their positions more from internal church doctrine than from American cultural norms.⁵⁷

Despite their reliance on internal church documents when forming political positions, the Vatican declared that the “bishops were no longer to view American culture as a force against which the Church had to defend itself.”⁵⁸ One person who was instrumental in reconciling Church teachings with American values and democracy was John Courtney Murray, S.J. Through his writings Murray conveyed the idea that “the new modern democratic state represented a new legitimate political and social development to which the Church must vitally adopt its immutable principles.”⁵⁹ Murray emphasized the Church’s ability to adapt to changing political orders.⁶⁰ He urged theologians to explore the new possibilities of Church-state relations in terms that were in accordance with

56. Vatican, The Holy See, “Pastoral Constitution on the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*,” http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html (accessed March 26, 2008).

57. Burns, “Commitment,” 717.

58. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 40.

59. Thomas T. Love, “John Courtney Murray, S.J.: Liberal Roman Catholic Church-State Theory,” *The Journal of Religion* 45 (July 1965): 219.

60. *Ibid.*, 220.

historical conditions.⁶¹ The Vatican accepted the American bishops' argument that Catholicism was compatible with American society. *Dignitatis Humanae* urged the bishops to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel.⁶² In the 1960s the American bishops, through the NCWC, began to pay attention to racial justice, war and peace in the Middle East, justice for farm workers, and prisoners of war. In November 1971, the bishops criticized American military initiatives. With the Vietnam War as a background, the bishops had released a conference statement in 1966 asking the U.S. government to resolve the international conflict through non-military means. After the government failed to fulfill the request of the bishops, the NCCB was no longer afraid to criticize the government, in large part because of the improved status of American Catholics.⁶³

The Church's approach to social issues has evolved through the years. It was initially modeled after the Vatican's natural law theory but eventually moved toward a scriptural basis. Although the Catholic Church holds the Bible to be the word of God, it does not believe that it is a guidebook for making contemporary rules and political decisions. This premise is part of the Church's approach to its social teachings. The Church has a very specific approach to its social teachings, an approach that includes numerous principles or themes. The New Testament does not draw a "poverty line" such

61. Ibid., 221.

62. Ibid., 41.

63. Burns, "Commitments," 720.

as those defined by economists and social workers. Instead, the Catholic Church has always believed that compassion must be guided by doctrine and that a process of translation must occur between the Gospel's command to love and the citizen's daily civic duty. The phrase "social justice" was developed to describe how Christians should practice spiritual and material charity toward each other. "Society ensures social justice when it provides the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation...Social justice can be obtained only in respecting the transcendent dignity of man."⁶⁴ It is the Church's role to guide its members in the proper treatment of their neighbors. The Catholic Church has traditionally applied elements of natural law, as set forth by St. Thomas Aquinas, in its interpretation of social justice. Natural law is the belief that humans participate in divine law through their reason. Through reason we discern God's governance in the nature of things, and it is left to man to follow or ignore these rules.⁶⁵

Leo XIII began what some might call a papal tradition of criticizing modernity and the ideologies that come with it. In *Rerum Novarum*, Leo XIII blasted socialism, Marxism, and the radical laissez-faire capitalism of the time. Leo XIII and the popes that followed him believed that while the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution brought tremendous benefits to mankind, they also created worrisome social and economic

64. Warner, *Changing Witness*, 4.

65. Ibid., 4-6.

structures. In order to counteract these new evils, the Church took the perspective that humans could be served through morals and spirituality. This entailed recognition of human limitations and obedience to God's laws. Catholic social doctrine also proclaimed that social progress was both objective and subjective. Material progress was acceptable because the more accomplished and prosperous a society is, the happier and healthier its people are. Yet progress is also subjective because attaining material prosperity affects others. Progress was considered successful if people developed their likeness to God both individually and as corporate bodies. Progress must enhance both the moral and the material life of man in accordance with his nature and end.⁶⁶

The social teachings of the Catholic Church relied upon the common themes of promoting the common good, maintaining a degree of equality among all people, and a belief in the inherent dignity of all human persons. These ideas can be found in additional social teachings of the Church besides *Gaudium et Spes*. *Quadragesimo Anno*, *Mater et Magistra*, *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio*, *Sollicitudo rei Socialis*, and *Centesimus Annus* played an important role in Catholic social thought. In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI released *Caritas in Veritate*, which built upon the themes of the previous encyclicals. Throughout all of these documents are several connecting principles,

66. Ibid., 6-7.

including the common good, solidarity, distributism, subsidiarity, a preferential option for the poor, care and stewardship for creation, and the pursuit of peace and justice.

The principle of subsidiarity holds that “nothing should be done at the higher level of the Church that can be done as well, if not better, at a lower level.”⁶⁷ Accordingly, decisions should be made at the level closest to their immediate impact, and such decision making should involve “the participation, direct or indirect, of those whom the decision is most likely to affect.”⁶⁸ Subsidiarity aims to avoid the centralization of authority and was first expressed in *Quadragesimo Anno* by Pope Pius XI. It was reaffirmed by John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* and again by John Paul II in *Centesimus Annus*. In *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI stated:

Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.⁶⁹

The Church worried about the centralization of authority and wanted its members to be responsible for anything that directly impacted them.

The principle of distributism, or the idea that wealth and ownership should be spread out among the general population, was addressed in Pope John XXIII’s 1961 encyclical *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher). *Mater et Magistra* states that “the

67. Richard P. McBrien, *The Church: The Evolution of Catholicism* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2008), 174.

68. Ibid.

69. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents.

economic prosperity of any people is to be assessed not so much from the sum total of goods and wealth possessed as from the distribution of goods according to norms of justice.”⁷⁰ In both *Mater et Magistra* and *Pacem in Terris* (1963) John XXIII placed an emphasis on a lay social ministry. Paul VI, in *Populorum Progressio*, reiterated this idea and encouraged the laity not to wait “passively for orders and directives” from the hierarchy.⁷¹ This idea of a lay social ministry was in accordance with the call to action in *Gaudium et Spes* and its exhortation that the Church should be a progressive force for social change. *Pacem in Terris* expresses how the lay social ministry was to be involved in promoting another principle of social teaching: the common good.

The dignity of the human person involved the right to take an active part in public affairs and contribute to the common good of the citizens. Pius XI pointed out that “man as such, far from being an object or, as it were, an inert element in society, is rather its subject, its basis, and its purpose; and so he must be esteemed.”⁷² Part of achieving and promoting the common good was to take special care of the poor. The preferential option for the poor meant that the decisions and policies of private and public institutions, as well as economic relationships, were to be evaluated by their effects on the poor.⁷³ The obligation to evaluate social and economic equality through the eyes of the poor was a

70. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents.

71. McBrien, 250.

72. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents

73. *Key Principles of Catholic Social Teaching* is published by the Office for Social Justice, Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

direct result of God's commandment to "love one's neighbor as one's self." In *Populorum Progressio* (1967), Paul VI stated:

You are not making a gift of what is yours to the poor man but you are giving back what is his. You have been appropriating things that are meant for the common use of everyone. The Earth belongs to everyone, not to the rich.⁷⁴
John Paul II, in *Sollicitudo rei Socialias*, also spoke of the need to pay special

attention to the poor:

Faced by cases of need one cannot ignore them in favor of superfluous church ornaments and costly furnishings for divine worship; on the contrary, it could be obligatory to sell these goods in order to provide food, drink, clothing, and shelter for those who lack these things.⁷⁵

Paul VI was also able to tie the idea of looking after the poor and promoting the common good with another principle of Catholic social teaching, the promotion of peace and justice. In *Populorum Progressio*, Paul VI stated that "excessive economic, social, and cultural inequalities among people arouse tension and conflicts and are a danger to peace."⁷⁶ The best way to ensure a peaceful society was, from his perspective, to promote equality. All of the encyclicals expressed the idea that it is wrong for one group to have everything while another group has nothing.

Another key principle of Catholic social teaching is that of solidarity. Solidarity is the idea that we are all a single human family. John Paul II proclaimed solidarity as a virtue:

74. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents

75. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents.

76. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents.

Solidarity...is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a firm and preserving determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all.⁷⁷

In essence, we are our brother's keepers. If one person suffers, we all suffer.

In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI reiterated all of the social teachings of the Church in *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth). Benedict XVI stated that “charity is at the heart of the Church’s social doctrine, and is defined as ‘love received and given.’”⁷⁸ *Caritas in Veritate* drew upon the social teachings of past encyclicals to offer a distinct plan for promoting the common good. This plan that Benedict XVI spoke of has been at the core of the Church’s social teachings for decades. From the very beginning of the Church’s political activity, the Church has espoused the ideals of promoting the common good and protecting the weakest members of society and has maintained a belief in the dignity of all human beings. As stated in *Centesimus Annus*, “Man...is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself. God has imprinted his own image and likeness on man, conferring upon him an incomparable dignity, as the Encyclical frequently insights.”⁷⁹ This idea has been the foundation for the bishops’ approach to social and moral issues. All humans, from conception to birth, were “imprinted with God’s image,” and all have an obligation to protect human dignity. As John Paul II stated, we are all responsible for each other.

77. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents.

78. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents.

79. http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents.

The NCCB and Its Early Causes (Race, Vietnam, Farm Labor, Middle East, Birth Control, and Abortion)

Racial Issues

Building on the momentum set in motion by Vatican II, the American bishops released several pastoral letters addressing racial discrimination. The first statement, *On Racial Harmony*, was released on August 23, 1963. It sought to reiterate the moral principles set forth by the bishops in 1943 and 1958. *On Racial Harmony* begins with the insistence that:

The heart of the race question is moral and religious. It concerns the rights of man and our attitude toward our fellow man...Discrimination based on the accidental fact of race or color, and as such injurious to human rights, regardless of personal qualities or achievements cannot be reconciled with the truth that God has created all men with equal rights and equal dignity.⁸⁰

The American bishops drew upon the writings of Pope John XXIII, who, in *Pacem in Terris*, stated that a man who is afforded rights has a duty to other persons to respect and acknowledge their rights. The bishops reiterated John XXIII's statement that respect of personal rights is a matter for civic action and that the chief concern of civil authorities is to "ensure that these rights are acknowledged, respected, coordinated with other rights, defended, and promoted." It is the duty of public authority to correct the evils of discrimination. The bishops stated pointedly that "public authority is obliged to help correct the evils of unjust discrimination practiced against any group or class." They made

80. Nolan, *Pastoral Letters*, 17.

the point that even oppressed minorities must respect the lawful rights of others: "...a well-ordered human society requires that men recognize and observe their mutual rights and duties." The NCCB called for equal rights in voting, employment, education, housing, and welfare assistance.⁸¹

According to the pastoral, part of the road to racial harmony lies in Christian charity. *On Racial Harmony* makes a point of stating that, in the words of Pope Paul VI, "Revelation teaches us to love all men, whatever their condition, for they have all been redeemed by the same Savior and it obliges us to offer to those who have least, the means of arriving in dignity at a more human life." If a person says that he loves God, then he must also love his neighbor, no matter who the neighbor is. The best way for the Christian to achieve racial harmony is through "a quiet and courageous determination to make the quest for racial harmony as a matter of personal involvement."⁸²

On Racial Harmony ends with a list of positive steps that should be undertaken. The pastoral urges open and sincere talks about mutual problems and concerns, breaking down barriers, free exchange of ideas within neighborhoods and communities, and looking to the religious for the basis of racial justice. In 1968 the NCCB issued the *Statement on the National Race Crisis*, which was more detailed and identified specific policy areas of concern. The pastoral letter began with an overview of all that the U.S. bishops had done

81. Ibid., 17-19.

82. Ibid., 18.

in the pursuit of racial harmony, including the formation of the 1963 National Conference on Religion and Race and helping to achieve the passage of civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965. Yet the letter focused mainly on what was still left to do. The pastoral was split into nine sections: needs, unfinished business of the Catholic community, bridges to be built, cooperative efforts, education, job opportunities, housing, welfare assistance, and critical questions.

In essence, the NCCB believed that certain American populations were deprived of adequate education, job opportunities, housing, medical care and welfare assistance. Catholics, as well as the rest of society, needed to recognize their culpability in allowing these conditions to persist. Moreover, the NCCB demanded a commitment from Catholics to end racial discrimination in parishes, schools, hospitals, homes for the aged, and similar institutions. The NCCB also called for (1) coordinated efforts on the part of the American religious community to raise substantial funds for the implementation of local programs and (2) continuing interfaith efforts to enact critically needed legislation in the fields of employment, housing, health, and welfare, which the late Martin Luther King, Jr., called the “Poor Man’s Bill of Rights.”⁸³ The NCCB and interested Catholic organizations developed an Urban Task Force to coordinate Catholic efforts in the pursuit of racial harmony. It was felt that the most important task facing the religious community was the building of bridges of understanding that were intended to link Americans of every color,

83. Ibid., 157.

race, religion, and economic standing. A special emphasis was placed on working with civic groups such as the National Urban Coalition, which reminded Catholics that “the Gospel of Christ and the good of the nation must motivate us to encourage, support, and identify with the efforts of the poor in their search for self-determination.” The NCCB also focused special attention to education, job opportunities, housing, and welfare assistance.

Believing that education is foundational for society, the bishops sought to break the vicious cycle of “poverty producing poverty” by providing a breakthrough in the educational system. Expanded employment opportunities were sought; the bishops asked all sectors of American business to work to end minority unemployment. Regarding housing, the NCCB believed that housing segregation was an added barrier to employment, as job opportunities were expanding in the suburbs and declining in the cities. They demanded the removal of “barriers of segregation for those who prefer and can afford suburban living and providing low-cost housing in the cities for those who cannot afford decent housing at the prevailing prices.”⁸⁴ Regarding welfare, the bishops sought policies that respected the dignity of those who could not secure adequate employment:

Every possible care should be taken that public or private assistance always be provided under conditions that respect the dignity of the person and the integrity of the families assisted.

84. Ibid., 159.

The pastoral letter ended with several critical questions:

When will we realize the degree of alienation and polarization that prevails in the nation today?
 When will we understand that civil protests could easily erupt into civil war?
 Must we rebuild on the scorched earth of our ruined and gutted cities, or will we begin to rebuild now with a heightened sense of justice and compassion for the suffering?⁸⁵

The bishops' concerns regarding these issues were expanded upon in the *Pastoral Statement on Race Relations and Poverty*. This November 1966 pastoral letter discussed how poverty and racism were interwoven. Saddened by the extreme degrees of wealth and poverty in the United States, the bishops asked all American citizens to remember that "material goods are held in stewardship for the welfare of all men."⁸⁶ Noting that poverty was inflicted mostly upon minorities, the NCCB maintained that poverty was connected to past or present discrimination. Espousing the belief that all enjoy the same rights, the pastoral asked Catholics to stop dwelling upon principles and start acting.⁸⁷

In 1967, the NCCB passed a resolution urging the U.S. House of Representatives to pass legislation supporting the War on Poverty. Two years later the bishops passed a resolution creating a National Catholic Crusade Against Poverty. They directed the president of the NCCB to appoint a committee to create a specific proposal addressing poverty. In April of 1970, the NCCB passed another resolution urging Congress to pass

85. Ibid., 160.

86. Ibid., 184.

87. Warner, *Changing Witness*, 87.

the Family Assistance Act of 1970. Michael Warner notes in *Changing Witness* that race relations were the definitive shifting point in how the American Church hierarchy viewed social problems. They began employing a sociopolitical analysis of individual groups instead of understanding human society as “an organic entity under the ordering norms of the common good.”⁸⁸

Vietnam

As they had with all previous U.S. military engagements, the bishops supported the Vietnam War. However, as was evident in their pastoral statements, NCCB disillusionment grew as the military efforts in Vietnam unfolded. Debate within the Catholic Church took place over the destructiveness of modern weapons and the strategies of war over against the classic just-war doctrine that was upheld in *Gaudium*.⁸⁹ Several influential members of the hierarchy began to view war and peace differently and concluded that the traditional just-war criteria did not justify modern military conflicts.⁹⁰ The shift away from the just-war theory occurred gradually during the 1960s and 1970s. Upset with the continued escalation of the conflict, the bishops’ statements became more aggressive and critical in tone. In November 1966, the NCCB issued *Peace and Vietnam*, which was gentle in tone and began with a plea for peace while reiterating the Church’s

88. Ibid., 85.

89. Ibid., 90.

90. Ibid.

belief that the imperatives of justice and peace can demand the possibility of war and violence. However, the bishops reminded Catholics of the moral limits of war:

Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities or of extensive areas along with their population is a crime against God and man himself. It merits univocal and unhesitating condemnation.⁹¹

While still gentle in its tone, the NCCB stated its belief in the sincerity of American leaders as long as a just peace was sought and alternatives to fighting were pursued. The pastoral ended with a quote from Pope Paul VI: “No more war, war never again.”⁹²

Five years later, the gentle tone of the bishops had disappeared. The NCCB stated in *Resolution on Southeast Asia*:

At this point in history, it seems clear to us that whatever good we hope to achieve through continued involvement in this war is now outweighed by the destruction of human life and moral value which it conflicts. It is our firm conviction, therefore, that the speedy ending of this war is a moral imperative of the highest priority. Hence, we feel a moral obligation to appeal urgently to our nation’s leaders and indeed to the leaders of all the nations involved in this tragic conflict to bring the war to an end with no further deal.⁹³

Against this backdrop, they laid out four steps by which to achieve peace and justice, drawn from the Vatican II document *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*. They first asked Americans to “undertake an evaluation of war with an entirely new attitude” by attending to the spirit of the Gospel. Second, they insisted that

91. Nolan, *Pastoral Letters*, 113.

92. Ibid., 114.

93. Ibid., 289.

“peace is not merely the absence of war, but an enterprise of justice.”⁹⁴ This step entailed a moral obligation to restore and redevelop Southeast Asia, just as the U.S. had done in Europe after World War II. Third, the United Nations needed to become a more effective advocate for world justice and peace. Lastly, the bishops stressed the need for Americans to possess a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, with a special concern for those members of the Armed Forces who served in the conflict, those who gave their lives, their family members, and prisoners of war. The bishops asked for an increase in GI Bill benefits and for a reintegration of those who had objected to the war in good conscience. The pastoral ended with the bishops’ statement that constructing a just social order and genuine world peace, though not be an easy task, was crucial:

Otherwise, for all its marvelous knowledge, humanity, which is already in the middle of a grave crisis, will perhaps be brought to that mournful hour in which it will experience no peace other than the dreadful peace of death.⁹⁵

In 1968, negotiations had begun to bring an end to the conflict, yet the delays lasted until 1973. In November 1972, the NCCB released *Resolution on Imperatives of Peace*, asking the U.S. government to negotiate “a just and lasting peace with stability and freedom for all the nations and peoples of Southeast Asia.”⁹⁶ It then reiterated the key points from the Pastoral Constitution.

94. Ibid., 290.

95. Ibid., 291.

96. Ibid., 339.

Farm Labor

Statement on Farm Labor was released in November 1968. It applauded the passage of the Migrant Health Act but acknowledged that it produced divisions between farm workers and produce growers. The statement highlighted the problems faced by the field workers who were paid low wages, experienced health care problems, had few educational opportunities, lived in substandard housing, and lacked year-round employment. Because of their immigration status these workers had been excluded from the benefits offered by social legislation enacted in the 1960s. Because the problem was spreading across the country (and no doubt also because such workers comprised a largely Catholic population) the NCCB called on Congress to pass legislation

- (a) to include farm workers under the National Labor Relations Act;
- (b) to include farm workers more effectively under a national minimum wage that would ensure them a decent standard of living; and
- (c) to include farm workers under the national employment and insurance program.

A peaceful settlement was urged, and the bishops recognized the problems faced by both sides.

In calling for the legal protection of the rights of farm workers, we, the bishops of the United States, do so in this same spirit and with sympathetic awareness of the problems faced by the growers and, more specifically, by family farmers. It is our prayerful hope that ways can be found at the earliest possible date to resume

negotiations and to bring reconciliation between the parties to the current farm labor dispute. We pledge our united efforts to achieve this objective.⁹⁷

In May of 1973, the *Resolution on Farm Labor* applauded the success of the United Farm Workers Union, AFL-CIO, but warned about the lack of the legal protections for the organizations. The bishops also pointed to the destructiveness of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, who had convinced California table grape growers to undo contracts that they had had with the UFWU for the past three years and sign with the Teamsters. The NCCB endorsed a boycott of table grapes and iceberg lettuce unless it carried the Aztec black eagle label of the UFWU, AFL-CIO. In 1974, the NCCB issued a resolution that reiterated “the seriousness of the farm labor problem.” They referred to it as a national scandal and urged Congress to pass legislation that was just toward all parties and that would assure the farm workers the right to secret-ballot elections of a union of their own choice. They affirmed their active support for “the solution of an evil that has gone on far too long.”⁹⁸

Peace in the Middle East

Issued on June 8, 1967, the bishops’ pastoral *War in the Middle East* addressed the outbreak of war in the Middle East. The bishops quoted a Vatican II document, *The*

Church in the Modern World:

Enmities and hatred must be put away, and firm, honest agreements concerning world peace reached in the future. Otherwise, for all its marvelous knowledge,

97. Ibid., 197.

98. Ibid., 465.

humanity, which is already in the middle of a grave crisis, will perhaps be brought to that mournful hour in which it will experience no peace other than the dreadful peace of death.⁹⁹

They expressed hope that the United Nations organizations would be able to halt the conflict; they also set aside June 11 as a day of prayer. That pastoral was followed by a *Resolution toward Peace in the Middle East* in November 1973, which called for a six-point comprehensive political solution: (1) recognition of the right of Israel to exist as a sovereign state; (2) recognition of the rights of the Palestinian Arab, especially refugees; (3) acceptance of the stipulations set forth in the United Nations Security Council Resolution of November 1967 as the basis for negotiations by all parties to the conflict; (4) continued restraint and diplomatic involvement by the Soviet Union and the United States; (5) continued reliance on the United Nations diplomacy through its peace-keeping machinery; and (6) recognition and access to Jerusalem through a form of international guarantee.

Birth Control and Abortion

The election of John F. Kennedy gave American Catholics a renewed legitimacy. Catholics had experienced greater economic prosperity, which afforded them many new opportunities. Yet these advances were both a blessing and a cause for concern. The American bishops were alarmed by how “American” Catholics had become. The Church was no longer the center of their lives, and Catholics had become less attached to the tenets

99. Ibid., 88.

of their faith. Yet rather than focusing specifically on Catholics, the bishops turned their attention, with the encouragement of the Vatican, to Americans as a whole. A key area of concern for all participants in Vatican II was the issue of the sanctity of marriage and the family. Part 2 of the *Pastoral Constitution* stated:

God, the Lord of life, has conferred in men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life—a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner which is worthy of men. Therefore, from the moment of conception life must be guarded with the greatest care while abortion and infanticide are unspeakable crimes.¹⁰⁰

In the years preceding the birth control and abortion debate, the American Catholic bishops had continuously fought for promotion of the common good, the dignity of the human person, economic equality, peace, and the protection of the weak. Whether speaking about race relations or farm labor, the American bishops always began with the premise that all men are created in God's image and all are obligated to love and protect one other, especially those who cannot protect themselves. These principles carried them through the birth control and abortion debate.

The bishops began to pay more attention to both issues in the 1960s and 1970s; however, they had briefly waged a battle against birth control in the 1920s. Prior to the 1960s the bishops had expressed concern over the use of birth control. Catholic priests viewed marital sex as a way in which God's people would populate the earth. Married

100. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 41.

couples were “co-creators” with God when their sexual union resulted in pregnancy.¹⁰¹

The problem was that, although the church opposed birth control, it did not want to add fuel to the fire of anti-Catholicism. Leslie Tentler, in *Catholics and Contraceptives*, noted the additional problems the Church faced in the birth control battle. The National Catholic Welfare Conference should have been a valuable resource; however, they risked appearing to be a “celibate dictatorship.” Therefore, the Church, according to Tentler, adopted two tactics:

1. They insisted throughout the 1920s that opposition to birth control was characteristic of all genuine Christians and...all other persons who cherish the elementary principles of morality.
2. They tried to enlist the Catholic laity, women in particular, as public actors in the birth control fight.¹⁰²

The NCWC attempted to keep a low profile. The general secretary, the Paulist priest John Burke, relied on a Philadelphia social worker, Sara Laughlin, for information about birth control supporters. Laughlin was regularly in contact with birth control supporters Mary Ware Dennett (of the Voluntary Parenthood League) and Margaret Sanger. Laughlin would inform Burke of any speeches or other activities of the two women. Burke additionally participated behind the scenes, lobbying with members of Congress and others

101. Leslie Woodcock Tentler, *Catholics and Contraception: An American History* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press, 2004), 20.

102. *Ibid.*, 54.

such as John A. Ryan, a leading social justice advocate in the Catholic Church, who had testified before congressional committees.¹⁰³

The bishops' work had been successful throughout the 1920s, as they maintained "at least the semblance of an ecumenical opposition to contraception." The bishops were also open to Catholic involvement on the local level. In 1921, New York Archbishop Hayer issued a pastoral letter in direct response to Margaret Sanger. Chicago's Archbishop George Mundelein intervened in a 1924 case involving the denial of a city license to a local birth control clinic. As with other issues, the Church found it easier to oppose birth control at the local level through the mobilization of lay Catholics. Throughout the 1920s local Catholic organizations passed resolutions opposing birth control. However, throughout the decade, the Church had some reservations about discussing and publicly opposing birth control.¹⁰⁴

At the bishops' annual meeting in November 1929, there was an "extended discussion" about birth control. Edmond Heelan, bishop of Sioux City, proposed that the bishops issue a joint pastoral letter on birth control. Yet the motion was denied, and they instead chose to commission new anti-birth-control pamphlets. There were several reasons for avoiding more direct involvement in the issue. According to Tentler, some of the bishops may have been alarmed at the idea of drafting a pastoral letter that was exclusively

103. *Ibid.*, 54.

104. *Ibid.*, 54-55.

about marital morality. Additionally, the bishops wanted to maintain the somewhat fictitious notion that opposition to birth control was held by all Christians; they wanted to eliminate the idea that Catholics stood alone on this issue. They also may have been afraid of the not always “docile” laity. The Church worried that women would be influenced by non-Catholics who perceived large Catholic families as vulgar. The bishops believed that Catholic women would be influenced by these statements and felt the issue was extremely difficult to tackle. They were, therefore, cautious in their efforts to oppose birth control.¹⁰⁵

In 1930 Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical *Casti Connubii* on Christian marriage. Pius XI, drawing from analysis rooted in natural-law reasoning, penned a reaffirmation of the Church’s objection to birth control:

Any use whatsoever of marriage in the exercise of which the act by human effort is deprived of its natural power of procreating life, violates the law of God and nature, and those who do such a thing are stained by a grave and mortal flaw.¹⁰⁶

The encyclical also warned priests that they should not fail to question married persons during confession about birth control. The encyclical’s ideas could not have come at a worse time, as the U.S. was in the midst of the Great Depression. Because of the Great Depression, various religious denominations had begun to accept the practice of limiting families. In the U.S., the Universal General Convention, the American Unitarian Association, the New York East Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the

105. Ibid., 70-71.

106. Ibid., 72.

Central Conference of American Rabbis publicly endorsed marital contraception in June 1930; in August, the Anglican's Lambeth Conference also endorsed marital contraception. Nevertheless, *Casti Connubii* was well received, despite the difficulty of the times. The next encyclical on the issue, written thirty-eight years later, would not be received as positively.¹⁰⁷

In 1968, Pope Paul VI released his encyclical on birth control, entitled *Humanae Vitae*. The events leading up to the encyclical spanned several years. The opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962 did not include birth control on its agenda. Therefore, Pope John XXIII established a commission called the Pontifical Commission for the Study of Population, Family, and Births to discuss the issue. It initially consisted of six members but was enlarged several times; by its last meeting in 1966 there were seventy-two members. The Commission's existence was originally a secret, but it became public knowledge with the expansion of its membership. Its existence was seen by the laity as a sign that the Church would change its position on birth control. In 1966, the Commission did, in fact, recommend a change in Church teachings, a fact that was kept secret for a year. Despite the recommendation of the Commission, Pope Paul VI reaffirmed the Church's long-standing ban on artificial contraception in his encyclical *Humanae Vitae*. The encyclical reiterated the natural law argument that marital sex was a gift from God meant to produce children. As a result, only "natural" means of contraception, such as the

107. Ibid., 74.

so-called “rhythm method,” were permissible. Although the pastoral was in a sense more lyrical than *Casti Connubii*, acknowledged the changing status of women and the problems of global overpopulation, and expressed hope that science would discover a means of family limitation through the rhythm method, the encyclical was not well received.¹⁰⁸

Most Americans did not read the encyclical; few encyclicals were widely read by the laity. Instead they relied on news stories proclaiming that the Pope was against birth control. Yet the document generated great dissent. For the first time, the laity spoke out against a pastoral letter; even some parish priests expressed criticism of the encyclical. Leslie Tentler believes that the problems that arose from the birth control debate brought to light a much larger problem facing the Church.

The contraception problem is simply the occasion for bringing the much broader problem of the teaching authority of the Church and specifically the Holy Father, out in the open. Once, the pope had spoken, what kind of dissent—if any—was permitted to the faithful? What, in other words, was the nature and function of the magisterum?¹⁰⁹

This question became a driving force in the abortion debate.

The bishops’ first response in several decades was a 1968 statement entitled *Human Life in Our Day*, which was a response to Pope Paul VI’s condemnation of artificial birth control. The bishops combined principles set forth by the Vatican with basic Judeo-Christian traditions stating that “human life should be inviolable from the moment

108. Ibid., 207.

109. Ibid., 275.

of conception” and that abortion was “contrary to Judeo-Christian traditions inspired by love for life, and Anglo-Saxon legal traditions protective of life and persons.”¹¹⁰ *Human Life in Our Day* was followed by three successive statements: *Statement on Abortion* (1969), *Statement on Abortion and Declaration on Abortion* (1970), and *Population and the American Future: A Response* (1972). All three based their arguments on Catholic doctrine and American legal principles but did not include any specific political strategies. Timothy Byrnes notes that the tone of each statement was increasingly aggressive, especially as the effort to legalize abortion gained ground in more and more states.¹¹¹ When the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973’s *Roe v. Wade*, the bishops were outraged; for the first time in their history, they sanctioned disobeying civil laws that would require abortion.¹¹² The decision forced abortion onto the national political stage and, in turn, brought the American bishops into a more active role in national politics.¹¹³

The bishops began their efforts by denouncing the decision. Cardinal John Krol, who was president of the NCCB at the time, called the decision “bad law and bad logic” and “an unspeakable tragedy for this nation.”¹¹⁴ In a January 24, 1973 statement, the Committee for Pro-Life Affairs of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops encouraged the public not to follow the law:

110. Ibid., 55.

111. Ibid., 56.

112. Burns, “Commitments,” 721.

113. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 57.

114. Ibid., 57.

Although as a result of the Court decision abortion may be legally permissible, it is still morally wrong, and no Court opinion can change the law of God prohibiting the taking of innocent human life. Therefore, as religious leaders, we cannot accept the Court's judgment and we urge people not to follow its reasoning or conclusions.¹¹⁵

The Committee for Pro-Life Affairs issued five recommendations: (1) that the bishops explore every legal possibility to challenge the Supreme Court's decision; (2) that all state legislatures protect unborn children and restrict the practice of abortion as much as possible; (3) a pledging of all of the Church's educational and informational resources for a program presenting the case for the sanctity of a child's life from conception to birth; (4) that Catholic health care professionals refuse to provide abortions; and (5) that the Court's decision should be opposed and rejected. The Committee concluded that the best way to overturn the decision would be the passage of a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion. They made it known that passage of this amendment would be their highest priority. To this end, the bishops took two steps. First, they established the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA) as a lobbying arm outside of the church's official bureaucracy. It was funded exclusively by the bishops and never severed its ties from the church. Second, the NCCB sent Cardinals John Krol of Philadelphia, Timothy Manning of Los Angeles, Humberto Medeiros of Boston, and John Cody of Chicago to testify on behalf of the hierarchy before a Senate subcommittee on

115. This statement of the Committee for Pro-Life Affairs National Conference of Catholic Bishops is reproduced in *Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1974), 59.

constitutional amendments. In the immediate aftermath of *Roe*, the push for a constitutional amendment became the highest political and policy priority of the bishops.¹¹⁶

Catholics Today

When Catholics first arrived in the United States, their faith was their most important means of preserving the connection to their home countries. Since the 1960s, Catholics have prospered both economically and socially, thus diminishing the protective role of the Church. With these changes also came changes in American Catholics' degree of devotion to the Catholic Church. Overall, the level of Church commitment has declined. A 2005 survey showed that 64 percent of high-commitment Catholics said you could be a good Catholic while not obeying the Church's teachings on birth control, and 31 percent said the same of abortion.¹¹⁷ Table 1.2 displays the changes in high church commitment.

Table 1.2 Church Commitment

Year	High Church Commitment (in percentage)
1987	27
1993	23
1999	23
2005	21

Source: William V. D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church*

116. Byrnes, 58.

117. William V. D'Antonio, James D. Davidson, Dean R. Hodge, and Mary L. Gautier, *American Catholics Today: New Realities of Their Faith and Their Church* (United Kingdom: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), 47-48.

In contrast to the past, Catholics now comprise a significant portion of the U.S. population. A 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey showed how the landscape and beliefs of the Catholic population have changed over the years. Tables 1.3 through 1.8 display the national Catholic demographic composition, economic background, and abortion views of Catholics in 2007.

Table 1.3 2007 Regional Catholic Population in United States

Region	Percentage Catholic
Northeast	29
Midwest	24
South	24
West	23

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey.

As in the past, the majority of Catholics reside in the Northeast and the majority are between the ages of 30 and 49 (41%) and 50 and 64 (24%). White non-Hispanics constitute 65 percent of the Catholic population, while 31 percent of Catholics make less than \$30,000 a year. Married Catholics total 58 percent of the population. Catholics now comprise a significant portion of the U.S. population. A 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey showed that 23.9 percent of the U.S. population is Catholic. That number is second only to evangelical Protestants, who make up 26.3 percent. Additionally, 10 percent of Americans were born Catholic but no longer consider themselves part of the religion. The ethnic background of Catholics has also changed

dramatically in recent decades. Latino Catholics now account for roughly one in three adult Catholics and account for nearly one-half of all Catholics ages 18 to 29.¹¹⁸

Table 1.4 U.S. Catholic Population (Percentage)

Race	Percentage Catholic
White (non-Hispanic)	65
Black (non-Hispanic)	2
Asian	2
Other/Mixed (non-Hispanic)	2
Hispanic	29

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey.

Table 1.5 Income of Catholics (Percentage)

Income	Percentage of Catholics
Less than \$30,000	31
\$30,000-\$49,000	20
\$50,000-\$74,999	16
\$75,000-\$99,999	14
\$100,000 and over	19

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey

Table 1.6 Marriage Status of Catholics

Status	Percentage of Catholics
Married	58
Living with Partner	7
Divorced or Separated	10
Widowed	8
Never Married	17

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey

118. 2007 *Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey*, The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life.

Table 1.7 Catholics and Political Identity	
Political Ideology	Percentage of Catholics
Republican	23
Lean Republican	10
Independent	10
Lean Democratic	15
Democratic	33

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey

Table 1.8 Catholics and Abortion	
Catholic Position on Abortion	Percentage
Legal in all cases	16
Illegal in all cases	18
Legal in most cases	32
Illegal in most cases	27
Don't know/refuse to answer	7

Source: 2007 Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey

Twenty-three percent of Catholics classify themselves as Republicans and 33 percent as Democrats. In regard to abortion, mirroring the American population generally, Catholics are divided. About 32 percent believe that abortion should be legal in most cases and 27 percent believe it should be illegal in most cases.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

When the first wave of immigrants arrived in the U.S., the American bishops were so consumed with finding a place for Catholics in American society and culture that they

119. 2007 The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *Pew Forum and Religious Landscape Survey*.

had little time for expansive political involvement. The American bishops knew that in order to alleviate fears of disloyalty they had to limit their commentary on U.S. governmental policies. From the 1840s to the 1960s, European Catholic immigrants assimilated, and the bishops were able to support this process of “Americanization” while retaining the Vatican’s respect. But by the 1970s, in part because they had navigated the waters of assimilation so successfully, the bishops were able to increase their political involvement. *Roe v. Wade* marked the beginning of this new political involvement.

Moreover, at the time of the *Roe* decision, the American Catholic population had experienced significant social and economic changes. Educated, wealthy, and so assimilated as to be scarcely different from Americans generally on issues of politics and policy, Catholics could claim a new place at the political table, with the bishops ready to take the lead. The bishops’ reaction to the *Roe* decision was like nothing the bishops had ever done before. In contrast to the battle over birth control in the 1920s, the bishops were not afraid of appearing to stand alone on an issue. In the 1920s and 1930s they had been afraid of branding opposition to birth control as a “Catholic” issue. Such fear was not evident among the bishops in the abortion battle.

The NCCB/USCC was also in place at this point to provide the bishops with a structured organization capable of carrying out a national plan of political action. The NCCB/USCC provided the bishops with a unified voice and allowed them a place to discuss strategies and work through differing opinions. In addition to being an essential

element of the abortion battle, the NCCB/USCC also allowed the bishops the ability to speak out about other important social and moral issues.

By the 1970s, organization and ambition came together to provide the bishops with the opportunity to wage a national campaign against abortion. Had Catholics not prospered socially and economically and had the bishops not formed their own institutions for governance of public policy, the abortion battle would either not have happened or would have been insignificant. Thus, the rise of American Catholics—economically, socially, and politically—gave the bishops the legitimacy they needed to mount a serious effort to end legalized abortion.

Chapter 2 – The USCCB from 1973 to 2004

When the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, the opinion in *Roe v. Wade* did not create as many headlines as the American bishops had hoped. The landmark decision was overshadowed by the death of former President Lyndon B. Johnson. The *Roe* decision was still shocking because of the number of conservative justices who had been appointed to the Supreme Court. When Richard Nixon was elected to the presidency in 1968 he tried to appeal to southern white voters who were upset with the liberalism of the Warren Court. Nixon denounced judicial activism and promised to appoint only “strict constructionists,” those who confined constitutional interpretation to the literal reading of the Constitution.¹ His attempt to reorder the Court was moderately successful: in 1969, Warren Burger replaced Earl Warren as chief justice, Harry Blackmun replaced Abe Fortas, and Lewis Powell and William Rehnquist replaced Hugo Black and John Harlan. The four new appointees impacted the Court greatly, reducing the number of liberal decisions by 25 percent in the first term of the Burger Court and decreasing it another 8 percent by 1972.² In *Roe*, only Rehnquist and White dissented. In *Abortion and American Politics*, Barbara Craig and David O’Brien state that the case was illustrative of the decision-making process within the Court and its changing role in U.S. politics. “*Roe* was both an extension of the developing constitutional law of privacy and an invitation for more litigation and larger struggles within the country over abortion, as well as over the

1. Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 3.

2. Ibid., 4.

course of constitutional law and politics.”³ The decision also elevated the abortion issue to the national political level.⁴

That the Court’s decision did not generate many headlines does not mean that it went unnoticed. The decision was applauded by Dr. Alan Guttmacher, the president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, who stated that it was “a wise and courageous stroke for the right of privacy, and for the protection of woman’s physical and emotional health.”⁵ However, the American bishops did not have such positive things to say about the ruling. Cardinal John Krol of Philadelphia said, “Apparently the Court was trying to straddle the fence and give something to everybody. Abortion on demand before three months for those who want that, somewhat more restrictive abortion regulations after three months for those who want that.”⁶ The decision was even criticized by those who supported abortion, on the basis that the Court had erred by resting abortion policy on a constitutional right to privacy. Others agreed with Justice Rehnquist’s dissenting opinion, which held that the decision was an infringement on states’ rights. Utah Senator Orrin Hatch called it the “Dred Scott issue of this century.”⁷ Whether a person supported or opposed the decision, the abortion debate had become a national issue and had become

3. Ibid., 6.

4. Ibid., 3-6.

5. Ibid., 32.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

intertwined in the political process. The bishops understood the impact of the decision and began an effort to make abortion illegal.

They began by releasing statements denouncing the decision and explored every legal option to overturn *Roe*. The NCCB decided that the best way to reverse the *Roe* decision would be to pass a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion. Following *Roe*, the hierarchy established the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment (NCHLA), a lobbying group funded exclusively by the bishops. Second, the NCCB sent Cardinals John Krol of Philadelphia, Timothy Manning of Los Angeles, Humberto Medeiros of Boston, and John Cody of Chicago to testify on behalf of the hierarchy before a Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments. The bishops were careful not to make the passage of an anti-abortion constitutional amendment a “Catholic” issue. When the NCCB testified before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Constitutional Amendments, they were careful not to base the whole of their argument on morality and religion and instead emphasized scientific, medical, and legal reasoning. Although the bishops did quote from various Church documents, they tried to find a basis for the rights of the unborn in the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. The NCCB stated:

...We wish to make it clear that we are not seeking to impose the Catholic moral teaching regarding abortion on the country. In our tradition, moral teaching bases its claims on faith in a transcendent God and the pursuit of virtue and moral perfection. In fact, moral teaching may frequently call for more than civil law can dictate, but a just civil law cannot be opposed to moral teaching based on God’s

law. We do not ask that civil law to take up our responsibility of teaching morality, i.e., that abortion is morally wrong. However, we do ask the government and the law to be faithful to its own principle—that the right to life is an inalienable right given to everyone by the Creator.⁸

The bishops testifying before Congress reiterated the point that the opposition to abortion was not exclusively a Catholic issue:

The state abortion laws of the 19th century, although highly prohibitive, did not represent Catholic morality...The rejection of liberal abortion laws in North Dakota and Michigan, by 78 and 62 percent of the people in a public referendum, cannot be attributed to Catholic moral teaching, since in both states the Catholic population is less than 30 percent.⁹

The NCCB enhanced their testimony by providing research from noted scientists and physicians discussing at what point human life begins. Numerous members of the scientific community testified that life begins at the moment of conception. The bishops also included detailed information regarding the development of the fetus. Although the bishops testified before Congress several times, they soon realized that more was needed to overturn *Roe*.

As the 1976 presidential election neared, the NCCB knew that they must make a bigger impact in the fight against abortion.¹⁰ After several years of attempting to pass a constitutional amendment banning abortion, the bishops had still seen no results in the abortion debate. They determined that a new strategy must be adopted. In 1974 the NCCB released the pastoral statement *A Review of the Principal Trends in the Life of the*

8. This testimony is reproduced in *Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion*, 2.

9. This testimony is reproduced in *Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion*, 3.

10. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 58.

Catholic Church in the United States. They used the word “malaise” to describe the state of all organized religion in the United States. The pastoral noted that some observers might argue whether the current condition was a result or a sign of polarization, confusion, self-doubt, and uncertainty about fundamental values and purposes, or whether it was a prelude to a new era of committed purposefulness. The bishops stated that the purpose of the pastoral was to not argue for or against either argument, as it was probably a mixture of the two. To address the problem, the NCCB focused on specific issues that might have contributed to the problem. One such issue was the radical change in individual moral values that they perceived as continuing to occur and that did not appear to be slowing down. They spoke of a “sexual revolution” that resulted in people viewing sex as an “instrument of individual gratification rather than a means for the expression of mutual love and commitment between husband and wife, fundamentally oriented to the begetting of new life.”¹¹ These new feelings about sexual freedom worried the bishops, who believed that the “sexual revolution” had led to a number of new problems.

One such problem was divorce and its newfound social acceptability, which undermined the stability of the family. Linked to the high divorce rates and the declining strength of the family was the widespread acceptance of abortion as a means of convenient birth control. Media images were partially blamed for the decline in traditional values, but the bishops believed that society itself was behind what the media reported. The bishops

11. Nolan, *Pastoral Letters*, 457.

believed that the media was not responsible for creating the images, but that they should have been more careful about what images and messages they decided to convey.¹²

One explanation offered for the decline was the challenge posed by secularism. The pastoral letter notes that “beyond question...in the United States at the present time transcendent religious belief finds itself engaged in direct contest with a secularistic, humanistic world view which rejects supernatural religion and absolute moral values.”¹³ Interestingly, the bishops believed that the social movements of the 1960s such as anti-poverty efforts had become passé and that organized religion had found nothing to replace such efforts. Adding to this decline in social movements, the positive influences of organized religion on public policy and public morality has also drastically declined. They lamented the widening separation of church and state by the courts and warned of its dire consequences. Pro forma religious activities in the classroom were not seen as likely to fulfill the spiritual needs of the young.¹⁴ This begged the question as to whether the Catholic Church would continue to “derive its fundamental beliefs and attitudes from the traditional value system of Catholic Christianity, or whether its beliefs and attitudes w[ould] be drawn more and more from the secularistic, humanistic value system of the society around it.”¹⁵ At one time, the Catholic Church was isolated from the rest of American society, but the prosperity of Catholics and the changes made during Vatican II

12. Ibid., 457-458.

13. Ibid., 458.

14. Ibid., 459.

15. Ibid.

brought Catholics into the American mainstream. With such assimilation also came the temptations of secular society. The bishops noted the decrease in the number of Catholics entering the priesthood and the convent, as well as the declining numbers in church attendance. Most alarmingly, they noted the lack of primacy of Catholic values in the lives of their parishioners. Perhaps most startling to them was the tolerant attitude toward abortion that had become widespread among Catholics.¹⁶ Catholic opinion on abortion generally reflected the same views as that of non-Catholics. Table 2.1 shows abortion attitudes since 1975.

16. Ibid.

Table 2.1 Public Opinion on Abortion

Date	Legal Under Any Circumstances (Percent)	Legal Only Under Certain Circumstances (Percent)	Illegal in All Circumstances (Percent)	Unsure (Percent)
July-09	21	57	18	4
May-09	22	53	23	2
May-08	28	54	17	2
May-07	26	55	18	1
May-06	30	53	15	2
Nov-05	26	56	16	2
May-04	24	56	19	1
May-03	23	57	19	1
May-02	25	51	22	2
Aug-01	26	56	17	1
Apr-00	28	51	19	2
May-99	27	55	16	2
Jan-98	23	59	17	1
Dec-97	26	55	17	2
Aug-97	22	61	15	2
Jul-96	25	58	15	2
Sep-96	24	52	17	7
Apr-90	31	53	12	4
Jul-80	25	53	18	4
Feb-79	22	54	19	5
Dec-77	22	55	19	4
Apr-75	21	54	22	3

Source: USA Today/Gallup Poll

All was not dark in the bishops' estimation, however. On the positive side, a significant portion of the Catholic community remained committed to orthodox values.

Yet this orthodox population was alienated by two events in particular: the Supreme Court's legalization of abortion in *Roe* and its prohibition of public assistance to non-public schools. The pastoral described these decisions as an affront to traditional Catholic values and stated that many Catholics viewed them as a "callous repudiation, with some anti-Catholic overtones, of their claim to equitable treatment..."¹⁷ The pastoral was hopeful that there would be a sudden return to traditional Catholic values and a transmission of values from generation to generation. In order to promote a return to traditional values, the pastoral ended with a plan to rejuvenate a sense of Catholic community. The bishops decided that evangelization was the most effective way to achieve their goals. To do this, they needed a clear understanding of what evangelization was in contemporary terms, and they needed to assess what means of evangelization were currently available to them.¹⁸

The Pastoral Plan

In the end, it was politics and not evangelization to which they turned. In November, 1975, the bishops revealed their new tactic when they issued the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*. The *Pastoral Plan* has been described as "the most 'focused and aggressive political leadership' ever exerted by the American Catholic hierarchy."¹⁹ It was created to "focus attention on the pervasive threat to human life arising from the present

17. Ibid., 461.

18. Ibid., 463.

19. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 58.

situation of permissive abortion.”²⁰ Its purpose was also to generate a greater respect for the life of each person in our society.²¹ The *Pastoral Plan* consisted of four specific areas: public information and education, pastoral care, public policy, and prayer and worship. It included a plan advocating a comprehensive defense of life to address all policy challenges to life in contemporary America. The bishops connected the issues of abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, war and peace, and economic justice in a “consistent strategy in support of all human life in its various stages and circumstances.” The bishops called this comprehensive defense a “consistent ethic of life,” and believed that it explained the Church’s teaching at the level of moral principle. Although the *Pastoral Plan* dealt with a number of life issues, it clearly stated that abortion was the central and most important issue:

To focus on the evil of deliberate killing in abortion and euthanasia is not to ignore the many other urgent conditions that demean human dignity and threaten human rights. Opposing abortion and euthanasia "does not excuse indifference to those who suffer from poverty, violence and injustice. 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" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23). We pray that Catholics will be advocates for the weak and the marginalized in all these areas. "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'

20. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* is reproduced in *Documentation on Abortion and the Right to Life II* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1976), 46.

21. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* is reproduced in *Documentation on Abortion and the Right to Life II*, 46.

of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community" (*Living the Gospel of Life*, no. 23).²²

Besides explicitly stating how important the fight against abortion was, the *Pastoral Plan* was more detailed and focused than any other political activity of the hierarchy. It argued for action in four areas. (The Plan originally consisted of three areas but was later expanded to include four.)

As previously noted, the four areas included public information and education, pastoral care, public policy and prayer and worship. The purpose of the public information program was to increase respect for human life and create stronger opposition to abortion among the American public. This involved an ongoing and intensive educational effort in the Catholic community in the hope that Catholics would become better equipped to convey to the public an understanding of the issues that would produce conviction and commitment to the pro-life movement. The educational effort relied on the most recent advances in medical, sociological, and legal information to demonstrate continuous human development from the moment of conception. In addition to scientific and legal evidence, the public information and education program also relied on moral and theological arguments to inculcate a deep respect for human life. The primary purpose of the education program was to develop pro-life attitudes by creating an awareness of the threats to human life and human dignity caused by abortion. The bishops hoped that the general

22. Ibid.

public would more readily see the need to create legal safeguards to correct the situation. By bringing information about abortion to the public, they believed that it would provide visibility to the issue and help those who were not aware of the situation to gain a firm conviction to reverse legalized abortions. They also hoped that their efforts would publicize the negative and long-lasting impact of abortion on women and others. The public information program took the form of public statements and press releases, discussion with the media, conferences and seminars, distribution of educational materials, and advertising campaigns.²³

The second program was pastoral care, which included providing spiritual and material help. Pastoral care encompassed four specific aspects: pregnancy services; post-abortion healing and reconciliation; care for the chronically ill, disabled, or dying; and care for prisoners, those on death row, and victims of violent crime.

Believing that respect for human life meant reaching out to those with special needs, the *Pastoral Plan* asked Catholic organizations to provide pastoral services and care to pregnant women, especially to those who were vulnerable to abortion or would not be able to afford high-quality medical care. The program for pregnancy services included factual and educational information on alternatives to abortion; nutritional, prenatal, childbirth, and postnatal care for the mother; nutritional and pediatric care for the child;

23. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities* is reproduced in *Documentation on Abortion and the Right to Life II*, 46-49.

and adoption and foster care services. It also included an educational effort that presented abortion in a negative light and offered counseling and spiritual assistance. There were also opportunities for teen- and college-aged parents to continue their education during pregnancy and after childbirth, support for victims of rape and other forms of abuse and violence, education about chastity and fertility awareness, and expansion of natural family planning programs. These services were to be provided by both professionals and volunteers.²⁴

The second segment of pastoral care involved post-abortion healing and reconciliation. The Church provides reconciliation and spiritual and psychological counseling for women suffering from the aftermath of abortion through diocesan-based programs known as Project Rachel. Project Rachel involves specially trained priests and professional counselors who provide one-on-one care to women who have had abortions. Other post-abortion ministries that have support groups and retreats are located throughout the country, and every Church-sponsored program and Catholic organization can refer women to those ministries. The Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities provides assistance to priests who specialize in this ministry.

The third segment of the Pastoral Care program was care for the chronically ill, disabled, or dying. The Church teaches that euthanasia and assisted suicide are not

24. The *Pastoral Plan* is reproduced on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops under the Committee for Pro-Life Activities, <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoralplan.shtml>.

reasonable or compassionate solutions for those suffering from an illness. The *Pastoral Plan* asked that the seriously ill and dying be given support through outreach to parish members who are sick or dying and the provision of support to their families. The *Pastoral Plan* also advised that physicians and health-care professionals should be encouraged to provide appropriate palliative care. Catholics should pray for the sick and the dying, develop and support respite care programs, and aid efforts to welcome those with disabilities into the Church community.

The final segment of the Pastoral Care program consisted of care for prisoners, those on death row, and victims of violent crime. Instead of responding to violence with anger and vengeance, the *Pastoral Plan* asked Catholics to respect the dignity of all human beings through rehabilitation, reconciliation, and restoration. The bishops encouraged outreach programs for prisoners, such as visitation or letter writing, providing for the spiritual needs of prisoners, pastoral outreach to victims of violent crime, and emotional and material support to the family members of prisoners, particularly children and pregnant women and new mothers in prison.²⁵

The third program within the *Pastoral Plan* was the public policy program. The public policy program was based on the notion that protecting and promoting the inviolable rights of persons is the “most solemn responsibility of civil authority.” The bishops stated that:

25. Ibid.

The Church must be committed to the task of educating and supporting lay people involved in law-making, government and the administration of justice, so that legislation will always reflect those principles and moral values which are in conformity with a sound anthropology and advance the common good.²⁶

Pointing to the Declaration of Independence, the *Pastoral Plan* reiterated that the *Roe v. Wade* decision denied the basic rights of human beings. The bishops believed that the decision had the effect of denying unborn children the right to life. The *Pastoral Plan* also reminded those called to civil leadership that they had a duty to “make courageous choices in support of life, especially through legislative measures.”²⁷ The *Pastoral Plan* stated that those in civil leadership are privileged because they have the opportunity to apply their moral convictions to public policy and asserted that those who fail to do so risk their own spiritual well-being. In order to restore legal protection to unborn children, a comprehensive public policy program should include the following: passage of a constitutional amendment protecting unborn children’s right to life, federal and state laws restricting abortion as much as possible, continual challenging of the scope and reversal of Supreme Court and other court decisions denying the right to life, support for legislation providing morally acceptable alternatives to abortion, support for federal and state legislation that promotes effective palliative care for the chronically ill or dying, support for efforts to prevent legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide through legislation or referendum, and support for efforts to end the death penalty. A successful public policy

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

program was to involve well-planned and coordinated advocacy by citizens on the national, state, and local levels and would involve not just Catholics but widespread support from religious and secular groups. The *Pastoral Plan* reminded Catholics that it was their duty to reform the legal system to ensure that the weak are preserved and the right to life of every human being, born and unborn, is protected.²⁸

The last program in the *Pastoral Plan* was prayer and worship, which taught that participation in the sacramental life of the Church sustains all people. Priests were asked to preach the truth about the dignity of human life for both the born and unborn and to encourage parishioners to be compassionate to those who find themselves in stressful situations by offering assistance and helping them to make life-affirming decisions. Special attention was to be given to those who have suffered the loss of a child through miscarriage, abortion, or other causes. Parishes were asked to include petitions at every Mass asking that the United States respect and protect all forms of human life. On the anniversary of *Roe* a National Prayer Vigil for Life was to be held at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C. The prayer and worship program would conclude with the statement that “prayer is the foundation of all that we do in defense of human life” and was the only way to create a culture of life.²⁹

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

After the *Pastoral Plan* outlined its various programs, the next course of action was implementation. The Committee for Pro-Life Activities was asked to keep the full body of the hierarchy informed about the status of each program. The task of implementing the four programs was divided into four areas: a state coordinating committee, a diocesan pro-life committee, a parish pro-life committee, and a public policy effort at the local level. The state coordinating committee's purpose was to provide overall coordination in each state regarding public policy matters. Generally, the committees would comprise the state Catholic conference director and the pro-life directors from each diocese. It was envisioned that several committee members should have experience in legislative activity. The committees were tasked with monitoring social, legislative, and political trends and assessing their implications for the pro-life movement. Each state committee was also responsible for coordinating the efforts of the dioceses in the state regarding public policy and providing an evaluation of their progress. They would also analyze the relationships between political parties and coalitions at the state level. Finally, they would encourage cooperation among pro-life groups in the state.³⁰

The diocesan pro-life committees were given the job of coordinating the activities of the *Pastoral Plan* within the diocese. Each diocesan pro-life director received information and guidance from the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities and from the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment. The director would relay that

30. Ibid.

information back to the diocesan committee. The diocesan committees were headed by the diocesan pro-life director, who was appointed by, and responsible to, the diocesan bishop. The committees might also include a diocesan Respect Life coordinator; representatives of diocesan agencies; representatives of lay organizations; medical, legal, public affairs, and financial advisors; representatives of local pro-life groups; and representatives of parish pro-life/respect life committees. The committees were to direct and coordinate the diocesan and parish pro-life information and educational program; provide educational opportunities and information sharing among members of parish pro-life committees; support local programs that counsel and assist women with pregnancy-related problems; support diocese-wide post-abortion ministry; support local programs that provide care for the dying; encourage and coordinate programs that focus on the sanctity of all human life; maintain working relationships with local pro-life groups and encourage the development of local pro-life lobbying networks; maintain a local public information program that monitors media treatment of pro-life issues; undertake appropriate public advertising campaigns; develop responsible and effective communications with each elected representative; maintain communications with the Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities and the National Committee for a Human Life Amendment; and report periodically to the diocesan bishop on the status of the implementation of the *Pastoral Plan*.³¹

31. Ibid.

The parish pro-life committee was to make the parish a center of pro-life activity. The committee ensures that the parishioners understand the needs of the most vulnerable members of the parish, especially mothers of unborn children. The exact structure of the committee is not fixed, and the only requirement is that its membership should comprise representatives of adult and youth parish groups, members of organizations that represent persons with disabilities, persons of minority cultures, and those responsible for education and pastoral care. The pastor of the church appoints the chairperson of the parish pro-life committee. It is the duty of the chair to recruit volunteers to help serve the needs of the committee, and they must keep in mind the importance of renewal regarding membership, talents, and interests. The parish committee depends on its diocesan pro-life director for information and guidance. The committee is supposed to play an important role in parish life and should share its efforts with other parish programs. The objectives of the parish committee are: coordinating parish implementation of the annual Respect Life program; promote and assist pregnancy counseling and maternity support services; develop or adopt a parish-based ministry to pregnant women and their children; encourage and support parishioners' involvement in services to help those who are chronically ill, disabled, or dying; sponsor programs of prayer in the parish to pray for mothers and their unborn children, for those who are dying, for those who are disabled, for prisoners on death row and those they have harmed; foster awareness of the need to restore legal protection to the lives of unborn children to the maximum degree possible, and to safeguard in law the lives

of those who are chronically ill, disabled, or dying; and to keep parishioners informed of upcoming important legislation.³²

The last part of the implementation process was the public policy effort at the local level. To meet the hierarchy's goal of passing a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion, it was necessary to secure the support of members of Congress. The hierarchy believed that this effort would be most successful on the local level. It was to be done through activities organized on a congressional district basis (through the congressional district action committee). The congressional district action committee comprised citizens from a particular district and contained people of different faiths. Its purpose was to organize people to lobby their elected representatives to support pro-life legislation. The goals of the congressional district action committee included educating voters about the destructiveness of abortion and the need for pro-life legislation and constitutional amendments; helping voters to organize effectively to capture the attention of elected officials; and building effective mechanisms to lobby elected officials and candidates to support the legal protection of human life from conception to death. The *Pastoral Plan* noted that the Church does not engage in partisan politics but does foster the responsibility of all Catholics to be well-informed on issues and to recognize the right to vote as a civic responsibility.³³

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

The *Pastoral Plan* was approved for publication in November 1975 and was updated again in 1985. That year, the bishops approved for publication *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation*. In 2001 it was updated again by the Committee for Pro-Life Activities and approved by the hierarchy. *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Campaign in Support of Life* was approved for publication in 2001. Within the updated document, the bishops provided an updated conclusion that conveyed the success of the *Pastoral Plan*. The NCCB cited the decline in the number of abortions since the 1990s and the increased number of people who identified themselves as pro-life. The bishops also noted that the pro-life movement is one of the largest and most effective grassroots movements in the nation. The bishops highlighted the expanded services for women facing difficult pregnancies, as well as the restriction on abortion enacted by many state legislatures. Despite all of these pro-life successes, the *Pastoral Plan* admitted that federal law had changed very little since *Roe*. The bishops blamed *Roe* for making it impossible to provide meaningful protection to human beings until they were fully born. The plan promised, “Our own commitment will not waver. Our efforts will not cease. We will speak out on behalf of the sanctity of life wherever and whenever it is threatened.”³⁴ It ended with a renewed appeal to all Catholics to join in the building of a “culture of life.”

The adoption of the *Pastoral Plan* was not without controversy, as some worried about the Church becoming too involved in political activity. Some bishops worried that it

34. Ibid.

would cause the Church to lose its tax-exempt status and rekindle anti-Catholic sentiment.³⁵ The main area of concern was the creation of pro-life lobbying groups in every congressional district in the United States. Some bishops worried that people would think these groups were subordinate to the NCCB. Bishop James McHugh, who drafted the plan, revealed that the bishops struggled for several hours to figure out a way to formally distance the pro-life lobbying groups from the Church. This was accomplished by stating that the groups were operated, controlled, and financed by citizens, not the Church. The distinction appeased some groups, but not all. The detailed list of objectives seemed to make the autonomy of the group void.³⁶ Others bishops worried about the focus on the pro-life movement to the exclusion of all other issues. These fears seemed to be alleviated for a time, as the *Pastoral Plan* was approved by an overwhelming majority of the bishops.³⁷

The Pastoral Plan in Action

The local-level pro-life groups created by the *Pastoral Plan* were successful in convincing county legislatures to be more receptive to the anti-abortion fight. They created an impetus for pro-life groups to help elect pro-life legislators. These pro-life groups pressed county legislators to stop funding abortions. In New York State, three counties stopped financing abortions in 1978, and the Suffolk County legislature passed

35. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 59.

36. *Ibid.*, 59.

37. *Ibid.*, 60.

legislation to stop abortion funding. When the county executive vetoed the legislation, the legislature voted to override the veto.³⁸ The pro-life movement was also granted a partial victory by the Supreme Court's decision in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*. The Supreme Court was forced to decide the constitutionality of a Missouri law that placed various restrictions on access to abortions. In 1974 the state had enacted regulations requiring written consent for abortions performed during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy, including spousal consent for married women, and requiring doctors to preserve the life of the fetus regardless of the stage of pregnancy. Both provisions were struck down by the Burger Court. In 1979 the state of Missouri again passed legislation restricting abortions. The new law required that abortions performed after twelve weeks be performed in a hospital; that a pathology report be produced for each abortion; that a second physician be present during abortions performed on women whose fetuses were viable; and that minors obtain parental, or, if that was not possible, judicial consent.³⁹ In *Planned Parenthood Association of Kansas City, Missouri, Inc., v. Ashcroft*, the Burger Court struck down the second trimester hospitalization provision, yet upheld the three other restrictions. This decision was interpreted by many to mean that the Court was becoming more accepting of restrictive abortion laws.⁴⁰

38. Craig and O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 47.

39. Ibid., 199.

40. Ibid., 199-200.

In 1986, following a mobilization led by Andrew Puzder, a pro-life activist, the Missouri state legislature passed legislation restricting abortions even further. Certain provisions of the bill banned state funding for abortions and prohibited public hospitals from counseling women about abortions or even performing them unless it was medically necessary. A class-action lawsuit was filed in district court by Reproductive Health Services, the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and five public health-care providers. Several provisions of the legislation and the preamble declaring that life begins at conception were overturned by Chief Judge Scott O. Wright. Among the provisions struck down included the following requirements: (1) that all post-fifteen-week abortions be performed in hospitals; (2) that doctors conduct tests to determine whether fetuses are viable; and (3) the prohibition of the expenditure of public funds for abortions, the use of public facilities for the purpose of performing abortions, and the use of public employees from counseling women to have abortions unless it was necessary to save their lives.⁴¹ The decision was appealed by Missouri Attorney General William Webster to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eight Circuit. The Eighth Circuit affirmed the lower court decision except for the invalidation of the section of the law denying public funding for abortions not necessary to save the life of the woman. Webster then appealed the decision to the Supreme Court.⁴²

41. Ibid., 200.

42. Ibid., 200-201.

The Supreme Court upheld the main provisions of the Missouri law but stopped short of overturning *Roe*. The decision was both heartening and frustrating for the bishops. The Supreme Court had given a mixed interpretation of the legality of abortion in the United States. Because the Court indicated that *Roe* might possibly be overturned in the near future, both sides began a furious fight to mobilize support.⁴³ The decision in *Webster* also meant that the abortion battle could be fought in state legislatures and through public opinion.

Table 2.2 shows the results of a poll taken after the *Webster* decision in 1989. The results might lead to the assumption that the majority of Americans are pro-life. However, the fifty-five percent of people who disapproved of the decision included both pro-life and pro-choice supporters. Of those who were pro-choice, 39 percent disapproved of the decision because it allowed state restrictions on access to abortion. Of those on the pro-life side, 16 percent were unhappy because the Court did not overturn *Roe*. Not all of those who approved of the decision would approve of overturning *Roe*. When respondents were asked specifically if they supported overturning *Roe*, 58 percent said no and 34 percent said yes.⁴⁴

43. Ibid., 242.

44. Craig and O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 242.

Table 2.2 Webster Decision

Webster Decision	Percent
Approve	37
Disapprove	55

Source: Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*.

What these results mean is that public opinion polling cannot be taken at face value. Some people's responses are not identical to the specific choices offered. A respondent may have to choose the option that is closest to his or her actual belief. As such, polling results and true public opinion may be two entirely different things. One thing that is true is that most Americans support abortion with restrictions or oppose it with restrictions, while only a minority of Americans either oppose or support abortion without any limitations. The tracking of public opinion on abortion through the years has shown that public opinion remains relatively stable until there is a possibility of a change in the legal status of abortion. This includes a change in presidential administration or new Supreme Court decisions. Both the pro-choice and pro-life movements respond when there is any possibility that abortion laws may be changed. The most notable aspect of public opinion is that many people, while not supporting support abortion, are unwilling to outlaw it completely. It is interesting to note that most Americans accept abortion for medical reasons; however, the majority of abortions performed in the U.S. are done for social or economic reasons. A 1987 study found that 80 percent of all abortions performed that year were on women who were unmarried. Fifty-seven percent of pregnancies of

unmarried women that year ended in abortion. Nevertheless, most Americans believe that abortion should remain legal for medical reasons.⁴⁵

Despite years of opposing legalized abortion, many people still ask why the American Catholic bishops decided to focus the majority of their energy on the effort to overturn *Roe*. The *Pastoral Plan*, which was published in 1975 and subsequently updated in 1985 and 2001, maintained that abortion is the most important issue that Catholics and Americans in general face.⁴⁶ It was the bishops' belief that the U.S. government must protect the most basic of all human rights, the right to life. In order to provide racial justice, promote peace, or abolish capital punishment, there first needed to be an undeniable right to life. The American bishops were significantly impacted by the Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes*, which called on the Church to be a force for social change in the world and urged the bishops to be a progressive force for change rather than merely reacting to problems that occurred.

For a time, the bishops devoted the majority of their energy to other causes, such as Vietnam and peace in the Middle East; however, as they became more aware of the state of moral decline among both Catholics and non-Catholics, they changed direction. The fact that Catholics had become a prosperous segment of American society and were no longer viewed with suspicion meant that the American bishops no longer feared criticizing secular

45. Ibid., 245-246, 253.

46. The *Pastoral Plan* is reproduced on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops under the Committee for Pro-Life Activities, <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/pastoralplan.shtml>.

American life and public policy in particular. As stated previously, the bishops were outraged by the decision of the Supreme Court in *Roe* to legalize abortion. They wondered how the government of the United States could deny the most basic of all human rights and why more people were not upset by the decision. Following *Roe*, the NCCB decided that the best way to reverse the decision was through a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion. Yet the decision to focus on abortion was not self-evident. Some bishops worried about the effect of that decision on other important issues such as nuclear war and poverty. However, after several failed attempts by Congress to pass the amendment, the bishops changed course and issued the *Pastoral Plan*. As noted, the *Pastoral Plan* specifically stated that abortion was the most important issue for the Church. Without protection for the unborn child, the Catholic Church could not even hope to make a difference in other areas.

Public Opinion and Abortion

The Vatican II document *Gaudium et Spes* stated that “the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the time.”⁴⁷ In the 1970s, the sign of the times was that abortion was becoming publicly accepted by all Americans, including Catholics. From 1965 to 1973 support for abortion under specific circumstances grew dramatically. According to a National Opinion Research Center Opinion Poll, only 18 percent of respondents in 1965 believed that it was permissible for a single woman who was pregnant

47. Gene Burns, “Commitments ,” 718.

but who does not want to marry the father to have an abortion. By 1973, 49 percent responded that it was permissible.⁴⁸ The general public had also become more accepting of abortions for married women who did not want to have any more children. In 1965, 84 percent felt it was wrong; by 1973, only 53 percent of Americans believed it was unacceptable.⁴⁹ If the bishops were reading the signs of the times, they understood that public opinion was shifting. Abortion was becoming a permissible form of birth control, and the state legislatures and eventually the Supreme Court would follow the trend.⁵⁰

The National Opinion Research Center devised six categories in which it would be permissible for a woman to obtain an abortion. The six circumstances were divided into three “hard” and three “soft” reasons. “Hard” reasons were defined as medical reasons and comprised the first three circumstances. “Soft” reasons were typically social reasons and were the last three circumstances in the poll. The six circumstances were: (1) woman’s health is seriously endangered, (2) pregnancy was the result of rape, (3) possibility of serious defect in the baby, (4) low income and cannot afford more children, (5) the woman is not married and does not want to marry the father, and (6) the woman is married and does not want any more children. In recent years a seventh circumstance has been added regarding the pregnancy interfering with work or education.⁵¹ In 1965, 73 percent of respondents agreed that abortion was permissible if the health of the woman was in serious

48. Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 250.

49. *Ibid.*, 250.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 249.

danger. The majority of respondents also agreed that abortion was permitted if the woman had been raped or if there was a strong chance that the baby would be born with a serious birth defect. However, those numbers were not as strong as the woman's health being endangered. The level of support plummeted when asked about the "soft" reasons for having an abortion. Only 22 percent of those polled agreed that it should be possible for a woman to obtain an abortion if her family was poor and could not afford any more children. The numbers were similar for married woman who did not want to marry the father of the baby; only 18 percent agreed that an abortion should be permitted in that instance. In the case of a married woman who did not want any more children, 16 percent believed it was permissible.⁵²

By the early 1970s, the level of support for abortion in all six circumstances began to rise. In 1972, the number of those who agreed that abortion should be legal in the instance of rape rose twenty points to 79 percent. The same percentage agreed that it was also permissible if there was a significant chance that the baby would be born with a serious birth defect. The level of support for social reasons rose dramatically as well. In the instance that a woman's family was too poor to afford more children, the level of support increased from 22 percent to 49 percent. For women who were married but did not want more children, the level of support rose from 22 percent to 40 percent. Such levels of support increased again after the Supreme Court issued the *Roe* decision in 1973. The

52. Ibid., 249-250.

level of support for all six circumstances rose steadily through the 1970s and began to level off by the 1980s.⁵³ Tables 2.3 through 2.5 show the number of abortions performed from 1973 and 2005 and public opinion regarding abortion.

Throughout the 1980s, over which the conservative Reagan administration presided, the public showed lower levels of support for abortion. But by 1989, the level of approval had begun to rise again. The rise in support was most likely due to the *Webster* decision, and it continued into the 1992 elections. The 1990s showed an increase in support for abortion, but since then the country has moved slightly in the pro-life direction. The percentages of support for and disapproval of abortion do not tell the whole story of public opinion. In studying public opinion polls it is important to take several factors into consideration. These factors include the specific wording of the polling question and the age, religion, race, gender, educational level, and region of the respondent. All of these factors help social scientists to understand the often ambiguous nature of public opinion toward abortion.⁵⁴

53. Ibid., 250.

54. Ibid., 256.

Table 2.3 Number of Abortions Performed per
1,000 Women Ages 15-44 per Year

Year	Number of Abortions Performed
1973	16.3
1977	26.4
1981	29.3
1985	28
1989	26.8
1993	25
1997	21.9
2001	21.1
2005	19.4

Source: Guttmacher Institute

Table 2.4 Views on Abortion

Date	Available for Any Reason (Percent)	Only in Certain Circumstances (Percent)
May 12-18, 2010	37	44
November 24- December 7, 2008	37	43
November 26- December 9, 2007	34	45

Source: Gallup Poll

Table 2.5 Pro-Life or Pro-Choice

Date	Pro-Choice (Percent)	Pro-Life (Percent)
May 3-6, 2010	45	47
July 17-19, 2009	46	47
May 7-10, 2009	42	51
May 8-11, 2008	50	44
May 10-13, 2007	49	45
May 8-11, 2006	51	41
May 2-5, 2005	48	44
May 2-4, 2004	49	44
May 5-7, 2003	48	45
May 6-9, 2002	47	46

The Consistent Ethic of Life

Cardinal Bernardin, who had become chair of the Committee for Pro-Life Activities of the NCCB/USCC, worried that the hierarchy would push one particular issue at the expense of others. Therefore, he wanted to create what he termed a “consistent ethic of life” that would tie all life issues together. He believed that a well-developed theological and ethical framework was the key to linking various life issues, but at the same time such a framework would distinguish that not all issues were the same.⁵⁵ In

55. Joseph L. Bernardin, “A Consistent Ethic of Life” in *Catholic Church, Morality, and Politics*. Edited by Charles E. Curran and Leslie Griffin (Paulist Press, 2001), 161.

December 1983, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin was invited to give the Gannon Lecture at Fordham University. He was asked to address some aspect of the pastoral *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response*. Bernardin decided that he would address that topic in a very specific manner. Feeling that a university setting would be the ideal place for the examination of new ideas, he proposed a discussion of the pastoral in terms of the relationship of Catholic moral vision and American culture. Specifically, he wanted to use the address as a starting point for shaping his theory about creating a consistent ethic of life in American culture. Given the various threats to the sacredness of human life, Bernardin believed that the Church was in a unique position to defend life in a comprehensive and consistent manner. Bernardin acknowledged that although the pastoral mentioned the importance of both abortion and nuclear war, it did not argue the case for linkage. He believed that linking these issues would place the bishops in a unique public policy position because no other institution held these positions together in the same manner as the bishops and it was both a responsibility and an opportunity. The lecture was divided into three sections.⁵⁶

In the first section, Bernardin discussed the pastoral letter on war and peace as an example of the Church's role in shaping the public policy debate. The bishops stated that their purpose in writing the letter was to share the moral wisdom of the Catholic tradition

56. Joseph L. Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American-Catholic Dialogue" (address delivered at Fordham University, Gannon Lecture Series, Dec. 6, 1983).

with society in accordance with Vatican II's declaration that dialogue with the world was a sign of love for the world. The bishops' intentions were to raise fundamental questions about the dynamic of the arms race and the direction of American nuclear strategies. However, the main conclusion of the letter was that the Church's social policy role was important in defining key questions in public debate. Equally important was what Bernardin referred to as a "new moment" in the nuclear age, which was a mix of public perceptions and policy proposals. This "new moment" was also an "open moment" in which ideas were under scrutiny and even long-established ideas were subject to significant criticism. *The Challenge of Peace* helped open the door to the "new moment" and brought forth the possibility that there was room for public debate regarding the moral factor of issues such as nuclear war.⁵⁷

In Bernardin's analysis, *The Challenge of Peace* was a starting point for the development of a consistent ethic of life but it lacked a well-defined framework. Defining that framework was the purpose of Bernardin's lecture. Bernardin elaborated on the Catholic perspective of the consistent ethic of life in the second section of the lecture. The second section detailed the sacred value of every human life that is present in Christian tradition. He pointed out that the Catholic Church has not held the view that life may never be taken, but that there should always be a presumption against taking human life.

57. Ibid.

Because we live in a world marked by the effects of sin, there are some narrowly defined exceptions in which life can be taken, as discussed in the “Just War” ethic. In the last thirty years, the Church had undergone a period of strengthening the presumption against taking life and the restrictions had become greater. In 1959, Pope Pius XII reduced the traditional three-fold justification for going to war (defense, recovery of property, and punishment) to the single reason of defense of the innocent and protection of the values required for a decent human existence. In the instance of capital punishment, likewise, the bishops and Popes Paul VI and John Paul II had moved toward a position opposing the state’s right to employ the death penalty. Their argument was based on the belief that more humane methods of defending society exist and should be used. Bernardin believed that the most important element of this shift was not that the shift itself had occurred but the reasoning behind the shift.⁵⁸

The fundamental part of the shift in attitude toward the sanctity of life was the enhanced awareness of the many ways in which life is threatened. The issues of war and capital punishment are not new, but the context in which the questions arise is new. This new context, in Bernardin’s opinion, shaped the content of the ethic of the lives of Americans. Bernardin responded to the relationship of cultural context and the content of the ethic of the lives of Americans in terms of (1) the need for a consistent ethic of life; (2) the attitude necessary to sustain it; and (3) the principles needed to shape it. The dominant

58. Ibid.

factor behind this enhanced awareness of the fragility of life is technology. In *Redemptor Hominis*, John Paul II implored scientists to direct their work toward the promotion of life and refrain from creating instruments of death. Technological advancements had moved the discussion beyond what *could* be done to what *should* be done. Even more fundamentally, technology forced the question of what should never be done. The issues at the heart of these questions run across the spectrum of life from “womb to tomb” and have created a need for a consistent ethic of life. The purpose of the lecture was not to highlight the principles and application of this ethic but rather to highlight “the need for an attitude or atmosphere in society which is the precondition for sustaining it.” Bernardin also stated that the purpose of proposing a consistent ethic of life was to argue that success on any one of the issues threatening life requires a concern for the whole. The attitude of Americans was the best place in which to root an ethic of life, but in order to do so, Bernardin had to prove that an inner relationship did exist among several issues at both the level of general attitude and moral principles.⁵⁹

Bernardin used two examples to illustrate the inner relationship of the different moral issues facing the U.S. The first example was contained in the *Challenge of Peace* and involved the connection between Catholic teaching on war and Catholic teaching on abortion. The most explicit connection between the two was the principle that prohibits the intentional taking of innocent human life. Catholic teaching on abortion stated that the

59. Ibid.

fetus is both a human and an innocent non-aggressor, which makes a direct attack on a fetus wrong. The same principle was applied to the issue of nuclear war: directly intended attacks on civilian centers are always wrong. In accordance with that principle, an attack on innocent civilian centers is wrong even as an in-kind counterstrike; anyone asked to execute such orders should refuse. The principle of protecting innocent life was something which Cardinal Bernardin felt needed to be sustained in both instances. He noted that some people clearly saw the bishops' application of the principle in terms of abortion but felt that they had overstepped their bounds when it comes to nuclear war. Still others see the application of the hierarchy's principles on abortion as a violation of private choice. Bernardin believed that there is both a right to life and a right to a certain quality of life. The right to life of every fetus should be protected by civil law and supported by civil consensus, meaning that moral, political, and economic responsibilities do not stop at the moment of birth. Those who defend the right to life of every fetus must also advocate for quality of life for the powerless: the elderly, immigrants, the homeless, and the unemployed. For Bernardin, consistency in the application of support for life was the most important element of a consistent ethic of life. He stated, "We cannot urge a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental

responsibility.”⁶⁰ A right to both life and quality of life were complementary in domestic social policy and in foreign policy.

Cardinal Bernardin ended the third and final section of his lecture by stating that a consistent ethic of life must be held by a constituency in order to be effective. He called for a dialogue on the spectrum of life issues like the one that was generated by the pastoral letter on peace. He also asked that the Catholic Church extend its vision about the importance of the spectrum of life to the rest of society. Because the U.S. is a pluralistic society in terms of moral and religious convictions, the Church faced a difficult task in shaping its convictions in a non-religious manner. He closed by saying that there is new openness in society toward moral arguments and moral visions in public affairs. Bernardin believed that domestic and foreign policies were in dire need of change and that change was the challenge of the consistent ethic of life. He believed that the challenge was worth the Church’s energy, resources, and commitment.

Cardinal Bernardin knew that his plan would be met with skepticism. Despite receiving the support of many American bishops, the consistent ethic of life was publicly criticized by several prominent bishops. During the presidential election of 1984, John Cardinal O’Connor, archbishop of New York, and Bernard Cardinal Law, archbishop of Boston, vigorously urged an abortion-centered approach. Under the leadership of Law, the New England bishops announced that “while nuclear holocaust is a future possibility, the

60. Ibid.

holocaust of abortion is a present reality...Indeed, we believe that the enormity of the evil makes abortion the critical issue of the moment.”⁶¹ Archbishop O’Connor supported these remarks with his statement that “...If the unborn in a mother’s womb is unsafe it becomes ludicrous for the bishops to address the threat of nuclear war or the great problems of the homeless or the suffering of the aged.”⁶² Law and O’Connor contradicted the main principles of the consistent ethic of life and instead maintained that ending legalized abortion was the most important task facing the bishops. Believing that their ideas were correct, O’Connor and Law reiterated their position that abortion was the most important issue in the 1984 presidential election. Despite their very public announcements of the position of abortion in the presidential campaign, the two powerful bishops were met with opposition. Twenty-three bishops who were members of Pax Christi released a response directly to Law and O’Connor opposing their positions. The response stated:

One cannot examine abortion as though that were the only moral issue facing our people...Without imposing our moral convictions on anyone, it does not seem the place of religious leaders to ask that moral evaluation be brought to the entire spectrum of life issues and to encourage our people to be wary of any narrowing of moral vision to focus on only one issue.⁶³

Bernardin also responded by rejecting the notion that abortion was more important than nuclear war and stated, “The possibility of a nuclear war is a clear and present danger.”⁶⁴

Although the bishops could not agree on the primacy of abortion within the public policy

61. Byrnes, “Catholic Bishops,” 116.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

debate of the 1984 election, the publicity generated by their disagreement added to the prominence of the abortion debate.

The consistent ethic of life theory that Cardinal Bernardin outlined at Fordham University received significant attention. Many wanted Bernardin to clarify exactly what he meant by a consistent ethic of life; he was given the chance at the William Wade Lecture Series at St. Louis University on March 11, 1984. He addressed three topics in relation to his consistent-ethic-of-life theory: (1) the case for a consistent ethic of life; (2) the distinct levels of the problem; and (3) the contribution of a consistent ethic of life to the Church and society generally. As he had done in the Gannon lecture, Bernardin used the opportunity to discuss how the pastoral *The Challenge of Peace* was rooted in a wider moral vision. Bernardin also wanted to address concerns that were brought forth after his first lecture. These included fears on the part of some individuals who agreed with the Church's position on peace but were at odds with the Church on other issues, as well as those who feared that the consistent-ethic-of-life approach would weaken the Church's opposition to both abortion and the arms race. Bernardin responded by specifying the necessary reasons for adhering to a consistent ethic of life: (1) the dimensions of the threats of life today; and (2) the value of moral vision. He juxtaposed the level of threats to life in regard to nuclear arms and abortion. He stated that nuclear war was a tangible threat that had captured the attention of the nation and created such movements as the "nuclear freeze." Bernardin believed that the Church was part of the process of bringing the issue

of nuclear war to a new standing in the public eye, and cited Pope John Paul II's attempts to bring awareness to the issue of nuclear war in terms of the problems of technology, politics, and ethics. Examining the nuclear issue in terms of the problems of technology, politics, and ethics made the multiple threats to life at that time very clear. Pope John Paul II believed that "it [wa]s only through a conscious choice and through a deliberate policy that humanity can be saved." Bernardin believed that John Paul II's statement could be applied to a broad range of life issues. He stated that nuclear war threatens life on an unimaginable scale but abortion takes life on a daily basis, as do the practices of execution and euthanasia. From his perspective, each of these issues was a unique problem but all needed to be confronted as "pieces of a larger pattern."⁶⁵

Bernardin was such a strong advocate for a consistent ethic of life because he was persuaded by the interrelatedness of these diverse problems and was convinced that the Catholic moral vision had the scope, strength, and subtlety to address the wide range of issues in an effective manner. A consistent ethic of life, which entails the protection of life from "womb to tomb," made evident the positive potential of the Catholic moral and social tradition. The consistent ethic of life was intended to identify both the protection of life and its promotion as a moral question. A consistent ethic of life meant that everyone should support a systemic vision of life. He stated, "It is not necessary or possible for

65. Joseph Bernardin, "A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue," delivered during the William Wade Lecture Series at St. Louis University, March 11, 1984.

every person to engage in each issue, but it is both possible and necessary for the Church as a whole to cultivate a conscious explicit connection among the several issues.”⁶⁶ In other words, everyone must do something to protect and promote the sanctity of human life.

There were four dimensions to Bernardin’s consistent-ethic-of-life theory: general moral principles, distinction among cases, how we relate a commitment to principles in our public witness to life, and the relationship between moral principles and concrete political choices. The first level was that of general moral principles; Bernardin believed it was possible to identify a single principle with diverse applications. He referred back to his address at Fordham University, in which he used the principle of prohibiting direct attacks against innocent life. The principle is central to the Catholic moral vision, and it is also relatable to a number of moral issues such as abortion, direct attacks on civilians during military engagements, and euthanasia. Each one of these topics has its own group of individuals who are committed to it, and a consistent ethic of life would allow them all to see how their efforts are interrelated. Each individual group is called to defend the moral principle of protection of life.

The second level of the consistent ethic of life stressed the distinction among the different issues instead of their similarities. Bernardin noted that sometimes a systemic vision of life issues requires the combination of different moral insights. He used the

66. Ibid.

example of capital punishment to show how classical teaching gives the state the right to execute criminals in order to protect innocent life; however, an emerging concern for the promotion of a public attitude of respect for life led the American Catholic bishops to oppose the exercise of that right.

The third level was the question of how to relate a commitment to principles to the public witness of life.⁶⁷ As he had stated before, Bernardin did not expect everyone actively to support all life issues, but he did believe that all people can do something. He believed that the Church must be a witness across a broad range of issues and that the scope of its moral vision required a commitment to a number of questions.

The last level of the consistent ethic of life is the relationship between moral principles and concrete political choices. The moral questions of abortion and the arms race are public moral issues, but they are decided on through the political process. Bernardin believed that a consistent ethic of life would present a coherent linkage among diverse issues. It should be used to test party platforms, public policies, and political candidates. The Church fulfilled its public role by creating a framework for political choices, relating them to specific issues and urging a systemic moral analysis of all public policy areas. The bishops also filled their public role by releasing a *Statement on Political Responsibility* before every presidential and congressional election.⁶⁸

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid.

Bernardin concluded his lecture by stating that “the pastoral life of the Church should not be guided by a simplistic criterion of relevance. But the capacity of faith to shed light on the concrete questions of personal and public life today is one way in which the value of the Gospel is assessed.”⁶⁹ He believed that nuclear arms, abortion, capital punishment, and euthanasia were all distinct problems but that treating them separately failed to show how a choice in one area affects choices in another area. There must be, in his opinion, a public attitude of respect for all life.

Abortion in the Political Debate

The abortion debate was given more attention because it occurred outside of the NCCB and within the public spectrum. Additionally, the 1984 presidential election had taken on a deeply religious tone. Both President Reagan and Walter Mondale argued over the place of faith in public policy debates. President Reagan believed that “faith and religion play a central role in the political life of our nation.” Because of that belief, Mondale accused him of blurring the line separating church and state. The religious tone of the 1984 election became so prominent that the real question became where the influence of Christian morality on public policy should begin. This question made the debate among the bishops even more difficult. Cardinal Bernardin wished to avoid the partisan debates among the candidates that had occurred in 1976 and instead embraced the unique position that the bishops could hold in 1984 because of the cross-cutting nature of

69. Ibid.

their most prominently articulated policy positions.⁷⁰ Bernardin's approach had some drawbacks, particularly in that it implied solidarity with the Democratic platform. In placing the prohibition of abortion and opposition to nuclear war on the same level, the bishops appeared to be endorsing the Democrats despite certain areas of disagreement. Bishops O'Connor and Law faced the same problem with the Republican Party; however, they did not mind that the primacy of the abortion issue linked them to Reagan and the Republican platform.⁷¹ They believed that they were not advocating one candidate over another, but rather were calling attention to a critical issue of the campaign in which one candidate opposed abortion and one supported it. O'Connor went so far as to say that he could not see "how a Catholic in good conscience could vote for an individual explicitly expressing himself or herself as favoring abortion."⁷²

The American bishops continued to debate the position of abortion within their public policy agenda, but the public statements of O'Connor and Law denouncing pro-choice candidates and the Catholics who voted for them only made the issue of abortion more prominent. O'Connor and Law engaged in public debates with Mario Cuomo, the Catholic governor of New York, and Geraldine Ferraro, the Catholic vice-presidential nominee, both Democrats. Cuomo replied at one point by saying, "Now you have the Archbishop of New York saying that no Catholic can vote for Ed Koch, no Catholic can

70. Byrnes, "Catholic Bishops," 118.

71. Ibid., 118-119.

72. Ibid., 119.

vote for...Pat Moynihan, or Mario Cuomo—anybody who disagrees with him on abortion.”⁷³ That same year, O’Connor accused Geraldine Ferraro of misrepresenting the teachings of the Catholic Church. Using a letter that Ferraro had signed two years earlier from Catholics for a Free Choice presentation, which invited members of Congress to a briefing to show how the Catholic position on abortion was not monolithic, he accused her of causing the world to believe that the Catholic Church was divided on the subject of abortion. Ferraro eventually relented to O’Connor’s pressuring by saying that she understood that the Church position on abortion was monolithic, but that not all Catholics share that view. She was even criticized during a speech in Scranton, Pennsylvania (where O’Connor had once served as bishop) by the current bishop, James Timlin. Despite the fact that few bishops were highlighting the abortion issue, Law, O’Connor, and Timlin made it quite clear that the bishops would not accept Catholic politicians who favored legalized abortion.⁷⁴

O’Connor, Law, and Timlin explained that they had no intention of derailing any candidate’s campaign, nor did they have any ill will toward them. They simply believed that abortion should have a higher place in the political agenda. Some political scientists have noted that the actions of O’Connor and Law were reactions to political conditions and the relationship of those conditions to the teachings of the Church. Their actions were also

73. Ibid., 119.

74. Ibid., 120-121.

believed to be a way of counterbalancing Bernardin's consistent ethic of life, reinforcing the identification of the bishops with the anti-abortion cause, and preventing pro-choice candidates from relying on their agreement with the bishops on issues other than abortion.⁷⁵

Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1984 presidential election signaled an important moment for the American bishops. The public statements of O'Connor and Law criticizing pro-choice candidates did not cause those candidates to lose, but they did show that abortion had prevailed as the major issue for the church. The importance of the abortion issue was emblazoned in the *New York Times*. On September 6, 1984, the *Times* ran a story about how Walter Mondale planned to call the Soviet leadership on his first day in the Oval Office to discuss arms control. Since the hierarchy had released *The Challenge of Peace* in 1983, Mondale thought the bishops would support his efforts. However, in the same edition of the paper, there was a quote from Cardinal Bernard Law that said, "We are not saying that you must vote for a particular candidate. But we are saying that when you make up your mind [abortion] is the critical issue."⁷⁶ A few days later the headline was "Mondale Plans to Focus on Issues Where He Says Reagan is Weak." Mondale stated that voters felt Reagan was going in the wrong direction regarding war and peace, but he was bested again by O'Connor. In the column next to the story was a headline that read

75. Ibid., 122.

76. Ibid., 125.

“O’Connor Critical of Ferraro’s Views.”⁷⁷ Mondale, although in accord with the American bishops regarding war and peace, could not escape the publicity that a few vocal bishops who believed abortion was the critical issue of the election had garnered. Some mistakenly believed that O’Connor, Law, and few other vocal opponents of abortion were speaking on behalf of the hierarchy. Whether the entire hierarchy of American bishops agreed or not, abortion had become their central focus.⁷⁸

It took the 1984 presidential election for abortion to be solidified as the main priority of the American bishops, but most voters had made that assumption long before 1984. In 1980, Federal Judge John Dooling of the United States District Court, Eastern District of New York, ruled that the Hyde Amendment, which prevented Medicaid payment for abortion, was unconstitutional. In *McRae vs. HEW*, Dooling, who was a Catholic, stated his belief that the Catholic Church was the “main source of energy, organization, and direction” for the right-to-life movement.⁷⁹ Dooling also described how the Catholic Church used single-issue voting to pressure legislators, candidates, and party organizations.⁸⁰ Dooling’s opinion illustrates how anti-abortion efforts had become synonymous with the Catholic Church. It is clear that the bishops decided to focus on abortion, but why abortion at the expense of other issues?

77. Ibid.

78. Ibid., 122-125.

79. Stephen Mumford, *American Democracy and the Vatican: Population Growth and National Security* (Amherst, NY: Humanist Press, 1984): 43.

80. Ibid., 43.

The Seamless Garment

The *Pastoral Plan* clearly stated that success in any other issue would be meaningless if the government could not protect the basic right to life of an unborn child. When Cardinal Bernardin tried to broaden the bishops' agenda with his consistent ethic of life, he made some critical errors. These errors caused him eventually to retract the main aspects of his theory, resulting in the abandonment of his proposed theory.⁸¹ Bernardin had begun expressing his idea for a consistent ethic back in 1975 during a homily on the second anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*: "If we are consistent, then, we must be concerned about life from beginning to end. It is like a seamless garment: either it all holds together or eventually it all falls apart."⁸² It has been argued that if Bernardin had adopted this as the strategy of the NCCB's Pro-Life Committee when he became chairman it would have fallen into obscurity.⁸³ The problem was that he proposed it as a theory during a 1983 speech at Fordham University and then immediately implemented it as a strategy for the NCCB. It was quite telling that in his speech, Bernardin said that he "would leave its finer articulation to 'philosophers and poets, theologians and technicians, scientists, and strategists, political leaders and plain citizens.'"⁸⁴ Between 1983 and 1988, Bernardin continued to restate his main points but reiterated that his theory awaited development.

81. Michael Pakaluk, "Does the Seamless Garment Make Sense?" in *The Catholic Church, Morality, and Politics*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Leslie Griffin (Kansas City, MO: Paulist Press, 2001), 197.

82. Ibid., 197.

83. Ibid.

84. Pakaluk, "Seamless Garment," 197.

When Bernardin tried to clarify his position during the speech at St. Louis University, some people became even more confused about what he meant by a “seamless garment.” The problem was caused by the fact that some people believed that the term “seamless garment” referred to the idea that all of the linked issues were of equal importance, so that if one acted against a single issue one acted against them all. In this interpretation, people who defend the right to life must also defend quality of life. But that was not the meaning that Bernardin had intended to convey.⁸⁵

The inconsistency of the consistent ethic was even attacked by some members of Congress. In regard to the premise that one cannot oppose abortion but can favor capital punishment, Rep. Barney Frank remarked that “the Reagan administration believes that respect for life begins with conception and ends with birth.”⁸⁶ Bernardin’s logic somewhat followed Frank’s statement because he wanted things both ways. He wanted the government to prohibit parents from killing their children and he wanted the government to require those same parents to feed, clothe, and educate their children.⁸⁷ The defect in his argument was that various unequal issues were given equal importance, even though some issues were more urgent than others. Critics insisted that the threat of nuclear war was not as important as the actual millions of fetuses aborted each year. The American bishops may not unanimously have agreed that abortion should be their main focus, but they could

85. Ibid., 197-198.

86. Ibid., 200.

87. Ibid., 201.

not argue with the fact that, while a nuclear war had not occurred, abortions continued to be performed each day. A few vocal opponents of the consistent-ethic-of-life theory caused its flaws to be publicly displayed. As such, the NCCB returned to the directives of the *Pastoral Plan*.⁸⁸

The American bishops did have some advantages in their fight to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Despite the growing number of Americans who supported legal abortion, the pro-life forces had significantly stronger organizational and financial foundations. Between 1978 and 1988, pro-life Political Action Committees (PACs) received almost double the amount of money received by pro-choice PACs.⁸⁹ Part of the reason was that pro-choice groups could rest soundly on the fact that from 1973 to 1989 the Supreme Court consistently overturned state legislative efforts to restrict access to abortions.⁹⁰ These groups also felt confident that even pro-life presidents such as Reagan and Bush would not be able to overturn the Supreme Court's rulings. Congress was also believed to be no threat to legalized abortions. The problem for pro-choice groups was that Supreme Court justices eventually leave the bench and may be replaced with judges appointed by presidents who do not support *Roe*.⁹¹

88. Pakaluk, "Seamless Garment," 200-201.

89. Clyde Wilcox, "The Consequences of Public Attitudes toward Abortion" in *Perspectives on the Politics of Abortion*, ed. Ted Jelen (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 56.

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

In 1989 the battle to overturn legalized abortion became more difficult. The Supreme Court, in *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, upheld a Missouri law that banned state hospitals from performing most abortions, required doctors to perform tests of viability before performing an abortion, and maintained a preamble to the law that declared that life begins at conception. While the Court refused to overturn *Roe*, the decision in *Webster* did show that four justices were willing to overturn *Roe* and a fifth would possibly consider overturning it in a future decision. Since the Court was one justice short of overturning the decision in the first year of President George H.W. Bush's first term, pro-choice forces had to act quickly and decisively. If the decision was overturned, supporters of abortion would need to pass a national abortion rights law, which would have to survive a Republican veto.⁹²

In addition, because of the Supreme Court's finely nuanced position on abortion, states felt compelled to test the limits of restricting access to abortions. Louisiana and Utah passed laws that banned most abortions, and some states tried to weaken the protections granted under *Roe*. Pro-choice groups could no longer sit back and relax; they were under pressure to preserve the protections granted under *Roe*. After *Webster*, pro-choice PACs surpassed pro-life groups in fundraising. More and more pro-choice candidates were elected to gubernatorial posts.⁹³

92. Ibid., 58.

93. Ibid., 60.

Public opinion also changed after the *Webster* decision, but the changes were unclear. In a *CBS News/New York Times* poll conducted in 1989, 25 percent of Americans believed that abortion was both murder and sometimes the best choice. The choice to support legalized abortion was influenced by many factors, but one of the most significant factors appeared to be education. Pro-choice forces are vastly supported by Americans who have received some form of postgraduate education. Pro-choice citizens have been found to be better educated and more affluent than pro-life supporters. They are also likely to be professionals or managers.⁹⁴

In response to the mobilization of both sides of the abortion debate, political parties began to modify their platforms to attract voters. Both parties operated under the belief that citizens who vote in primary elections were more extreme than average citizens. They wanted to tailor their platforms to fit those extremes. Therefore, Democrats, whose constituency was made up of largely pro-choice supporters, took the position of supporting women's right to abortion. The Republicans took the opposite approach to appease their primary constituents.

The NCCB returned to focus primarily on the evils of abortion, largely due to the imminent threat to the right to life. But what issues were pushed to the side, and how did they compare to the issue of abortion?

94. Ibid., 66.

The NCCB and Its Other Issues

Poverty

Poverty has always been an important issue for the American Catholic Church. American Catholics were once poor, uneducated immigrants, and the leaders of the Church were keenly aware of the financial problems facing their parishioners. Even after Catholics became one of the most prosperous groups in America, the bishops kept their commitment to eradicating poverty. Moreover, Catholic social teachings, as outlined in numerous encyclicals since the famed *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, insist on the so-called “preferential option for the poor” in all policymaking. In 1967 the NCCB urged the House of Representatives to pass legislation supporting the War on Poverty that was being waged by the Office of Economic Opportunity. They asked the House of Representatives to defeat any amendments that would impede the commitment made to the economically and socially handicapped.

Marriage

Over the years, the American bishops have released various statements about the sanctity of marriage. In all of the statements about marriage, the bishops have always returned to the theme of life. For the bishops, marriage “exists so that the spouses might grow in mutual love and, by the generosity of their love, bring children into the world and

serve life fully.”⁹⁵ Abortion is wrong because it takes an innocent life, capital punishment is wrong because it denies the dignity of life, and homosexual practices are wrong because there is no possibility of the creation of life. While the Church reminds Catholics that homosexual persons should be afforded the same dignity as heterosexual persons, they still oppose same-sex unions and homosexual acts because the possibility of life does not exist:

Our respect for them [homosexuals] means we condemn all forms of unjust discrimination, harassment or abuse. Equally clear is the Church’s teaching about the meaning of sexual relations and their place only within married life. What are called ‘homosexual unions,’ because they do not express full human complementarity and because they are inherently non-procreative, cannot be given the status of marriage.⁹⁶

Marriage is an institution of nature that forms the bedrock of our social and civil life. It is therefore critical for upholding the natural order of society.

Peace

In the 1980s a significant portion of the hierarchy’s energy was focused on the effort to prevent nuclear war. The NCCB released a highly publicized pastoral in 1983 entitled *The Challenge of Peace*, which was received with mixed reactions. The bishops had grown increasingly worried about the threat of nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Their criticism of the military initiatives of the U.S. marked a departure from their usual behavior. In the past, the Catholic Church could be counted on

95. Statement of the Administrative Committee United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, September 9, 2003, <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2003/03-179.shtml> (accessed November 18, 2008).

96. Statement of the Administrative Committee, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, September 9, 2003.

to provide unwavering support for U.S. foreign policy. The Church's support was critical during World War I and World War II, but it began to dwindle during the Vietnam War.

The main problem with *The Challenge of Peace* was that because the bishops had differing opinions on the legitimacy of nuclear weapons, the final document appeared to be a compromise and sometimes contradicted Church teachings. The Church's initial teachings on nuclear war were set by Pope Pius XII, who evaluated nuclear war in relation to the theory of just war. The next pope, Pope John XXIII, did not take the same approach to nuclear weapons. In his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* he asked for a ban on nuclear weapons and an end to the arms race.⁹⁷ During Vatican II, the Church released its *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, which urged an evaluation of war. The pastoral constitution declared that any act of war that knowingly targeted non-combatants was a crime against God and humanity. The document also stated that while many might agree that deterrence (by threatening the use of nuclear weapons) is the most effective means of maintaining peace, the arms race was not a safe way to achieve or maintain peace. The document was problematic because it did not evaluate all types of nuclear weaponry. Specifically, it did not evaluate the specific structures and targeting strategies of the U.S. military. The task of evaluating U.S. military practices was left to the American bishops. In 1976, the bishops released *To Live in Christ*, which urged prevention of the development of nuclear weapons with massive destructive capability,

97. Byrnes, "Catholic Bishops," 97.

stating that it was wrong to attack civilians and to threaten the use of nuclear weapons (deterrence).⁹⁸

The problem most critics had with *The Challenge of Peace*, which was created by the Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace, or the Bernardin Committee, was that in order for it to be adopted by two-thirds of the hierarchy, it would have to contain provisions acceptable to everyone. One outcome of this problem was that throughout the three drafts of the pastoral, the bishops struggled to find a morally acceptable justification for nuclear deterrence.⁹⁹ Pope John Paul II had determined that deterrence was a step toward disarmament and might be morally acceptable, and the American bishops could not contradict papal teachings. Furthermore, the committee drafting the pastoral comprised bishops with wide-ranging views on military initiatives. The committee also feared that if the pastoral was too pacifist, they would be out of the mainstream and would therefore lack any influence.¹⁰⁰

The idea that the bishops would conclude that nuclear deterrence was acceptable did not sit well with many people. In justifying nuclear deterrence as morally acceptable, the bishops had to contradict the Church's just-war theory. Specifically, they contradicted the principle of discrimination, which stated that a government is not justified in attacking non-military targets or population centers. One critic, Samuel S. Kim, noted that the

98. Ibid., 97.

99. Susan Moller Okin, "Taking the Bishops Seriously," *World Politics* (July 1984): 528.

100. Ibid., 528-529.

bishops most likely adopted the position of acceptance of nuclear deterrence as a means of gaining consensus. He also noted that the pastoral fails to condemn the production and deployment of nuclear weapons as a moral crime. Kim stated that “the bishops came very close to adopting the position that ‘you can have it but shouldn’t use it’ without satisfying the *ad bellum* and *in bello* criteria.”¹⁰¹ Kim argued that the bishops ignored evidence that nuclear weapons had become “more like an uncontrollable plague threatening to destroy human civilization than a manageable instrument in the service of peace and justice.”¹⁰² The need for consensus may also have forced the bishops to reject the idea of consequentialist reasoning through their acceptance of deterrence. The three drafts of the pastoral contained different views of deterrence and switched from rejecting nuclear deterrence as morally wrong, to accepting it as the lesser of two evils, to finally accepting deterrence as a necessary means of maintaining peace.¹⁰³

Another flaw in the bishops’ reasoning in *The Challenge of Peace* was that the limitations placed upon the deterrence policy and the Church’s just-war theory made it virtually impossible for any effective nuclear deterrence policy to meet their standards.¹⁰⁴ The biggest problem appears to be that the bishops created confusion by rejecting any possibility of the legitimate use of nuclear weapons, yet they ultimately accepted the

101. Samuel S. Kim, “The U.S. Catholic Bishops and the Nuclear Crisis,” *Journal of Peace Research* (December 1985): 325.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid., 325-326.

104. Okin, “Taking the Bishops Seriously,” 531.

possibility of nuclear deterrence.¹⁰⁵ If their reasoning is to be followed logically, then nuclear deterrence should be rejected as morally unacceptable. *The Challenge of Peace* shows that while the American bishops had the noble intention of preventing unnecessary conflicts and protecting innocent lives, the need for consensus regarding the pastoral meant that the message ultimately had to be watered down to appease the majority of bishops. It was not like the issue of abortion, in which all the bishops agreed that having an abortion was wrong. Some bishops were quite “hawkish” and supported the production of nuclear weapons, while other bishops were more “dovish” and wanted to deescalate the arms race.¹⁰⁶

Capital Punishment

Beginning in the late 1970s, the American bishops spoke publicly about their opposition to capital punishment. Although the hierarchy has been able to define a clear and unified position, the death penalty has not received as much attention as abortion. Perhaps the issue does not resonate as strongly with Americans because of the usually heinous nature of the crime that was committed and the feeling that justice is best served by taking the criminal’s life. Another reason may be that while few people know anyone on death row, most people know someone who has either had or considered having an abortion. The bishops recognized that fear of violent crime caused many Americans to

¹⁰⁵. Ibid., 531.

¹⁰⁶. Ibid., 531-539.

support the use of the death penalty. In a 1980 statement regarding capital punishment, the bishops addressed the reinstatement of the death penalty:

We should note that much of this debate was carried on in a time of intense public concern over crime and violence. For instance, in 1976 alone, over 18,000 people were murdered in the United States. Criticism of the inadequacies of the criminal justice system has been widespread, even while spectacular crimes have spread fear and alarm, particularly in urban areas. All these factors make it particularly necessary that Christians form their views on this difficult matter in a prayerful and reflective way and that they show a respect and concern for the rights of all.¹⁰⁷

Knowing the emotion and fear that the capital punishment debate would evoke, the bishops recognized that the issue would require serious debate. The debate would involve the “great mysteries of evil and human freedom” and the “complex reality that is contemporary society.”¹⁰⁸ The bishops offered three justifications for punishment—reform, deterrence, and retribution—and explained them in the context of capital punishment. Reform or rehabilitation allows the criminal to develop a new way of life that adheres to societal norms. The finality of the death penalty renders reform or rehabilitation impossible. The benefits of deterrence are also not met through the use of capital punishment; the hierarchy noted that death certainly deters the individual from preventing another heinous crime, yet there is no evidence that it deters others. “The small number of death sentences in relation to the number of murders also makes it seem highly unlikely

107. Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1980, <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/criminal/death/uscc80.shtml> (accessed November 18, 2008).

108. Ibid.

that the threat will be carried out and so undercuts the effectiveness of the deterrent.”¹⁰⁹

Retribution, or restoration of the violation of justice, is absolutely necessary for the maintenance of society, but it does not require the taking of a life:

It is morally unsatisfactory and socially destructive for criminals to go unpunished, but the forms and limits of punishment must be determined by moral objectives which go beyond the mere inflicting of injury on the guilty.¹¹⁰

Essentially, the bishops wanted to remind Americans that those who enforce laws must be better than those who break the law and must set an example for the proper way to behave.

The pastoral invokes the words of St. Thomas Aquinas:

In this life, however, penalties are not sought for their own sake, because this is not the era of retribution; rather, they are meant to be corrective by being conducive either to the reform of the sinner or the good of society, which becomes more peaceful through the punishment of sinners.¹¹¹

As Christians, the hierarchy wanted Catholics to remember that the death penalty invalidates the dignity of all human beings and invalidates the conviction that God is the Lord of life who decides when a person lives or dies.

In December 2005, the USCCB released a pastoral entitled *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death* that detailed the progress the Church had made in fighting the death penalty. It contains significant statistical data on capital punishment and public opinion. Some of the justifications for abolishing the death penalty include the long period of time that elapses between the death sentence and the actual execution, which renders capital

109. Ibid.

110. Statement of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Capital Punishment, 1980.

111. Ibid.

punishment ineffective as a deterrent. Death sentences are not carried out frequently, and the time delay allows people to forget about the problem.¹¹²

Faith-Based Initiatives

In February 2001, the USCCB applauded President George W. Bush's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. They praised President Bush for welcoming the participation of faith-based and community groups in the fight against poverty and other issues. The bishops appreciated the opportunity to work with the federal government to provide both spiritual guidance and public policy guidance to combat the growing problem. "The efforts of the Catholic community and those of other religious and community groups can touch hearts and change lives, but our efforts cannot replace needed government action..."¹¹³ They recognized an opportunity and vowed to work with President Bush to address childhood poverty and widespread violence.

Although the need to combat poverty and violence was extremely important, the initiative took a back seat to more pressing issues. After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the Bush Administration's attention was pulled in another direction. The USCCB attempted to jumpstart stalled legislation regarding the faith-based and community initiatives. The bishops expressed concern regarding a faith-based initiative bill that had

112. "A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death," developed by the Committee on Domestic Policy of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. It was approved by the full body of the bishops at its General Meeting in November 2005.

113. Statement by His Eminence Cardinal Roger Mahony, Archbishop of Los Angeles, Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee, February 12, 2001.

been passed in the House of Representatives but had been held up in the Senate because a letter containing anthrax was delivered to Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's office. While they remained unsure of the possibility of Congress resuming debate on the legislation, they released a letter expressing support for the legislation. In February 2002, the USCCB released a statement supporting H.R. 7, the Community Solutions Act, which was passed in the House in July 2001. The USCCB supported the legislation but was disappointed that "equal treatment" language, which contained clarifications that religious organizations cannot be required to alter or remove religious icons or symbols or change their names, was not a condition of participating in federally funded programs serving the poor. The USCCB was also upset that the legislation did not include new Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) funding. The bishops encouraged Catholics to contact their senators and representatives and urge them to complete work on the faith-based and community initiative legislation.¹¹⁴

The USCCB continued to release statements supporting faith-based initiative legislation. While they were successful on some levels, faith-based initiatives did not receive the same attention as other legislation. In the post-9/11 world, the attention of the White House and Congress was turned more toward security and immigration-related

114. Statement of the USCCB Social Development and World Peace Committee on President Bush's Faith-Based Initiatives and Community Development, February 2002.

legislation. Undaunted by the situation, the bishops continued to advocate for faith-based legislation, as well as for immigration reform and climate change legislation.

Conclusion

During the past thirty years, the attention of the USCCB has turned to a wide range of issues. They have become strong advocates of finding peaceful ends to military conflicts, ending capital punishment, and eradicating childhood poverty. However, these issues have not garnered the same attention as the bishops' fight against abortion. When the bishops were drawn into elections and politics, their focus was not on poverty or capital punishment but on abortion. Even though abortion was not always the most important issue on voters' minds, it seemed always to find its way into electoral politics. The bishops' plan to end abortion was more focused and strategic than any of their other plans and reflected an overwhelming consensus among the bishops themselves. Abortion, it appears, struck a chord with the bishops, politicians, and the American people.

When the *Roe* decision was announced, the bishops felt that a constitutional amendment banning abortion would be the best solution. They initially determined that testifying before Congress and releasing pastorals would be their most effective strategy. In 1975, the USCCB released the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*. It has been described as the most detailed and aggressive political plan ever produced by the hierarchy. The *Pastoral Plan* created the outline for the bishops' 30-plus-year battle to end abortion. It did not, however, come without disagreements. Cardinal Joseph Bernardin worried that

the hierarchy would be labeled a one-issue institution. Bernardin attempted to create a platform in which all life issues would be given equal weight. This position was not articulated well and was met with very public criticism from Cardinals O'Connor of New York and Law of Boston. O'Connor and Law's statements during the 1984 presidential election were so well publicized that virtually everyone believed that the bishops' main priority was ending abortion.

Whether Bernardin desired it or not, the 1984 election solidified abortion as the main priority for the U.S. bishops. Despite releasing pastorals on nuclear war and other issues, it was abortion that received the most attention. Neither party was allowed a pass for their agreement with the bishops on other issues. As Democrats learned, agreement with the bishops on other policy issues did not excuse disagreement on the abortion issue. Abortion remains the one issue that divides people of all political ideologies, religious affiliations, gender, economic levels, and educational backgrounds. It is the defining political issue of our time. By emphasizing abortion, the American bishops have found themselves in the center of the political square. This makes their actions regarding abortion available to an audience beyond Catholics. Additionally, all candidates, Catholic and non-Catholic, must now justify their position on abortion. The bishops' focus on abortion has made it relevant to all Americans.

Chapter 3 – The Democratic Party and the Catholic Church

Despite a lengthy association with the Democratic Party, the allure between Catholics and Democrats has weakened over the years. What was once a key electoral group is now just as likely to vote for a Republican as a Democratic candidate. While there are myriad reasons why Catholics have moved away from the Democratic Party, evolving differences over social and economic issues have been key. For many Catholics the Democratic Party's response to certain social and economic changes has caused disillusionment. Illustrative of the strained relationship between Catholics and the Democratic Party was Senator Ted Kennedy's funeral. Kennedy's death on August 25, 2009, was the end of an era. American Catholics had flooded the polls in record numbers to elect his brother John as America's first Catholic president, solidifying Catholics as an accepted part of American society. The Kennedy family personified what it meant to be a Catholic and a Democrat, but their exit from the political spotlight has paralleled the retreat of Catholics as a reliable Democratic constituency. Some Catholics were outraged that Ted Kennedy would be allowed a Catholic funeral. Cardinal Sean O'Malley, archbishop of Boston, was the target of much of the anger when he agreed to attend the funeral Mass. Judie Brown of the American Life League said, "Spitting on Christ himself at his crucifixion could not have been any more disdainful than what we witnessed Saturday."¹ Some wondered how the Catholic Church could allow a Catholic funeral for a man who supported abortion and gay rights. Despite the sentiment, Kennedy's funeral was a showcase of American Catholicism. Streets were lined with the poor and the handicapped,

1. Daniel Burke, "O'Malley Defends Kennedy's Catholic Funeral," September 3, 2009, *USA Today*. (Retrieved through www.usatoday.com).

and everyone who walked by his casket made the sign of the cross. These were Catholics whose parents and grandparents and even themselves had proudly voted for JFK in 1960. The question thus emerges: what had happened over the previous forty years that would cause many Catholics to protest a Catholic funeral for the last Kennedy brother?

William Prendergast has noted that “for many years to be a Catholic in religion was to be a Democrat in politics.”² In national contests, Catholics supplied a significant portion of the vote for Democrats outside of the South, and Catholics in major northern cities filled many leadership positions at the local level. Catholic political leaders did not emerge at the state and national level until the 1910s, when Catholics were elected as governors of New York and Massachusetts. During Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration many Catholics served in appointed and elected offices. The identification of Catholics with the Democratic Party began with the mass immigration of Catholics, who settled in major eastern cities. Prior to this wave, prominent Catholics were mainly Whigs and Federalists. During the 1850s the voting behavior of recent Catholic immigrants diverged from that of older Catholics. John Tracy Ellis’ examination of the party attachments of Catholics during the first half of the nineteenth century reveals that Catholics felt that the Federalists most closely represented their political interests. The demise of the Federalists forced Catholics to choose between the Whigs and the Democrats. Catholics initially leaned toward the Whigs but quickly became disillusioned when they discovered the “flirtations”

2. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 23.

of that party with nativists. The Democrats were strong supporters of religious freedom and were more welcoming to those who were foreign born.³

The natural attraction of Catholics to the Democratic Party was most evident starting with the arrival of Catholics from Ireland and Germany in the 1850s and 1860s and remained prevalent until the 1890s. Yet the period from 1896 through World War I saw allegiance to the Democratic Party begin to weaken. The breach was not repaired until the election of 1928, when Catholic governor Alfred E. Smith ran for president on the Democratic ticket. The election of 1928 was the pinnacle of Catholic support for the Democratic Party, although they remained overwhelmingly loyal from the Depression through the post–World War II period. In 1956, Republican presidential candidate Dwight D. Eisenhower received fifty percent of the Catholic vote, a level of support also received by Nixon, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush. It was not until 1992 that Bill Clinton was able to recapture the majority of the Catholic vote for the Democrats. Indeed, since the late 1960s, the number of Catholics who identify themselves as Democratic has declined sharply.⁴

Initial Catholic alignment with Democrats was grounded in the immigrant mindset of Catholics, which found a natural home in the Democratic Party. Immigrant concerns regarding economic survival found expression in labor and mutual benefit societies that

3. Ibid., 23-25.

4. Ibid., 24-25.

had arisen throughout Europe. These had been created to counteract the deteriorating peasant economy and allowed peasants to support themselves and preserve their families. Immigrants' primary political concern was to ensure that government on the local and national level would underwrite the objectives of those mutual aid societies. As a result, most immigrants followed the Irish into the Democratic Party. Catholics felt that government should ensure a sufficient standard of living in order to make family and religious life fulfilling. They appreciated the Democratic Party's respect for the prerogatives of local communities and groups.⁵

The exact reasons for the loss of Catholics as a cornerstone of the Democratic Party are not known. Many agree that social, cultural, and economic changes over recent decades have led Catholics away from the Democratic Party. While certainly important, abortion has not been the only reason for the schism. Michael Sean Winters describes abortion as "the iceberg against which the New Deal coalition of Catholics and liberals crashed and sank."⁶ Abortion, however, has not been the only reason that Catholic allegiance to the Democratic Party has significantly weakened. More important was the way the Democrats responded to abortion and other key social issues of the time. Democrats operated on the premise that morality cannot be legislated. In so doing, the Democrats failed to see that for a large group of voters, particularly pro-life Catholics,

5. James S. Olson, *Catholic Immigrants in America* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1987), 235.

6. Michael Sean Winters, *Left at the Altar: How Democrats Lost the Catholics and How the Catholics Can Save the Democrats* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 113.

moral issues were extremely important.⁷ Yet the division was more complex than the disagreement over abortion. While the political response to the *Roe* decision made many Catholics leery of the Democratic Party, the rule changes for the 1972 Democratic Convention pushed Catholics to the numerical margins. The rule changes sought to diversify the convention's attendees. However, the rule changes had a zero-sum effect by displacing ethnic Catholics who had been dominant in the party. Ronald Reagan's foreign policy further weakened Catholic support for the Democratic Party. Many Catholics, particularly those of Eastern European descent, believed that the Democrats did not take the Cold War seriously.⁸

Democratic response to the abortion issue was emblematic of the problems the party faced with Catholic voters. Democrats recast liberalism to emphasize personal autonomy and a libertarian view of moral issues,⁹ an approach that turned off religiously motivated voters, especially Catholics. The New Deal Coalition, of which Catholics were a cornerstone, gave way to a bevy of interest groups. The Democratic Party splintered its appeals among these interest groups and in doing so lost their sense of national purpose and their ability to engage the country.¹⁰ Democrats also became victims of the rise of the campaign consultant. They hired people who were trained to get candidates elected without any thought about how they would govern after they won, leaving the Democrats

7. Interview with Michael Sean Winters, February 22, 2010.

8. Interview with Amy Sullivan, February 9, 2010.

9. Winters, "Left at the Altar," 113.

10. Ibid., 135.

without an effective narrative. In contrast, the Republicans built a narrative of working-class resentment.¹¹ By the 1980s, the Democratic Party was held hostage by interest groups and had tied its fortunes to the feminist interpretation of *Roe*. Democrats relied less on the argument that illegal abortions threatened women's health and instead focused on abortion as fundamental to women's autonomy. In so doing, they misread the national mood. Some believe that the Democratic Party could have broadened its appeal by attempting to make the adoption process easier, extending health care benefits to women who could not afford another child, or supporting a constitutional amendment sending the abortion issue back to the states. Instead, abortion rights became a key plank in the 1976 Democratic Party platform. In supporting abortion rights and moving toward support of personal autonomy, the Democratic Party lost working-class ethnic Catholics who had been the center of their party. Democrats were unable to articulate a unifying message to inspire voters. Additionally, they had become so defined by the feminist position on abortion that many pro-life Democrats were forced to switch their positions. When Dick Gephardt decided to run for president in 1988, the pro-life congressman consulted with liberal activists about how his pro-life position would affect him. He was told that a pro-life Democrat had little chance of winning the Democratic nomination. Shortly thereafter he met with Missouri Citizens for Life and announced that he was no longer pro-life.¹² For

11. Interview with Michael Sean Winters.

12. Amy Sullivan, *The Party Faithful: How and Why Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* (New York, NY: Scribner, 2008), 75.

many Catholic voters Ronald Reagan had summed up their feelings years before: “I did not leave the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party left me.”¹³

Prior to *Roe*, many of the political concerns of the American Catholic bishops ran parallel with those of the Democratic Party. The decision changed the political direction of the hierarchy. The 1976 presidential election marked an important moment for the U.S. Catholic bishops, as it was the first presidential election since *Roe* and the first election in which the Democrats did not capture the majority of either Catholic or Southern votes. In 1972, Richard Nixon won 60.7 percent of the popular vote and all of the electoral votes except for those of Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. Additionally, Nixon increased his margin of Catholic voters by 33 percent from the 1968 election. Throughout his political career, Nixon had included Catholics in important positions within his administration. Nixon claimed that his staff included more Catholics than John F. Kennedy’s.¹⁴ Nixon and his staff also paid attention to Catholic concerns, such as funding for non-public schools. Many Catholics had felt abandoned by McGovern, who had focused on “the poor and the minorities and the young people and the anti-war movement.” The Catholic movement away from the Democratic Party placed the Democrats in a new and troubling situation. Heading into 1976, Jimmy Carter, the Democratic nominee, was forced to employ new tactics to win back a traditionally Democratic base.¹⁵

13. Winters, “Left at the Altar,” 153.

14. Prendergast, “Catholic Voter,” 158.

15. *Ibid.*, 157-163.

1976 Presidential Election

The new dynamics of the 1976 election impacted not only the candidates but also the American bishops. The 1976 election tested the relationship between the bishops and the Democrats. During the campaign, the bishops made every effort to persuade Catholics to vote for the pro-life candidate regardless of that candidate's position on other issues. The weakening relationship between Catholics and the Democratic Party heightened the importance of the bishops' role. In 1975 the bishops released the *Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*. The *Pastoral Plan* called for "well planned [antiabortion] political action," and their goal was to make abortion the key issue of the 1976 election.¹⁶ Not all of the bishops supported this strategy, fearing that people would assume that the hierarchy would judge candidates solely on the basis of their position on abortion. In response, the hierarchy released *Political Responsibility: Reflections on an Election Year*. Approved in May 1976, the document was intended to "call attention to the moral and religious dimensions of secular issues, to keep alive the values of the Gospel as a norm for social and political life, and to point out the demands of Christian faith for a just transformation of society."¹⁷

Because Democrats had lost the Catholic majority and the white Southern majority, Carter faced an uphill climb. Winning back the white South would likely not be a problem

16. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 68.

17. *Ibid.*, 69.

for the Georgia governor, but attracting Catholics would prove difficult. Carter was a “born again” Southern Baptist, which did not sit well with Catholic voters. He attempted to fix his “Catholic problem” by assuring Catholics that he was sympathetic to their concerns. He voiced support for parochial education and stated that he was personally opposed to abortion. Carter also pursued a positive relationship with the Catholic hierarchy, yet his position on abortion was not in agreement with that of the bishops. Carter expressed his personal moral opposition to abortion, yet he supported the Democratic platform, which explicitly opposed an anti-abortion amendment. He attempted to gloss over these differences by creating the impression of a close personal relationship with the hierarchy. His first attempt was a meeting with the executive committee of the NCCB.¹⁸

In August 1976 Carter assured the bishops of his agreement with them on a list of key issues, including support for parochial education. He reiterated his personal moral opposition to abortion and explained that his differences with the bishops were due to political strategy and not ethical principles.¹⁹ He expressed his hope that such a small misunderstanding would not affect his relationship with the bishops and hoped that they could come to an agreement on abortion. Carter’s strategy was a failure; NCCB president

18. Timothy A. Byrnes, “The Politics of the American Catholic Hierarchy,” *Political Science Quarterly* 108 (Autumn 1993): 504.

19. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 74.

Joseph Bernardin repeated an earlier statement about his emphatic desire not to compromise on the issue of abortion. Reading from a prepared statement, Bernardin said:

We have called for a constitutional amendment that will give the maximum protection possible to the unborn. Despite contrary positions, there is no other way to correct the serious situation that now exists. If there is an agreement that abortion is a moral evil because it violates a person's most basic right, then the only logical conclusion is that something must be done to correct the evil, and the only remedy is a constitutional amendment....We...repeat today, with all the moral force we can muster, the need for a constitutional amendment to protect the life of the unborn. Indeed, without such a remedy, the effort to promote other human life cause for individual and social betterment, about which we are all concerned, is seriously weakened.²⁰

This statement did not stop Carter from attempting to produce a compromise with the hierarchy. He relayed to the executive committee that he was not opposed to all anti-abortion constitutional amendments; he was only opposed to those which had been proposed. He further stated that he would be willing to consider a "partial" amendment and asked the bishops to offer specific language for the amendment. The bishops declined his invitation, explicitly conveying their refusal to compromise on abortion. The media characterized Bernardin's reaction to the meeting as "disappointed," which angered Carter's staff.²¹

Some bishops who had opposed the singular focus on abortion attempted to work with some of their contacts within the Democratic Party. Leading this effort was Bishop James Rausch, General Secretary of the NCCB/USCC. Rausch contacted Thomas Farmer,

20. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 74.

21. *Ibid.*, 74-76.

a Washington lawyer who wanted to become involved in the Carter campaign. Farmer was seen as someone who had a number of valuable contacts within the conference and who understood the bishops. Farmer arranged a meeting between Rausch and Andrew Young, an aide to Carter. They agreed that the focus needed to be taken away from abortion and emphasize all of the social issues on which Carter and the hierarchy agreed. The meeting resulted in a personal phone call from Carter to Rausch, in which Carter expressed his desire to resolve his differences with the conference. Rausch agreed and encouraged him to continue working through Farmer. Farmer and Rausch decided that the best strategy would be to arrange a personal meeting between Carter and the leaders of the conference. Carter, having recently secured the Democratic nomination for president, agreed. Bernardin and the NCCB's executive committee agreed to the meeting after some hesitation. Given all of the channels that Carter's staff had gone through to schedule the meeting and after the assurances they had received from Rausch about its effectiveness as a strategy, they were undoubtedly upset with the outcome of the meeting and with Bernardin's remarks.²²

Both Carter and President Gerald Ford were vying heavily for the Catholic vote in 1976. Ford realized he would lose the white South and therefore needed the heavily Catholic Northeast and upper Midwest to remain in office. Ford's moderate acceptance of a pro-life constitutional amendment captured the approval and support of the bishops,

22. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 73-74.

much to Carter's dismay. Archbishop Bernardin later stated that he had had no intention of endorsing one candidate over the other. His statements after each presidential candidate meeting signified that abortion was the main priority for the conference. This is particularly evident because Bernardin seemed to ignore the areas of agreement with Carter and glossed over the many issues on which he and Ford disagreed. When asked later about these areas of disagreement, Bernardin stated that "there was not total agreement on the approaches that should be taken to some issues." What Bernardin did not say was that he and the other members of the conference saw the 1976 election as an opportunity to highlight the issue of abortion. Their prepared statements stressing their "disappointment" with Carter's abortion position and their "encouragement" regarding Ford's position suggest such a strategy.

It is hard to quantify the bishops' influence on the 1976 election. Despite Carter's capturing 57 percent of the Catholic vote and Ford's capturing 42 percent, the bishops were successful in becoming more involved in the national political scene. Both candidates found the bishops so influential that they sought out a relationship with the hierarchy. Despite the fact that Carter reclaimed the "lost" Catholic vote, candidates were now paying more attention to what the bishops had to say, and abortion was becoming a major campaign issue. Although Ford received only 42 percent of the Catholic vote, the actual number was significantly higher than the number of Catholic votes cast for Nixon in 1960 and Goldwater in 1964, and was comparable to the number received by Eisenhower

in 1952. In 1956, Eisenhower increased his share of the Catholic vote to 50 percent. The Catholic vote that Carter won was not the same vote of the New Deal Coalition; Catholic voting patterns now reflected those of the American public. Some Catholics had no allegiance to either party and simply based their vote on candidate preference. As such, candidates understood the importance of engaging the bishops and obtaining their support. The 1976 presidential election marked the beginning of the importance of the hierarchy and Catholics in elections. It also marked a shift in ecclesiastical support toward the Republican Party.²³

Prior to Carter, abortion was a minor issue for Democratic presidential candidates. Lyndon Johnson had promoted the use of contraceptives and family-planning services under Medicaid as part of his “War on Poverty.” In 1972, Democratic nominee George McGovern refused to make abortion a major issue in the campaign. He stated, “In my judgment abortion is a private matter which should be decided by a pregnant woman and her doctor. Once the decision has been made laws should [not] stand in the way of its implementation. I do believe, however, that abortion is a matter to be left to the state governments.”²⁴ By 1976, abortion had become a major issue because of the fallout from the Court’s 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*. Additionally, in July 1976, the Burger Court struck down Missouri’s requirement that a woman obtain spousal or parental consent

23. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 173-175.

24. Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 150.

before having an abortion. As president, Carter did little to either legitimize or overturn *Roe*. Just as Ford had done during his administration, Carter sent mixed messages. The Carter administration stayed out of the annual appropriations fight over reenactment of the Hyde Amendment. Carter named Midge Costanza, a strong pro-choice and Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) advocate, as a senior White House aide. He then named Joseph Califano, a pro-life Catholic, as Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Califano did little to stir the abortion debate. The Carter administration tried to take a middle-of-the-road approach to the abortion controversy, which made neither side happy. President Carter applauded the 1977 Supreme Court decision upholding states' refusal to fund non-therapeutic abortions under Medicaid. Wade McCree, Carter's Solicitor General, filed a brief and defended before the Court the Hyde Amendment's restriction on federal funding of abortions in *Harris v. McRae*. One month before losing to Ronald Reagan in the 1980 presidential election, Carter stated his position on abortion:

I am not in favor of abortion, and as President I have done everything I could to minimize the use of abortion in this country... I don't want to mislead the rest of the audience. I don't see the need for a constitutional amendment on the subject. I believe that what the Supreme Court has ruled is adequate for our country.²⁵

Throughout his presidency, Carter sent mixed messages about his position on abortion.

25. Ibid., 165.

1980s and Abortion

The 1976 election led to significant debate within the hierarchy over their participation in elections, and, more importantly, abortion's place in their political agenda. Some in the hierarchy feared that the bishops appeared to favor one party over another. The bishops agreed with the words of Monsignor George Higgins, who described the 1976 election by saying, "Whatever the intention was, the conference was being widely perceived as favoring one party over the other. I didn't think that was going to do us any good."²⁶ To that end, the bishops expanded their agenda beyond abortion. In *Resolution of the Administrative Committee*, the bishops put forth a multi-issue agenda:

Abortion and the need for a constitutional amendment to protect the unborn are among our concerns. So are the issues of unemployment, adequate educational opportunity for all, an equitable food policy both domestic and worldwide, the right to a decent home and health care, human rights across the globe, intelligent arms limitation and many other social justice issues...The Catholic Bishops of the United States have often publicly stated—and we reaffirm—deep commitment to the sanctity, dignity, and quality of human life at all stages of development, as well as to legislation and public policy which protects and promotes these values in all contemporary contexts.²⁷

The bishops decided on a low-key approach to the 1980 presidential election, despite the fact that the conference had not entirely agreed upon the place of abortion within their political agenda. In order to avoid the problems of 1976, the hierarchy released *Political Responsibility: Choices for the '80s*, which outlined a broad agenda of policy issues. The

26. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 83.

27. *Ibid.*, 84.

hierarchy deliberately refrained from reacting to either party's platforms on abortion. Shortly before the election, the Democratic Party reaffirmed its support for legal abortion; the conference reacted by not reacting at all. There was no public outcry, no negotiations, and no meetings with the candidates. As noted above, the conference had not agreed entirely upon this new approach. Many bishops felt that abortion was the overriding issue of any election.²⁸

Cardinal Humberto Medeiros of Boston was one who disagreed with the new tactics. One week before the Democratic primary, Medeiros wrote an open letter to his diocese regarding congressional candidates who supported abortion. In the letter, Medeiros explained that those who supported legal abortion could not separate themselves from the "guilt which accompanies this horrendous crime and deadly sin."²⁹ The letter received little attention outside of Massachusetts, but it did signify a disagreement within the bishops' conference on how the abortion issue should be handled.

Analysis of the 1980 election shows that abortion was not a major issue to voters and that many voters had erroneous knowledge of both candidates' positions on the issue. Despite both candidates and both party platforms being well differentiated, such differences appear not to have been communicated to voters.³⁰ The Democratic platform stated that while the party recognized the concerns that many Americans had regarding

28. Ibid., 83-84.

29. Ibid., 85.

30. Donald Granberg and James Burlison, "The Abortion Issue in the 1980 Elections," *Family Planning Perspectives* 15 (September-October 1983): 234.

abortion, they remained supportive of the Supreme Court's decision. The platform opposed any constitutional amendment to overturn legal abortion and even supported Medicaid funding for abortion. The Republican platform also acknowledged that there were different opinions about abortion but stated the party's support for a constitutional amendment to overturn *Roe*. The platform also expressed support for congressional efforts to restrict taxpayer funding of abortions. A survey conducted by the Center for Political Studies (CPS) showed that 49 percent of those asked about the Democratic Party's position on abortion answered that they did not know, and 51 percent did not know the Republican Party's position. Additionally, 40 percent thought that the Democratic Party had the more restrictive abortion position and 32 percent thought the Republican Party had the more liberal position. As a result, a high percentage of voters did not know either candidate's position on abortion. In the end, the 1980 election was primarily about economic issues and the Iran hostage crisis. Despite lack of voter knowledge and the relative unimportance of abortion as an electoral issue, Ronald Reagan—the pro-life candidate—was elected president.³¹

1984 Presidential Election

The deeply religious tone of the 1984 election stood in stark contrast to that of the 1980 election. The catalyst for the extreme religious underpinnings can be linked to a speech given by President Ronald Reagan to religious leaders in Dallas in which he stated

31. Ibid., 234.

that religion and politics “are necessarily related” and further suggested that they are “inseparable.”³² He suggested that those who believe that religion and politics are not linked are “intolerant of religion.” The speech sparked intense debate over the role of religion in politics. This was hardly a new topic in politics, and the strategists of Democratic nominee Walter Mondale believed that Reagan’s emphasis on religion and morality might alienate some of his more moderate supporters, particularly young urban professionals. Mondale blasted Reagan in radio addresses, saying that Reagan did not respect the separation between government and religion. Both candidates did worry about overemphasizing the issue.

The American Catholic bishops recognized the significance of the election and its impact on the future of the abortion debate. Although the hierarchy had some internal disagreement over the status of abortion on their agenda, their fundamental opposition to abortion became the dominant issue of the campaign. John O’Connor, archbishop of New York, publicly stated, “I don’t see how a Catholic in good conscience can vote for a candidate who explicitly supports abortion.”³³ O’Connor personally criticized Geraldine Ferraro, Mondale’s Catholic running mate, for her support of abortion. Following a Ferraro speech in Scranton, Pennsylvania, O’Connor held a press conference to criticize her abortion views. The bishops of Buffalo and Philadelphia appeared on the platform

32. Albert R. Hunt, “The Campaign and the Issues,” in *The American Elections of 1984*, ed. Austin Ranney (Washington DC: Duke University Press, 1985), 142.

33. *Ibid.*, 143.

with Reagan during the campaign, leaving Mondale and Ferraro unsure how to respond to the actions of several bishops. In their defense, the Catholic governor of New York, Mario Cuomo, criticized Cardinal O'Connor for telling parishioners how to vote. He also gave a major speech at Notre Dame University warning Catholics not to impose their views on controversial issues like abortion.³⁴

Cuomo's 1984 speech at the University of Notre Dame attempted to show how politics and religion should coexist. Cuomo spoke of "private belief" versus "public responsibility" in an attempt to defend Geraldine Ferraro. Ferraro had stated many times that she was personally opposed to abortion but did not want to impose her personal beliefs on others or legislate morality. In his speech, Cuomo stated, "I accept the Church's teaching on abortion. Must I insist that you do by denying you Medicaid funding? By a constitutional amendment? And if by a constitutional amendment, which one? Would that be the best way to avoid abortions or prevent them?"³⁵ Cuomo ended by stating that the U.S. needed a consensus on public morality and on the laws that result from that morality, but that consensus might not necessarily come from religious values.³⁶

Cuomo tried to echo the sentiment of John F. Kennedy's 1960 speech to the Houston Ministerial Association. Kennedy maintained that he did not speak for the Church and the Church did not speak for him. Liberal Catholics applauded Cuomo's

34. Ibid.,143-144.

35. Governor Mario Cuomo's September 13, 1984 address to the University of Notre Dame, <http://Pewforum.org>.

36. Winters, "Left at the Altar," 160-162.

speech for drawing a line between “private faith” and “public duties.”³⁷ Cuomo’s speech, however, caused some observers to compare his perspective to those of nineteenth-century speakers who had not wanted to end slavery. A *Washington Post* editorial questioned the logic behind Cuomo’s argument and contended that making the case that one was opposed to slavery personally but was not willing to tell someone else that they could not own slaves meant that the person was not truly opposed to slavery. One of the major failures of Cuomo’s speech, according to Michael Sean Winters, was that he insisted that the Church remove itself from political judgments. Such an approach would lead the Democrats to a dead end, an end where faith was only a “vague influence” and where “politicians could hide behind ‘prudence’ when ‘privacy’ failed to offer sufficient cover.”³⁸ The direction that Cuomo advocated in his speech was unsuccessfully adopted by Mondale. Amy Sullivan notes that while Cuomo intended to echo John F. Kennedy’s sentiments in Houston, he actually did the opposite. She points out that Kennedy declared that his faith meant so much to him that if his religious and political views conflicted, he would resign his position. Cuomo conveyed quite the opposite: if there was a conflict, he would set aside his faith.³⁹

Following the same logic that Cuomo outlined in his speech, the Mondale campaign made a conscious decision to stay away from the Catholic Church: “[We]

37. Sullivan, “The Party Faithful,” 69.

38. Winters, “Left at the Altar,” 167.

39. Sullivan, “The Party Faithful,” 69.

weren't going to be able to repair ourselves in favor of abortion, it was as simple as that. So we never spent resources or time trying to convince the Catholic bishops that they ought to be for Walter Mondale."⁴⁰ In the end, Ronald Reagan was the overwhelming victor in the 1984 presidential election.

1988 Presidential Election

The Democratic Party made no effort in 1988 to appeal to its historical base of Catholics. Although Dukakis attended the Alfred E. Smith Memorial dinner, he avoided appearances on Catholic campuses, fearing that his pro-choice position would incite hostility. The Democratic Party also altered its platform regarding education and abortion, two areas important to many Catholic voters. In the past three elections, the Democratic plank had specifically mentioned its commitment to "the support of a constitutionally acceptable method of providing tax aid for the education of all pupils in non-segregated schools in order to insure parental freedom in choosing the best education for their children."⁴¹ In 1988, the Democratic platform lacked any mention of support for private and parochial schools or any pledge for financial assistance. The change to the abortion plank was not as dramatic but was still a change from past elections. In 1976, 1980, and 1984, the Democratic Party had made an attempt to soften its support of abortion rights. In 1976 the party stated that it understood the religious and ethical concerns regarding

40. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 113.

41. *Ibid.*, 195.

abortion; by 1980 the term “abortion” had been replaced with “reproductive freedom.”

The 1980 platform advocated reproductive freedom as a fundamental human right and stated that the government should not interfere in the reproductive decisions of Americans. By 1988, the platform had been changed to state that reproductive choice is a “fundamental right which should be guaranteed regardless of ability to pay.”⁴² The change signaled that pro-life voters were no longer a major priority for Democrats. This change in support for Catholic issues caused two members of the hierarchy to withdraw from the Democratic Party. Archbishop John F. Whealon of Hartford burned his membership card. Andrew Greeley, a prominent Catholic cleric, publicly stated, “Catholic voters continue to be ignored by the party leadership because they are not ‘politically correct’ and never will be.”⁴³

1992 Presidential Election

As the Democratic candidate for president in 1992, Bill Clinton appeared to fill the void that religious voters had been missing. He had been raised in the Southern Baptist tradition and was at ease discussing his faith. Clinton also knew that his key to electoral victory was to win back white evangelical Christians and Catholics. He was not afraid to use religious rhetoric on the campaign trail. His success in courting religious voters was tempered by his pro-choice position on abortion. During the 1992 Democratic

42. Ibid., 196.

43. Ibid.

Convention, his speech was overflowing with religious rhetoric. He called for a “New Covenant” with Americans, a “solemn agreement between the people and their government based not simply on what each of us can take but what all of us must give to our nation...We offer our people a new choice based on old values....” Clinton tried to chart a moderate course on abortion, stating that it was a “difficult and painful decision” that must be left to women. Clinton’s “New Covenant” was not what the Catholic press reported on about the convention.⁴⁴ Despite his best efforts at appealing to religious voters, Clinton’s “New Covenant” was not the primary focus of the Catholic press.

The Catholic press was buzzing about the “snub” of Pennsylvania Governor Robert Casey. Casey said that the pro-choice wing of the party had not allowed him to speak at the convention because he was pro-life and because he was the lead plaintiff in the recent Supreme Court case *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*. Casey had written a letter to the chair of the DNC asking to address the delegates. He wanted to let Americans know that “Democrats do not support abortion on demand and believe that the number of abortions should be reduced.”⁴⁵ Casey’s letter went unanswered, and the Pennsylvania delegation, one of the largest and most important at the convention, was seated as far from the podium as possible. Casey declared that the Democratic Party now had a litmus test: if you were pro-life, you were out. The Catholic bishops were furious.

44. Winters, “Left at the Altar,” 167.

45. Sullivan, “The Party Faithful,” 79.

The Pilot in Boston ran an editorial that said, “What makes Casey fascinating to so many is that he makes a liberal and political argument for his pro-life stance. He argues for comprehensive health care for the mother and child, nutrition programs, family and medical leave, early intervention services for developmentally delayed children, Head Start, child care, and communities that are nurturing, safe, and drug-free.” The unborn child, the most powerless and voiceless member of the human family, should be added to the list, he says. The editorial further noted that Casey did not insist that all abortions should be illegal. “But he does argue persuasively that a political party that appears unqualifiedly for ‘choice’ over ‘life’ and cannot hear the genuine uneasiness of many members on this vital issue, is a political party being side-tracked. It is a shame he cannot speak.”⁴⁶ David Carlin, Jr. also wrote about the snub in *Commonweal*, describing the pro-choice forces as elitists who believed themselves to be socially and morally superior to others. Years later, it is still disputed whether Casey was denied the chance to speak because he was pro-life or because he had not endorsed the Clinton-Gore ticket. Regardless of the truth, the Democratic Party had become so entrenched in the pro-choice movement that many believed Casey was snubbed because of his pro-life views.

1996 Presidential Election

In his 1996 reelection bid, Bill Clinton had managed to stave off any Democratic primary challengers. Kansas Senator Bob Dole had not been so lucky in that regard. Dole

46. Winters, 171.

faced serious competition for the Republican nomination. Dole, a World War II veteran in his seventies, lacked the charisma and mass appeal of President Clinton. Another obstacle for Dole was the fact that by 1996 Americans were generally pleased with the Clinton administration and the overall state of the country. Republicans agreed with Clinton's attempts to reduce the size of government. A key bipartisan accomplishment was welfare reform, which dramatically limited the amount, time, and conditions under which a person could receive welfare benefits from the government. Clinton had also signed legislation ensuring that states would not have to recognize gay marriages, which earned the approval of the Catholic bishops.⁴⁷

Although Dole's dedication to the pro-life movement was questionable, he did not draw the ire from the Catholic bishops that Clinton did. The bishops had been expressing concern over immigration and welfare issues, which appeared to show agreement with Clinton, but the veto of a bill banning partial-birth abortions drove a huge wedge between the two parties. The bishops sent the president a three-page letter accusing him of allowing a procedure "more akin to infanticide than abortion to continue."⁴⁸ The issue was emotional for both sides. After vetoing the ban, Clinton wrote to Cardinal James Hickey, Archbishop of Washington, explaining that he only intended the procedure to be used to protect the life or health of the mother. He told Hickey that he had asked Congress to

47. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 205-206.

48. "Cardinals Condemn Clinton Abortion Veto," *The New York Times*, April 17, 1996, <http://www.nytimes.com>.

include a provision for severe maternal health risks in the bill, but Congress had declined his request. The members of the hierarchy rejected Clinton's health exception as weak, believing that women who were mentally distraught over the consequences of an unplanned pregnancy would be deemed eligible for the procedure due to severe mental health risks.⁴⁹

The bishops saw the veto of the partial-birth abortion ban as a vehicle for drawing Catholics into the election. In 1995, the hierarchy had released their *Statement on Political Responsibility*, in which they asked for a commitment to the dignity of every human being. They also urged more involvement from citizens and asked them not to be frustrated by the cynicism of American politics. According to the bishops, the way to combat cynicism was to renew the search for common good and for Catholics to recommit themselves to the dignity of every human being. A part of that commitment was recognizing the need to eliminate legalized abortions. The statement conveyed the bishops' desire to avoid partisan politics and to judge each issue by how it affected human life and human dignity. Because Clinton's veto of the partial-birth abortion ban bill would significantly impact human life and human dignity, the hierarchy felt it was their duty to become involved in the issue.⁵⁰

49. Ibid.

50. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 210-211.

The bishops launched a massive offensive against the partial-birth abortion veto. This was particularly worrisome for Clinton and the Democrats, as they had hoped to capture the Catholic vote without any trouble. Angered by the threat of a legislative veto, the Office of Pro-Life Activities placed a two-page ad in the *Washington Post* balking at the idea that the procedure was intended to be used only as a health exception. The bishops also lobbied members of Congress to override the presidential veto. On September 12, 1996, sixty-three bishops assembled on the steps of the Capitol to pray that Congress would have enough votes to override the veto. At the service, Cardinal Hickey stated, "We pray that America will choose life and end the reign of death that has claimed 37 million children since 1973."⁵¹ Cardinal Law of Boston complained that two Boston newspapers refused to run a graphic ad that he asked them to print because they claimed it was repulsive. Law replied that its repulsiveness was the point. Media accounts of the event highlighted the fact that this type of activity, in which eight cardinals and numerous bishops protested an issue on the steps of the Capitol, had never occurred before. This event indeed marked a change for the hierarchy; no bishop could doubt that it was their central focus. It was evident that their activist approach had garnered a significant amount of attention.

51. Julia Duin, "63 Bishops Urge Veto Override; Pray on Capitol Steps for Ban on Partial-Birth Abortion," September 12, 1996, *The Washington Times* (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

On September 19, 1996, the House voted 285-137 to override the president's veto.⁵² However, seven days later, the U.S. Senate failed to override the veto, coming up short with a vote of 58-40. Dole characterized Clinton's acceptance of partial-birth abortions as acceptance of an extreme position, and said that the procedure blurred the lines between abortion and infanticide.⁵³ In the end, Dole had waited too long to speak out against abortion. His running mate, former Congressman Jack Kemp, had spoken publicly against the Clinton veto before Dole. Dole, perhaps fearful of the attention that the bishops were garnering, changed his strategy.

The Catholic bishops were able to obtain national media attention highlighting their outrage over President Clinton's veto of the partial-birth abortion ban legislation. For the first time in their history, the bishops had gathered on the steps of the Capitol to support a piece of legislation and had mailed millions of postcards to parishioners urging them to write to their members of Congress. Even though the veto override was unsuccessful, it prompted both candidates to engage the abortion debate. Clinton, afraid of losing the Catholic vote, attempted numerous times to explain his decision to veto the bill. He conveyed that it was a very emotional decision for him and insisted that he only intended its use in cases of severe health risks to the mother. Dole also feared the Catholic vote and alienating the bishops. Early in his campaign, Dole appeared uncomfortable speaking

52. Ibid.

53. Ann Scales and Richard Saltus, "'Partial Birth' Procedures Are a Religious Rallying Point," October 24, 1996, Campaign '96/The Abortion Issue, *The Boston Globe*. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

about the issue, and many questioned his pro-life bona fides. After witnessing the attention that the bishops had received on the partial birth abortion protest, he began to speak against the procedure. He referred to it as infanticide and criticized the president for vetoing the bill. It was too little too late for Dole, but his increased focus on partial birth abortion did illustrate the strength of the bishops. They had been able to exert enough power to make each candidate confront the issue of abortion, regardless of its importance to voters. Fear of losing Catholic support led the candidates to take the bishops seriously and marked a resurgence of their influence in future elections. The struggle over partial birth abortion highlighted the growing rift between the Democrats and the Church. Abortion had solidly lodged a wedge between the two parties, and no agreement on any other issues was enough to overcome it.

Clinton and Faith

Even before he took office, Bill Clinton recognized what most Democrats had failed to grasp: that faith was important to Americans. He also understood that Democratic electoral prospects were being jeopardized because the party had stopped trying to reach out to Catholics and conservative Christians. Clinton's comfort level with discussing faith was due in part to his upbringing in the Baptist Church, which requires an exploration of

one's faith at a young age. He also spoke the language of faith in a way that John Kerry and Al Gore could not. Clinton could talk the talk and walk the walk of many faiths.⁵⁴

At an October 1992 campaign stop in Saginaw, Michigan, Clinton gave an interview with Patricia Zapor from *Catholic News Service*. He spoke about the influence of his Southern Baptist faith and his Catholic education. "From my Southern Baptist heritage I have a deep belief that the First Amendment separation between church and state is what guarantees the religious freedom of all people..." The experience of studying at Georgetown taught him "that we are morally obliged to try to live out our religious convictions in the world, that our obligations to social mission is connected to religious life...That I got out of my Catholic training more than from the Baptist Church, which is more rooted in the notion that salvation is a matter of personal relationship between an individual and God carries with it no necessary burden to go out into the world and do things."⁵⁵ Clinton carried the Catholic vote in both 1992 and 1996 and reached out to evangelicals. His administration has been described by many people of faith as one that was genuinely committed to working on issues of religious freedom and liberty. Yet, when Clinton left the office of the presidency, his approach to religion left with him. Many Democrats believed that Clinton's apparent ease with religion was a campaign

54. Interview with Michael Sean Winters, February 22, 2010.

55. Sullivan, 94.

gimmick. They also saw being vocal about one's faith as a potential target for hypocrisy, and they wanted to avoid that.⁵⁶

2000 Presidential Election

Social justice and moral issues were key factors in the 2000 election. The Democratic Party had long enjoyed support from Catholics, due in part to their support of social justice issues. Catholics traditionally appreciated the Democrat's policy of providing government support to the less fortunate. Al Gore was generally considered to be faith-friendly and was a supporter of social justice issues. Although Gore narrowly won the Catholic vote in 2000, the Bush campaign countered with its own focus on social justice issues and a call for "social renewal." Bush described himself as a "compassionate conservative" and acknowledged an obligation to the poor, but insisted that local and church-based initiatives were the best way to achieve this goal. Bush's compassionate conservatism was enhanced by his support for a culture of life. Bush's speechwriter Michael Gerson, who had studied Pope John Paul II, invoked the pontiff's call for a "society of free work, of enterprise, of participation." Bush successfully emphasized the link between individual and social responsibility. Bush's strategy was aimed at Catholics who attended mass frequently and who worried that America was in moral decline and believed that the federal government was harming the nation's moral character. Despite

56. Interview with Michael Sean Winters, February 22, 2010.

narrowly winning the Catholic vote in 2000, Gore could not counter Bush's ability to link social and moral issues.⁵⁷

Some analysts have suggested that Gore could not escape the taint of the Clinton administration. While many Americans still liked Bill Clinton, Gore became the "scapegoat" for those who were weary of the Clinton era and wanted a change. Authors such as Amy Sullivan believed that Gore was seen by many religious voters as someone who stressed issues over values. And while Gore openly talked about religion in private, he refrained from doing so in public after being mocked for telling the *Washington Post's* Sally Quinn that he asked himself "What would Jesus do?" Additionally, Gore did not capitalize or expand the religious foundation that Clinton had created, and the campaign had no religious outreach.⁵⁸

The 2000 election saw the emergence of several electoral cleavages, particularly between those who attended mass regularly and those who attended infrequently or never. While Gore did narrowly win the Catholic vote, George Bush was victorious among Catholics who attended mass at least once a week. These cleavages and their impact on the 2000 election are explored more thoroughly in chapter 4.

57. E.J. Dionne, Jr., *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith & Politics After the Religious Right* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), 165-167.

58. Sullivan, "The Party Faithful," 111-114.

2004 Presidential Election

The 2004 presidential election presented the problem of a pro-choice Catholic running for the presidency. When Massachusetts Senator John Kerry decided to run for president in 2004, he probably did not anticipate that his faith would play such a major role. The issue had been simmering for years and came to a head when several bishops threatened to deny Kerry communion because of his position on abortion. Numerous public threats to deny him communion precipitated the need for the bishops to form a task force to look into the issue. The public threats to deny communion became a nationwide story, one to which voters reacted with both support and disapproval. Despite the feelings about the communion question, a Republican candidate had won the Catholic vote for the first time since 1988. Whether or not Catholics agreed or disagreed with some of the bishops' actions, the hierarchy had played a significant role in the election. As a result of the Kerry-communion issue, the relationship between the Church and the Democrats was in need of major repair.

As in 2000, the 2004 election began with the USCCB releasing its *Statement on Political Responsibility*. In September 2003, the Administrative Committee of the USCCB approved *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*. *Faithful Citizenship* began with a discussion of the wounds that the nation had suffered since the 2000 election. The wounds included the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the clerical sexual abuse scandal. The document expressed the need for Catholics to remember

their role as faithful citizens as a way to deal with both the realities of war and the sex abuse scandal. Although the world had changed, the fundamental mission and message of Catholics in public life had not. *Faithful Citizenship* returned to the central questions of the 2000 statement, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*: how can Catholics protect human life and human dignity, and how do Catholics pursue peace and justice? Sensing that Catholics might feel lost in the post-9/11 world, the bishops urged them to remember their faith and duty to the nation by running for office, working with political parties, contributing time and money to campaigns, and joining diocesan legislative networks, community organizations, and other efforts that would apply Catholic moral principles to public policy.⁵⁹

Once again, the statement on the 2004 election avoided a partisan tone and instead focused on the need for Catholics to become involved in civic life. Calling civic participation a moral duty, the bishops hoped that Catholics would be able to help bring a moral framework to politics, regardless of political party. After listing issues such as the war in Iraq, abortion, poverty, and healthcare, *Faithful Citizenship* concluded with a request that all Catholics register, vote, and become involved in public life. It urged Catholics to be “political but not partisan,” “principled but not ideological,” “clear but also civil,” and “engaged but not used.” The bishops presented Catholics with one fundamental

59. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, 2004, <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/bishopStatement.html>.

question: “What does it mean to be a Catholic living in the United States in year 2004 and beyond?” The USCCB left Catholics to ponder this statement: “This dual calling of faith and citizenship is at the heart of what it means to be a Catholic in the United States. Faithful citizenship called us to seek ‘a place at the table’ of life for all God’s children in the elections of 2004 and beyond.”⁶⁰

As a pro-choice Catholic politician, Kerry was problematic for the hierarchy. For years, there had been debates within the USCCB about how to address this type of situation. Several bishops independently decided that the best way to handle Kerry was to threaten him with denial of Holy Communion. The bishop of Kerry’s own diocese in Boston told him that as a pro-choice politician he should abstain from communion. Archbishop Raymond Burke of St. Louis announced that Kerry was not welcome to receive communion while campaigning in the state of Missouri. The denials of communion garnered a great deal of attention and even precipitated the formation of a task force to address the denial of communion to pro-choice politicians. Division among the bishops was reflected among Catholic voters. Kerry’s positions did not sit well with some religious groups. Many Catholics, for example, did not approve of denying him communion, but they had trouble reconciling his personal and public beliefs. Many felt

60. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*, 2004.

that if Kerry was going to identify himself as a Catholic he should be willing to stand up for his beliefs.⁶¹

Certainly Kerry was not the first pro-choice Catholic politician, but the office that he sought forced the bishops to consider their options under heightened public scrutiny. Two years earlier, the Vatican had approved a document entitled *Doctrinal Notes on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* urging Catholic politicians to oppose laws that attack human life. In addition, the American bishops were developing a task force regarding how to deal with Catholic lawmakers. While the task force was being formed, deciding how to address the Kerry situation became unavoidable. Archbishop Sean O'Malley, the head of Kerry's archdiocese in Boston, stated that pro-choice politicians should abstain from communion. Following O'Malley's statement, the media followed Kerry to Easter Sunday mass to see whether there would be a confrontation over communion. Kerry attended mass at the Paulist Center and was not denied communion.

The Vatican left the decision to deny communion to the American bishops. The Congregation for the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, under the leadership of Cardinal Francis Arinze, had released *Redemptionis Sacramentum* in the spring of 2004. The document, which discussed the proper manner of receiving the Holy

61. Melinda Henneberger, "Varia: It's About Abortion, Stupid," *Newsweek*, September 23, 2004. This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

Eucharist, did not mention the issue of denial of communion to Catholic lawmakers. In fact, Cardinal Arinze said that the decision rested with the American bishops. Bishop Michael J. Sheridan of Colorado Springs issued a pastoral letter to American Catholics stating that not only politicians but Catholic voters risked being denied communion. In the letter, Sheridan stated that any Catholic who voted for a politician that supported abortion rights, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, or stem-cell research should not receive communion. Because voting is a private act, Sheridan would not have any way of knowing how particular Catholics had voted, but he maintained that Catholics who know they are in the Church's good graces may present themselves for communion.⁶²

Many of the bishops were aware of the public disapproval over how the communion issue was being handled. On June 18, 2004, the U.S. Catholic bishops, at their semi-annual meeting in Englewood, Colorado, adopted a statement about the communion problem. The statement affirmed the teaching of the Church on abortion, but the bishops could not reach a consensus on a resolution regarding the denial of communion. The conference decided to leave the issue up to individual bishops.⁶³ Cardinal McCarrick, head of the task force on the communion issue, discussed the leaking of a memo from then-Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The memo was believed to refer directly to Kerry and said that pro-choice politicians

62. Henneberger, "Varia: It's About Abortion, Stupid."

63. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Bishops Issue Statement on 'Catholics in Political Life,'" June 21, 2004, <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2004/04-116.shtml>.

should be warned by a priest that they are not eligible for communion. If they continue in their “grave sin,” the person should be turned away at the altar. In the case of abortion, Ratzinger said that in the case of a politician who continues to support abortion, his pastor should meet with him and warn him that he must change his behavior or he will be denied communion. McCarrick noted that Ratzinger’s comments were meant as guidance and were never intended to be published, and that he had left the final decision to the American bishops. The results of the meeting in Colorado were widely discussed among both the political and religious communities.⁶⁴ In September 2004, Ave Maria School of Law and the Our Sunday Visitor Foundation sponsored an all-day conference entitled “Public Witness, Public Scandal.” The conference noted the remarkable fact that the church did not hide after the clerical sex abuse scandals. They pointed out that the Colorado meeting of the bishops proved that abortion was the main issue for elected Catholic officials and that Rome had decreed abortion to be intrinsically evil, which could not be said of any other issue in mainstream U.S. politics. The members of the conference also noted that the move to censure Archbishop Raymond Burke, Kerry’s most outspoken critic, was defeated overwhelmingly.⁶⁵

The Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians released their report on November 17, 2004. In the end, the task force decided to adhere to the resolution that

64. Julia Duin, “McCarrick Tempered Letter on Pro-Choice Politicians,” *The Washington Times*, July 7, 2004. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic.)

65. Julia Duin, “Abortion Called the Top Issue,” *The Washington Times*, September 17, 2004. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic.)

they had agreed upon at their semi-annual meeting. The decision was made to leave the judgments to individual bishops regarding the best way to apply Catholic teaching to public policy. McCarrick, the head of the task force, said that the bishops would not politicize the issue of protecting life and promoting human dignity. Their decision was of little help to Kerry, who not only lost the election but also lost the Catholic vote. Kerry was unwilling to change his position on abortion, and unlike candidates from previous elections, he was not willing to work with the bishops. Many Catholics may not have agreed with the communion debate, but it caught their attention and forced them to take a closer look at Kerry.⁶⁶

When John Kerry decided to run for president in 2004, he most likely thought the campaign would be centered on the issues of terrorism and the war in Iraq. He probably had no idea that the election would become a question of just how Catholic he was. Kerry was the first Catholic in 44 years to run for the presidency, and much had changed since John F. Kennedy was elected the first Catholic president in 1960. Catholics had become more economically and socially prosperous and relations with the Democratic Party had frayed. Since 1960, abortion had been legalized by the Supreme Court and had become a central issue for the Catholic bishops. As John Kerry professed his personal opposition to abortion but continued to vote in favor of legislation upholding abortion rights, he became

66. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Task Force on Catholic Bishops and Catholic Politicians, report by Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, November 17, 2004, <http://www.usccb.org/bishops/mccarrick1104.shtml>.

implicated in the bishops' fight against abortion. The question that Kerry created was: Can you be a good Catholic and still take positions that are against Church teachings? Unlike the bishops, Kerry believed the answer was "yes."

Despite the obvious similarities between John F. Kennedy and John F. Kerry (both were Catholic Democratic senators from Massachusetts) their presidential campaigns unfolded very differently. These differences were due in part to the religious, cultural, social, and economic changes that American society (and Catholics in particular) had undergone since 1960. Everett Carll Ladd, Jr., believes that students of American government and politics should know which links between the political and social spheres have the greatest influence on politics and, equally important, how changes in the larger social environment reshape politics and move it in a new direction. Ladd asserts that an "axial principle" is needed to identify the main features of American society that form the settings for political life. For much of the twentieth century, the Catholic Church provided an axial principle for American Catholic voters, providing many reasons for societal and political conflicts. The Church provided security to Catholic immigrants and reinforced their religious and political identity. Additionally, the high percentage of church attendance (75 percent of Catholics in 1958 attended weekly mass) strengthened the ties between parishioners and Church leaders. When John F. Kennedy became the second Catholic nominee for the presidency, American Catholics enthusiastically supported him, despite the fact that JFK asked voters not to vote for or against him because of his religion.

The deep Catholic/Protestant divide inspired voters from all denominations to decide their vote on religious grounds. Yet by 1963, the deep cultural divides began to diminish as Richard M. Scammon, then Director of the Census Bureau, advised Kennedy to focus on new suburbanites in the upcoming election. American Catholics were a key part of the new suburban dynamic. Traditional Catholic urban neighborhoods were beginning to wither. This also meant that Catholics were shifting from their axial principle to the socioeconomic. Kerry's 2004 campaign made it clear that Catholic identity had become increasingly complicated relative to party politics. It was telling indeed when the Most Reverend David M. O'Connell of The Catholic University of America offered the benediction at the Bush-Cheney headquarters on election night. O'Connell offered a prayer for the president and urged that we might build "a culture of life that loves every person, born and unborn."⁶⁷

Between 1960 and 2004, anti-Catholic hostility and its mobilizing effects on Catholic voters were virtually non-existent. Catholics had become both socially and economically assimilated into American society and no longer identified themselves solely on the basis of their religion. There were emerging cultural battles in the U.S. Church attendance and not religious affiliation had become the new axial principle.⁶⁸ The results from the 2004 elections showed that there was no longer a Catholic vote, but that did not

67. John White and William D'Antonio, "Catholics and the Politics of Change," 54-58.

68. Ibid., 63.

mean that there was an absence of political conflict over religion. Religious values constituted a major political divide. In 2004, a sharp dividing line existed between those who attended church and those who never attended. Sixty-one percent of church attendees voted for George Bush and 62 percent of those who never attended church voted for John Kerry.⁶⁹ The 2004 exit polls showed that moral values outranked all other issues. Of those polled, 22 percent ranked moral values as their top concern, 20 percent ranked jobs and the economy as the top priority, 19 percent cited terrorism, and 15 percent mentioned Iraq. Of those who mentioned moral values as their top concern, 80 percent voted for Bush.⁷⁰ George W. Bush had stressed the importance of religious values and his own religious experiences during the campaign. Kerry, on the other hand, was committed to the idea that a candidate's religious beliefs and practices should not be a campaign issue.⁷¹ Throughout the campaign, Kerry maintained that he was personally opposed to abortion but it was his public duty to uphold the provisions of *Roe*: "My oath is to uphold the Constitution of the United States in my public life...My oath privately between me and God was defined in the Catholic Church...which allows for freedom of conscience for Catholics with respect to these choices, and that is exactly where I am."⁷²

69. Ibid., 62.

70. Ibid., 62-63.

71. Ibid., 63.

72. Robert E. Denton, Jr., "Religion and the 2004 Presidential Campaign," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (September 2005): 14.

Political scientists and reporters speculated that Kerry's appearance of discomfort with his faith and his desire to separate it from public policy was due to the differences between evangelicalism and Catholicism.⁷³ Bush's advantage lay in the fact that "Protestantism is very word-based, very based—particularly evangelicalism—on talking about your own faith, as President Bush does, whereas Catholicism is very sacramental and emphasizes works and action in living out your faith."⁷⁴ Bush, as well as Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton (both Southern Baptists), had a different view about the role of religion and public life and were more comfortable talking about their faith. Kerry viewed faith as a private matter and adhered to the position that John F. Kennedy spoke of in his 1960 address to the Houston Ministerial Association. Kennedy had stated that he did not speak for the Church and the Church did not speak for him. Kerry's comfort level with religion and his views about faith and public policy were also reflected in the way individual Catholics identified themselves with both parties. Catholics fall between evangelical and mainline Protestants in voting behavior, which means that they are not tied to one party. Regarding issues such as abortion, churchgoing Catholics identify more closely with the Republican Party.⁷⁵ Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show how different groups within each faith viewed Bush and Kerry. Traditionalist Catholics, who attend Church regularly, have the most orthodox views, and closely identify with evangelical Protestants, who in turn

73. Ibid., 14.

74. Ibid., 15.

75. Ibid., 15.

identify most with the Republican Party. Those that identified themselves as Traditionalist voted in higher numbers for Bush, presumably because his mix of faith and politics appealed to their sensibilities. Bush's agenda was also more favorable to those who engaged in religious practice more frequently. Of those who attend church regularly, Bush won 64 percent of their votes, as compared to Kerry who only captured 35 percent.⁷⁶ Bush also defeated Kerry in obtaining the votes of those who attend church once a week and monthly.

Table 3.1 Partisan Affiliation of Major Religious Groups

Religious Affiliation	Republican	Democrat	Independent
Traditionalist Evangelical	70	20	10
Traditionalist Mainline	59	31	10
Traditionalist Catholic	57	30	13
Evangelical (All)	56	27	17
Modernist Catholic	37	52	11
Atheist, Agnostic	19	54	27
Modernist Mainline	23	56	21
Jewish	21	68	11
Black Protestants	11	71	18

Source: "Religion & Public Life A Faith-Based Partisan Divide," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005.

76. Ibid.,11.

Table 3.2 Church Attendance and 2004 Presidential Vote

Church Attendance	2004 Exit Poll Bush	2004 Exit Poll Kerry
More than Once a Week	64	35
Once a week	58	41
Monthly	50	49
A Few Times a Year	45	54
Never	36	62

Source: "Religion & Public Life A Faith-Based Partisan Divide," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2005

Kerry and Catholic Outreach

While many described the Republicans' outreach to Catholics during the 2004 election as the most sophisticated operation they had ever seen, Kerry's was perhaps the most unsophisticated. Mara Vanderslice, who was hired to oversee religious outreach for the Kerry campaign, quickly realized that there really was no religious outreach. On her first day at the campaign, Vanderslice saw her colleagues working hard updating databases that contained lists of veterans and labor unions and other key Democratic electoral groups. When she asked where her lists were, she was told they did not exist. When Kerry came under fire for his position on abortion, Vanderslice consulted with an informal group of religious advisors and devised a plan to counter the attacks. When she delivered the plan to Kerry's senior advisors, she was told, "Thanks, but we have it all under control." Vanderslice, an evangelical, was eventually silenced after a *USA Today* article identified her as the director of religious outreach. Bill Donohue, head of the Catholic League, blasted the Kerry campaign for hiring her, citing her late conversion to evangelical

Christianity. She was accused of trying to shut down Washington, D.C. in a protest against the IMF and World Bank when she worked for Jubilee 2000, a debt relief organization.

Vanderslice dismissed the attacks, but her bosses told her that she was never again to speak to reporters. After Vanderslice was silenced, there was no one left in the campaign to speak knowledgeably about religious issues. Campaign leaders lumped all religion press calls with “specialty press” and refused even to speak with *Catholic News Service*, a balanced news organization that supplies news stories to many diocesan newspapers.⁷⁷

Pro-Choice Catholic Democrats

Bush was successful in the 2000 election because he linked social justice issues with moral issues. He was also able to exploit the religious cleavages that were deepening in the U.S. In the 2004 election, it appeared that these cleavages were the most insistent and had distracted attention from other social issues. The Catholic bishops did not mince words when several outspoken members stated that Catholics who chose to vote on questions other than abortion were in danger of losing their souls. The Bishop of West Virginia, Bernard W. Schmitt, stated that abortion is “the greatest moral evil of our age” and that voting for a pro-choice candidate was equal to “formal cooperation in grave evil.”⁷⁸ Another member of the hierarchy, Newark Archbishop John Meyers, in an op-ed piece in *The Wall Street Journal*, cited a memorandum from then-Cardinal Ratzinger that

77. Sullivan, “The Party Faithful,” 125-129.

78. Dionne, *Souled Out*, 169.

Catholics could support a pro-choice candidate only “in the presence of proportionate reasons.” Meyers stated that the single or combined issues of welfare, national security, Iraq, or Social Security were not proportionate reasons to vote for a pro-choice candidate. The outspokenness of several conservative bishops brought to light an important dilemma for Catholics, and for Catholic Democrats in particular: how does one reconcile support for social justice issues with support for abortion? Rep. David Obey, a Democrat from Wisconsin, was denied communion in 2003 because of his mixed voting record on abortion. In response, Obey echoed the sentiment of John F. Kennedy in Houston that the Church does not have the right to dictate how he votes on specific issues. Obey struggled with the tenets of his faith and his political views.⁷⁹ His struggle was evident among many other Catholic liberals. In 2006, a number of Catholic Democratic officeholders tried to counter the growing alliance between certain members of the Church and the Republican Party. In February, they released a document entitled *Statement of Principles by Fifty-Five Catholic Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives*. The members explained their relationship between faith and political commitments:

As Catholic Democrats in Congress, we are proud to be part of the living Catholic tradition—a tradition that promotes the common good, expresses a consistent moral framework for life, and highlights the need to provide a collective safety net to those individuals in society who are most in need...we seek the Church’s guidance and assistance but believe also in the primacy of conscience. In recognizing the Church’s role in providing moral leadership, we acknowledge and accept the tension that comes with being in disagreement with the Church in some areas. Yet

79. Ibid., 173.

we believe we can speak to the fundamental issues that unite us as Catholics and lend our voices to changing the political debate—a debate that often fails to reflect and encompass the depth and complexity of these issues.⁸⁰

In regard to the issue of abortion, the members of Congress expressed a desire to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and to create policies that would encourage women to carry their pregnancies to term. The statement was signed by members on both sides of the abortion debate and attempted to make the hierarchy aware of their concern that abortion was overshadowing all other issues. The members of the hierarchy responded to the statement in 2006 with a “Statement on Responsibilities of Catholics in Public Life.” The bishops expressed their eagerness to discuss the challenges of balancing faith with policy choices.

Democrats and Faith

The problem that Kerry faced in the 2004 election and the problem that Democrats continue to face may be part of a larger problem. The problem facing Democrats is that they are widely perceived to be unfriendly to organized religion. How does that perception affect a population in which there is a deep divide between those who attend church and those who do not? In 2004, George Bush was the overwhelming winner among voters who attend church at least once a week. These voters have spurned the Democrats for being unfriendly toward religion. However, the Democrats’ biggest problem may be that even moderate citizens view them as unfriendly toward religion. Most Americans have a

80. *Statement of Principles by Fifty-Five Catholic Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives.*

positive view of religion and feel that it fills an important role. The idea that the Democrat's problem is a "God problem" was suggested by the results of a July 2005 poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. When asked "Do you feel that the Democratic Party is generally friendly toward religion, neutral, or unfriendly?" only 29 percent responded "friendly," which was an 11 percent decrease from August 2004. The problem for the Democratic Party lies in the fact that most Americans believe in God, and in an August 2004 poll, seven in ten stated their belief that having strong religious beliefs is an important trait for a president to have. Additionally, the majority of the public feels that political leaders express the right amount or too little of their religious beliefs.⁸¹

Analyses of polling conducted by the Pew Research Center suggest that including seculars and evangelicals in the sample may have affected the final numbers. This finding suggests that moderate voters are the key to the Democrat's problem with religion. Centrists that viewed the Democrats as friendly toward religion were 2.5 times more likely to hold favorable views of the party. These same individuals were also more likely to vote for John Kerry. Some scholars believe that these numbers reflect the root of the Democrat's religion problem: they have lost those who are highly religious. These scholars also suggest that the Democrats should try to convince centrists of their

81. Gregory A. Smith, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life and Peyton M. Craighill, Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, "Do the Democrats Have a God Problem?" July 2005.

friendliness toward religion, as they hold the most favorable views of the party. The need to be religiously friendly had some interesting effects on the Democrat's strategies in the 2008 election.⁸²

The religious left is an important aspect of reclaiming religious voters. The religious left has a long history of involvement in American politics, yet it virtually disappeared after the creation of the Moral Majority. The religious left is associated with a variety of liberal social movements and reflects a "liberal" or "modernist" theology, especially among white Christians. Throughout the early twentieth century, a divide existed between those who felt that religion and politics were one entity and those who advocated a complete separation of the two. From the progressive era through the 1950s, liberal activists, particularly mainline Protestants, advocated economic reform, social justice, and peaceful ends to all wars. This same group was integral to the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War protest movement. In the 1980s they added women's rights, illegal immigrants' rights, environmentalism, and gay rights to their agenda. Despite their efforts, an institutionalized religious left never developed. The religious left was the dominant religious group in politics until the religious right was formed. Some assumed the creation of the religious right would cause the religious left to become stronger. It was during this time that differences among modernists and traditionalists of all religious denominations began to deepen. Additionally, the number of secular and

82. Ibid.

unaffiliated groups increased. With the changing religious landscape, traditionalists from different religions discovered that they had more in common with each other than with modernists from their own religions. Both experienced ease in forming citizen groups; however, the religious left could not match the political force of the religious right. Many religious left leaders do feel that the religious left can become a powerful political force.⁸³

The religious left was not able to mobilize support as effectively as the right during the 2004 election. A key problem was that the religious left's constituencies did not hold a homogeneous set of religious beliefs. This diversity was an obstacle to forming alliances. Traditionalist Catholics like Pennsylvania senator Bob Casey found it difficult to find common ground with some more liberal religious members. Because traditionalists stayed within their own party, they found it difficult to obtain cooperation from others whose views were not as orthodox. Additionally, the large constituency of the religious left makes it difficult to use religious arguments as a political tool, being limited to issues such as concern for the poor, the environment, and world peace. The religious left, in comparison to the right, draws its members from several different traditions: mainline and black Protestants, white and Latino Catholics, and the unaffiliated. Another segment comes from a scattering of other groups ranging from evangelical Protestants to Jews. Unlike the religious right, which draws heavily from evangelicals, only ten percent of the

83. Lyman A. Kellstedt, Corwin E. Smidt, John C. Green, and James L. Guth, "A Gentle Stream or a 'River Glorious'? The Religious Left in the 2004 Election," in *A Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election*, ed. David E. Campbell (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2007), 232-236.

members of the religious left are evangelical. Differences among the religious left have been a major hindrance to unifying their message; however, they have agreed upon their desire to bring socioeconomic issues to the political debate.⁸⁴

Historically, leaders of the religious left have been able to achieve a level of consensus around issues of socioeconomic justice. The same could not be said for moral issues, which were a major staple of the 2004 election. There is a gap between traditionalist liberals and secular liberals regarding the issues of abortion, gay rights, and civil unions. The inability of the religious left to form alliances with members of the secular and more liberal sections of the Democratic Party can be traced to moral issues. Moral issues have divided the left, and only social welfare issues have held them together. As such, the left was forced to mobilize and recruit members on the basis of socioeconomic issues. The religious right, in contrast, was effectively mobilized around moral issues, particularly abortion and gay marriage. The religious left became more active in the 2008 presidential election than in the past. The left will likely continue to gain prominence and influence, as they are a counter to the bishops, but the degree of their influence is still unknown.⁸⁵

84. Kellstedt et al., 239-242.

85. Interview with John C. Green, Senior Fellow in Religion and American Politics, *Pew Forum*.

2008 Presidential Election

In the 2008 presidential election, there was a movement among some pro-life Catholics to support Barack Obama. Their support was based on a belief that certain social issues were more important than abortion. Douglas Kmiec, a Pepperdine University law professor and former dean of the law school at the Catholic University of America as well as former co-chairman of the Mitt Romney campaign, said that as the presidential election unfolded, “I kept discovering that Obama was sounding more Catholic than most Catholics I know.” Kmiec was speaking particularly about issues like family wages, health-care costs, and the Iraq war. Kmiec and two other pro-life Catholic supporters of Obama (M. Cathleen Kaveny and Nicholas Cafardi) argued that (1) Catholics had lost the abortion war; (2) abortion is not the only intrinsic evil and the Bush administration was guilty of committing intrinsically evil acts; and (3) Senator Obama supported government action that would reduce the number of abortions.⁸⁶ Their argument led them to conclude that a vote for Obama was, in fact, a “real” pro-life vote. However plausible it might be, the conclusion was complicated by Barack Obama’s “unalloyed” record of support for abortion on demand. Obama’s website listed support for the federal Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), which would eliminate all state and federal regulation of abortion, including

86. George Weigel, “Pro-Life Catholics for Obama: Should Abortion be the Litmus Test for Political Support?” *Newsweek*, October 14, 2008.

informed consent and parental notification. The claims of pro-life Catholic Obama supporters were quickly challenged by members of the hierarchy.⁸⁷

Cardinal Francis George of Chicago, president of the USCCB, countered the argument that Obama was more supportive of life than Republicans. George laid out his definition of justice: “In a just society, innocent human life, especially when incapable of self-defense, deserves the protection of the laws.” He asserted that no one with any moral or logical consistency can claim to support both *Roe* and the common good. They must choose one or the other. Cardinal George was not the only member of the hierarchy who was upset with pro-Obama Catholics like Kmiec, Kaveny, and Cafardi. New York bishops William Murphy of Rockville Centre and Nicholas DiMarzio of Brooklyn wrote a letter to *The New York Times* challenging their positions. The letter referenced the bishop’s statement on the 2008 election, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, which Kmiec, Kaveny, and Cafardi had interpreted as allowing Catholics to vote for a pro-choice candidate if they did so for other reasons. Murphy and DiMarzio stated flatly that this interpretation was incorrect, and that a Catholic could support a pro-choice candidate only for truly grave moral reasons and not for partisan preferences. Unfortunately for Kmiec, Kaveny, and Cafardi, the standard for grave moral reasons was a very high standard to meet.⁸⁸

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

Some Catholic Obama supporters argued that the grave moral standard had been met, but Cardinal George countered in his letter that there was a distinction between legal protection of all forms of human life and social justice issues like war and welfare. The former was the building block of society and could not be compromised; the latter was a matter of judgment. Therefore, George contended, putting the weight of their argument on prudential judgment was not sufficient criteria to meet the grave moral standard. The 2008 debate over what constituted grave moral reasons caused a previous problem to reemerge. In the 1984 election certain Catholic politicians were chastised by the hierarchy for misrepresenting Catholic teachings on particular issues; in 2008 certain Catholic politicians made incorrect statements about the Church's position on abortion. Cardinal Justin Rigali, chairman of the U.S. Bishop's Committee on Pro-Life Activities, released a statement in response to erroneous statements made by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and then-Democratic vice-presidential nominee Senator Joe Biden on *Meet the Press*. Pelosi claimed that the Church was not in agreement about when life begins. Biden expressed his belief that life did begin at conception, but he suggested that this belief was a "personal and private" matter of religious faith and could not be "imposed" on others. One of the most aggravating facets of this problem for the bishops was that both politicians tried to portray themselves as ardent Catholics, yet they continued to oppose Church teachings.

The bishops made it clear that they would not let politicians pick and choose which doctrines they wished to follow.⁸⁹

In response to erroneous statements made by the politicians, the USCCB released a fact sheet detailing the Church's historical teachings about when life begins. According to this fact sheet, Christian opposition to abortion dates back to the first century. The Church continued to believe that abortion at any stage was wrong, even when more knowledge about biological processes became available. The fact sheet addressed the incorrect references made to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. It noted that St. Augustine affirmed the Church's teaching that abortion at any stage was wrong, and that St. Thomas Aquinas had said that it was a sin "against nature" to reject God's gift of a new life.⁹⁰

Some devout Catholics grew worried over the growing number of Catholics who were not only voting for Obama but actively supporting him. A volunteer for the Pro-Life Union of Southeastern Pennsylvania worked feverishly during the 2008 campaign to urge Catholics to vote for John McCain because of his pro-life position. This volunteer, like many other Catholic pro-life supporters, complained that the Democrats were hindering her efforts by strategically reaching out to Catholics in support of issues other than abortion. The Democrats were arguing that the Church's teachings on social justice issues such as

89. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Media Relations, "Bishops Respond to Senator Biden's Statements Regarding Church Teaching on Abortion," September 9, 2008, <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-129.shtml>.

90. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, fact sheet, "Respect for Unborn Human Life: The Church's Constant Teaching," <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/constantchurchteaching.shtml>.

poverty, the environment, and health care should be given as much consideration and were just as important as abortion. Prior to the election, McCain had a 54 to 41 percent lead over Obama. The Obama campaign implemented specific strategies to win his Catholic followers over. Obama had a Catholic outreach team that trained field staffers to talk comfortably to voters about faith. The Obama campaign held Sunday brunches after mass to emphasize Obama's Christianity and to make Catholics aware that he would like to reduce the number of abortions in the U.S. through providing social services to women and children.⁹¹

In response, McCain increased his outreach to Catholics by working with groups such as the Pro-Life Union, which comprises conservative Catholics and evangelicals. Yet his best weapon in attracting pro-life Catholics may have been his running mate Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, although she may have alienated Catholic swing voters. Palin frequently spoke of her strong opposition to abortion as a way to attack Obama on the campaign trail. However, McCain did not build on the immense Catholic outreach team developed during the previous four years by Bush strategists. McCain's direct appeals to Catholics were sporadic at best. During the primaries he achieved success by following the advice of Catholic Outreach strategists. Yet he abandoned this effort in the general election and did almost nothing that they suggested.⁹²

91. Krissah Williams Thompson and Jacqueline L. Salmon, "Among Catholics, Political Rifts Over Abortion Have Grown," *The Washington Post*, October 19, 2008.

92. Interview with Deal Hudson, February, 17, 2010.

In contrast to the 2004 election, when several bishops threatened to deny Kerry communion, Catholic groups supporting pro-choice candidates actively voiced their support. In addition to scholars like Kmiec, organizations such as Catholics United and Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good came to national prominence during the 2008 campaign, despite having been in existence well before Obama became the Democratic nominee. Both groups argued for more emphasis on social issues and believed that economic policies might be the best way to combat abortion. These groups also expressed their belief that it was not a sin to vote for a pro-choice candidate.⁹³

In an October 2008 editorial for *The Washington Post*, E. J. Dionne examined the consequence of Catholics' publicly supporting Barack Obama. Dionne cited Gabino Zavala, a Los Angeles auxiliary bishop who believed there were other issues beyond abortion that demanded the Church's attention, including racism, torture, war, and poverty. Zavala stated, "We know that neither of the political parties supports everything the church teaches. We are not going to create a culture of life if we don't talk about all the life issues, beginning with abortion but including all of them."⁹⁴ He was careful to add that he did not want to take issue with any of the members of the hierarchy, but his position nonetheless differed from the one held by many of them.

93. David D. Kirkpatrick, "Abortion Issue Again Dividing Catholic Votes," *The New York Times*, September 16, 2008.

94. E. J. Dionne, "A Catholic Shift to Obama?" *The Washington Post*, October 21, 2008.

Prior to the 2008 election, Scranton bishop Joseph Martino ordered all priests in the diocese to read a letter during mass warning Catholics that voting for a supporter of abortion rights was equal to endorsing homicide. The letter stated, “Being ‘right’ on taxes, education, health care, immigration and the economy fails to make up for the error of disregarding the value of human life.”⁹⁵ Martino’s letter went further by criticizing some people’s idea of social justice. “It is a tragic irony that ‘pro-choice’ candidates have come to support homicide—the gravest injustice a society can tolerate—in the name of ‘social justice.’” In stark contrast to the 2004 election, progressive Catholic organizations appeared willing to counter the arguments of some Catholic bishops. In Scranton, Pennsylvania, Sister Margaret P. Gannon, a professor at Marywood University, collected signatures for a newspaper advertisement that reminded those leery of voting for Obama that the Catholic Church considered racism a sin that threatened the dignity of life. Additionally, the group Catholics United, which was formed in the spring of 2004, came under fire from some members of the USCCB for its involvement in the 2008 election. Catholics United was formed to promote the USCCB’s *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility*. However, their interpretation of the document and of Catholic social teaching was not what the Church had intended to convey. During the Educating on the Nature and Dignity of Women dinner in Denver on October 17, 2008, Archbishop

95. David D. Kirkpatrick, “As Election Nears, Catholic Church Is Driven by Unusual Internal Debate,” *The New York Times*, October 5, 2008.

Charles Chaput expressed his belief that Catholics United had “done a disservice to the Church” by confusing the priorities of Catholic social teaching and giving some Catholics an excuse to abandon the abortion issue. Catholics United responded by saying that they had hoped to depolarize the abortion debate in order to find common-ground solutions promoting Catholic teachings on human life. Catholics United also conducted a direct mail campaign asking voters to consider the “real meaning of pro-life” when they voted on November 4.⁹⁶

In preparation for the 2008 presidential election, the bishops released *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*. The document contained four questions: (1) Why does the Church teach about issues affecting public policy? (2) Who in the Church should participate in political life? (3) How does the Church help the Catholic faithful to speak about political and social questions? and (4) What does the Church say about Catholic social teaching in the public square? *Faithful Citizenship* offered Catholics a list of ten goals for forming their consciences and reflecting on the moral dimensions of their public choices. The document noted that not all of the issues were of equal importance: “Not all issues are equal; these ten goals address matters of different moral weight and urgency. Some involve matters of intrinsic evil that can never be supported. Others involve affirmative obligations to seek

96. Kirkpatrick, “As Election Nears, Catholic Church Is Driven by Unusual Internal Debate.”

the common good.” The first two goals listed addressed the issue of abortion and protection of the unborn.⁹⁷

In addition to *Faithful Citizenship*, the USCCB has released statements advising Catholics not to rely on outside groups to provide them with the Church’s views on certain issues. On October 21, 2008, Cardinal Justin Rigali released a statement in which he said, “Our faith requires us to oppose abortion on demand and to provide help to mothers facing challenging pregnancies.” Rigali also responded to those individuals who suggest that the Catholic Church should accept *Roe* as law and concede that government support for pregnant women was the only way to reduce abortions. Rigali, along with Bishop William Murphy of Rockville Centre, New York, said, “Providing support for pregnant women so they choose to have their babies is a necessary but not sufficient response to abortion. Similarly, reversal of *Roe* is a necessary but not sufficient condition for restoring an order of justice in our society’s treatment of defenseless human life.”⁹⁸ Rigali noted the successes that had been achieved in the fight against abortion, such as bans on public funding, as well as informed consent and parental consent requirements. He urged support to fight the Freedom of Choice Act, which would undo pro-life laws and forbid public programs from discriminating against abortion in providing services to women. Rigali

97. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, <http://www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship/FCStatement.pdf>.

98. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Office of Media Relations, “Legal Protection for Unborn, Support for Mothers Both Needed,” October 21, 2008, <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-154.shtml>.

ended his statement with a call to help build a culture of life in the United States and provide women with an alternative to abortion.⁹⁹

2008 Presidential Election Results

In 2008, 54 percent of Catholics supported Obama, as compared to McCain's 45 percent share of the Catholic vote.¹⁰⁰ Yet as in past elections, church attendance was a major factor, as Catholics who attended church frequently voted for John McCain. After Obama's victory, the hierarchy sent him a letter of congratulations on his historic win and urged him to defend the weakest among us. They also pledged their support to work with him to defend the dignity of human life. To that end, the bishops have drafted a list of goals that will be their priority through 2011. These goals include protecting the dignity of human life and strengthening marriage.

Democrats and the Catholic Church

A major issue Democrats face regarding Catholic policy concerns is the difference between what they describe as society's moral obligations and what Republicans view as such. Both sides agree that the poor and less fortunate deserve support from others, but they disagree on the type and extent of that support. President George W. Bush presented an example of the conservative approach to responsibility toward the poor. Bush, who regularly injected religious rhetoric into his speeches, believes in what he described as

99. Ibid.

100. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "How the Faithful Voted," November 5, 2008.

“compassionate conservatism.” His compassionate conservatism underscores that the roots of poverty are found in individual shortcomings and not in social or economic inequality. He used the example of drug addicts who must free themselves from their addiction. Essentially, the Republican view is that individuals must take responsibility for themselves, but the government may step in at times. The Democrats take a different view of responsibility.¹⁰¹

Hillary Clinton, for example, advocates a type of society in which individuals can rely on others for support. Her philosophy is best expressed in the title of her book, *It Takes a Village*. Clinton’s philosophy has been described as “a generally progressive social agenda with a strong dose of moralism, the admixture of the two driven by an abundant faith in the capacity of the human intellect and the redeeming power of love.”¹⁰² Clinton believes that communities and families guide and support individuals, especially those in need. Yet where she and the Democrats differ from the Republicans is that the former believe that government should have a role in this process as well. In *Lifting Up the Poor*, Mary Jo Bane, former assistant secretary of Health and Human Services in the Clinton administration, and Lawrence M. Mead, a moderately conservative evangelical and politics professor at New York University, discuss their views of the welfare debate and explain the religious undertones of their arguments. Bane, who is described as a liberal

101. Dionne, *Souled Out*, 73.

102. Ibid., 74.

Catholic, acknowledges that scripture does not say who is obligated to provide what goods and to whom, but asserts that it is the moral duty of the community to provide basic levels of “subsistence, health care, and education to all its members.” This view was based on Bane’s belief that God’s plan is for everyone to succeed and flourish.¹⁰³ Mead reflects a traditional Protestant emphasis on the individual in private relationship with God, while Bane reflects Catholicism’s emphasis on community and solidarity en route to salvation. These differences may reflect the basic theological differences between Protestants and Catholics.

Mead’s ideas, while based on religious principles, take a different view of individual and community responsibility. “Jesus does help the needy and commands his followers to do so, but he has other concerns which are not economic, and he is not undemanding toward those he helps.”¹⁰⁴ Mead believes that the root causes of poverty are found in our culture. He adopts a paternalistic approach to the poor based on his idea that “if you receive some benefits, you accept some obligations in return.”¹⁰⁵ Both Mead and Bane have compassion for those in need, but their views on how the government and the individual should respond are quite different. Bane, who adheres to a liberal philosophy, places a heavy emphasis on the structural causes of poverty. Mead, who is more

103. Ibid., 76-78.

104. Ibid., 76.

105. Ibid.

conservative, emphasizes the shortcomings of the individual, which are rooted in a flawed culture.

E. J. Dionne addresses the problem that Democrats face in admitting that both the individual and the community have responsibility for solving societal problems. Democrats have trouble admitting that faith plays a role in both individual and collective responsibility. In 2008, Senator Barack Obama was adept at urging liberals to consider the personal responsibility that individuals bear in their own successes and failures. Obama emphasized both governmental responsibility and personal responsibility, noting that gang members who shoot into crowds have a hole in their heart that government cannot fix. Obama also noted that contraception can prevent teen pregnancy, but so can faith and guidance. Obama made no apologies for sounding “preachy,” and reminded liberals that the fear of religion or the fear of being preachy undercuts the role of values and culture in some of the country’s biggest social problems. Obama also cautioned against using religion to lecture Americans. Rather, he advocated a measured approach. “No matter how religious they may or may not be, people are tired of seeing faith used as a tool of attack. They don’t want faith used to belittle or to divide.”¹⁰⁶ Obama’s words are increasingly important, as many Americans view liberals as hostile to religion. Perhaps

106. Ibid., 78.

Obama can create a political environment in which government, individuals, faith, values, and morality coexist to produce a better society.¹⁰⁷

Another area in which the Democrats face a problem with both the Catholic Church and voters is gay marriage. The Democratic Party is more supportive of the rights of homosexuals to marry, but unlike Republicans, there is a significant degree of division within the party regarding support. This is a stark contrast to Republicans. Eighty-three percent of conservative Republicans and 66 percent of moderate Republicans oppose gay marriage. The Catholic Church also opposes gay marriage, as do the majority of American Catholics. Currently, 58 percent of white Catholics are opposed to gay marriage. Despite the relatively significant opposition to gay marriage, a large percentage of Americans believes in civil unions, which offer the legal benefits of marriage without the title. Catholics in particular are supportive of this, with 63 percent supporting civil unions.¹⁰⁸

The Catholic Church opposes any form of gay marriage. The USCCB explicitly states that marriage is between a man and a woman. The nature of marriage is rooted in the ability of the man and woman to procreate, which cannot occur in gay marriage. For the Church, the legal recognition of marriage is not only about a personal commitment that husband and wife make to each other, but it also a commitment to the well-being of society. The bishops feel that it is wrong to redefine marriage for the sole purpose of

107. Ibid., 77-78.

108. Facts and Figures obtained from a July 2006 poll conducted by The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life entitled "Pragmatic Americans Liberal and Conservative on Social Issues." It was released on August 3, 2006.

providing benefits to those who cannot legally enter into marriage. The legal benefits sought by persons in civil unions can be obtained without marital status.¹⁰⁹ To date, the bishops have also opposed any legislation, either federal or state, that seeks to redefine marriage by granting civil unions or domestic partnerships, or by naming such arrangements as marriage. They continue to support a constitutional amendment that defines marriage as only the union of a man and a woman. They support this amendment in order to “bear witness to a truth that is given by God in the natural order of creation and that is confirmed by divine revelation in the Bible.” In the 2008 election, John McCain’s position fell in line with that of the Church; however, he opposed a constitutional amendment to define marriage because he believed it would usurp the power of the states. Obama, on the other hand, took a more liberal approach to the issue of gay marriage.¹¹⁰

During the campaign, Barack Obama stated that while he personally believes that marriage is between a man and woman, he also believes in the equality of all individuals. Obama urged a repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) because federal law should not discriminate against gays and lesbians, which he believes DOMA does. Obama supported civil unions and voted against a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage. Interestingly, as a senator, Joe Biden voted for the constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman. He supports granting legal rights and

109. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops Fact Sheet on Marriage and Same-Sex Unions, <http://www.usccb.org/laity/marriage/samesexfaq.shtml>.

110. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, Religion and Politics ’08, Candidate Profiles.

protections to gay and lesbian couples but would not go as far as supporting the legalization of gay marriage. The split between Obama and Biden is reflective of the larger split within the Democratic Party. It signals that the Democrats may have to address the issue as a party in order to find a more united stance. They face a problem: the majority of Americans are not comfortable with the idea of gay marriage. Conversely, while some may support the idea that gays and lesbians have the right to marry, many are not comfortable with the federal government amending the Constitution to ban it.¹¹¹

Parts of the Democratic Party platform are in accordance with Church teachings. For instance, the Democratic Party's environmental platform closely parallels Church teaching. After the 2004 elections, Democrats attempted to connect issues such as the environment to morality. They also recognized that there was an opportunity for Democratic candidates to freely express their religious beliefs. A Pew Forum event in October 2006 called "In Pursuit of Values Voters" discussed this particular change among Democrats. Amy Sullivan, contributing editor of *TIME Magazine*, noted that "2004 was a turning point for some Democrats who had been anxious to talk about religion but didn't feel it was acceptable within the party."¹¹² In a speech at Pepperdine University on September 18, 2006, John Kerry described how he regretted not speaking more openly about his religious faith during the 2004 presidential election. Kerry expressed his regret

111. Ibid.

112. Transcript of Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Event, "In Pursuit of Values Voters," which was held October 11, 2006.

by saying, “I learned that if I didn’t fill in the picture myself, others would draw the caricature for me.”¹¹³ He also spoke of a religious awakening that he had experienced in the 1980s.

Kerry discussed how his faith had evolved from his childhood, through his time in Vietnam, and during what he referred to as a twelve-year period of alienation from his faith. During the Vietnam War, Kerry’s faith was a strong part of his daily life, but it was a dependent one in which he would tell God, “Get me through this and I’ll be good.” His faith did not grow during this time because he confronted firsthand the horror of war. He saw friends die and witnessed other evils that haunt him to this day. After returning from Vietnam, he was unable to reconcile the problem of the evil that he had witnessed and wandered “in the wilderness, went through a divorce, and struggled with questions about my direction.” He suddenly realized the connection between his work as a public servant and his formative teachings. He experienced a revelation in 1987 or 1988 when a friend died of cancer. His friend helped him to understand that his death was part of God’s purpose, and from that came a sense of acceptance. “It was a stark awakening about how you reconcile some of these difficulties I had about...the suffering, about the problem of

113. Text of speech given by Sen. John Kerry (D) at Pepperdine University, Monday, September 18, 2006.

evil. I understood that to be part of the test of faith.”¹¹⁴ It was then that Kerry understood that he had to translate his faith into action.

One of his favorite passages from scripture comes from the Gospel of Mark. In the story, the apostles James and John ask Jesus if they can sit, one at his right hand and one at his left, and bask in his glory. He tells them that the special position they want is not his to grant; it is only for those who are up to the task. When the other apostles hear the story, they are angry, and so Jesus gathers them together. He explains to them that while Gentile rulers lord their power over their servants, he who wishes to be first must be a servant to all, “for the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Those words had what Kerry described as a “profound impact” on him. He realized that saying one believes in Jesus is not enough; “believing in Jesus requires action.” He believed that his public leadership was a form of Christian service and an expression of his faith.

Kerry then discussed several questions with which all Christians should wrestle, his interpretation of a list that had been presented by the Catholic bishops in their 2004 election guide. For Kerry, the first and most obvious challenges were the issues of poverty, disease, and despair. The emphasis on these three issues was an obvious departure from the issues that both the Republican Party and the bishops had deemed most

114. Text of speech given by Sen. John Kerry (D) at Pepperdine University, Monday, September 18, 2006.

important. At the Pew Forum event on values voters, Amy Sullivan noted the differences between the Republicans and the Democrats in deciding which is more pressing: economic issues or social issues. She explained that the Republican Party speaks in communitarian ways: what one does in one's own life affects the entire community, and as a member of society, one has a responsibility to live up to certain morals and norms. Yet, Sullivan warns, this has a limited appeal to the economic libertarian wing of the party. The Democrats, she noted, have done the opposite. They believe we have an economic responsibility to each other but that social issues are private matters.¹¹⁵

During the forum, the panelists discussed how many Christian conservative voters had become disillusioned with the Republicans due to Iraq, lack of success in certain social issues, and the Mark Foley sex scandal. Could the Democrats capitalize on the desire of many religious voters to address both social and economic issues? The key to Democratic success would be convincing voters that the party is open to those who have diverse social views. One promising sign was the election of Tim Kaine, a pro-life Democrat, as governor of Virginia. His election showed many that a Democrat could run as a pro-life candidate but not be anti-choice. The candidacies of Robert Casey for U.S. Senate and Bill Ritter for governor of Colorado were also important in this respect. Both are pro-life Catholic Democrats who ran without pro-choice money. Their victories showed that candidates can stand up to pro-choice groups and win without their money. Pro-choice

115. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "In Pursuit of Values Voters."

campaign donations have traditionally been an anchor holding Democrats to the belief that they had to advocate socially liberal positions and could not move toward the middle. Ritter was personally pro-life but refused to have abortion as a top item on his agenda. Instead, Ritter advocated reducing abortions by avoiding unwanted pregnancies. Ritter's approach marks an important new direction emerging among Catholic Democratic candidates. John Kerry had noted the shift from the Mario Cuomo model of approach: a person may be personally opposed to abortion, but he or she is not going to impose his or her religious beliefs on others. For Ritter and other candidates taking this new tack—reducing abortion by reducing the need for it—a Catholic Democrat can bridge his or her religious views with political necessity. This approach may appeal to pro-choice voters by avoiding the odd model of saying “I’m religious, but I’m not religious in my political life.”¹¹⁶ John C. Green used the example of Democrats claiming that they were personally opposed to poverty but did not want to impose their views on others by raising taxes. However, if a candidate was concerned about poverty and could cite his church’s teachings on advocating for the poor, then he could make a nuanced argument balancing economic growth with social concerns. It is also parallel to the abortion issue.¹¹⁷ Green believes that while the level of hostility toward pro-life Democrats has declined, they are still not accepted by many within the party. It may be possible for them to find acceptance among

116. Ibid.

117. Ibid.

traditionalist Catholics, “but then politics is never easy for traditionalist Catholics because neither party really fits Catholic teaching.”¹¹⁸

In his speech, Kerry suggested that fighting poverty and disease, caring for the earth, reducing abortions, and fighting only just wars were godly tasks that would transcend the culture wars and help voters find common ground. In addressing the fear of expressing religion in the world of politics, he advocated that “a vision of public service based upon serving rather than being served is ultimately a vision of hope and not despair.”¹¹⁹ He criticized those who would use faith to divide and alienate people or who would use God for partisan gain. He reminded his audience that “the call of Jesus, and of every great religious leader, to everyone is one of service to all and not the pursuit of power. Each of us needs to do our best to answer that call, and help each other hear it in a common spirit of obedience, humility, and love.”¹²⁰

On the same day as Kerry’s speech, a new group was formed called Red Letter Christians. Named for the colored type that highlights Jesus’ words in some editions of the Bible, the group consisted of progressive Christian communicators who urged an open, honest, and public dialogue on faith and politics. Their goal was to advance the message that faith could not be reduced to the issues of abortion and homosexuality. Red Letter Christians felt that fighting poverty, caring for the environment, advancing peace,

118. Interview with John C. Green.

119. Text of Kerry speech, September 18, 2006.

120. Ibid.

promoting strong families, and supporting a consistent ethic of life were “critical moral and biblical values.”¹²¹ The group stated that they were speaking out because members of the religious right had attempted to convince Christians and Americans that faithful people with strong moral values have only one option when it comes to voting. This view, in their opinion, marginalized Christians who seek an open dialogue on moral values and their role in the public square. According to their website, “God is not a Republican or a Democrat, and candidates should be measured by examining an array of social and economic issues.” Other liberal religious groups similar to Red Letter Christians developed after the 2004 election. Devout Democrats is an interfaith, grassroots organization whose mission is to explain why religious Americans vote for Democrats.¹²² The group also hopes to be a model for the appropriate way to bring religion into the public square. Both Red Letter Christians and Devout Democrats have similar positions on key social, moral, and economic issues. On abortion, both groups advocate reducing abortions by reducing unwanted pregnancies and supporting adoption.

Christian conservatives, however, did not seem affected by the creation of these groups. Conservative advocacy groups planned a four-day “Values Voter Summit” in Washington, D.C. Fearful that liberal groups might usurp the narrative of key social issues, their goal was to reignite the passions that drove values voters to the polls in 2004:

121. http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.redletterchristians.

122. *Devout Democrats*, <http://devoutdemocrats.org/>.

abortion, gay marriage, and preserving religious liberties.¹²³ Despite the efforts of conservative Christian groups, it appears that many liberal-leaning religious voters have decided to make their voices heard. The Democratic Party seems to have begun to realize that many Americans believe that religion should have a place in politics.

Conclusion

Catholics were once the mainstay of the Democratic base. As many have noted, to be Catholic was once to be a Democrat. Through the years, however, the allegiance of many Catholics to the Democratic Party has weakened for several key reasons. Catholics began to move away from the Democratic Party during the 1960s when they experienced enormous economic and social prosperity. As Catholics became more educated and wealthier, their place and status in American society changed as well. As a result, the Democratic Party platform was no longer a perfect match for all Catholics. Not all Catholics abandoned the party, but Catholics became a major swing group in the American electorate, with almost equal percentages splitting their votes between the Democrats and the Republicans. Additionally, as the Republican Party increasingly focused on opposition to abortion and similar pro-life concerns, the Catholic bishops and the administrative institutions of the Church found more agreement with the Republican Party on various social and moral issues.

123. Alan Cooperman, "Kerry Talks of Loss, Renewal of His Catholic Faith," *The Washington Post*, September 19, 2006.

More than any issue, it was abortion that changed relations between the Church and the Democratic Party. Beginning with the 1976 presidential election, the bishops made it known that they did not condone the Democratic platform regarding abortion. From that point forward, pro-choice Democratic candidates and officeholders, particularly those who were Catholic, were publicly criticized by the bishops. Because candidates understood the importance of Catholic voters, many of these pro-choice candidates attempted to appease the bishops by emphasizing other areas of agreement with the Church. Yet this tactic was of limited utility; any time a pro-choice candidate would focus on areas in which he or she was in agreement with the Church, the bishops would counter with the issue of abortion. The Democratic Party-Catholic Church relationship has been extremely fractured by the abortion debate. It seems that no matter what other issues the two have agreed upon, abortion has driven a wedge between them that may be impossible to bridge. As Catholics have enjoyed greater economic and social prosperity, their reliance on the Catholic Church as a defining social institution has diminished. As the hierarchy has increasingly focused on abortion, the Church's reliance on the Democratic Party has diminished as well. The centrality of abortion has shifted the allegiance of religiously motivated voters more toward the Republican Party, which has left Catholic Democrats feeling abandoned by both their party and Church. It has awakened them to the reality that they need to embrace faith and not run from it. But whether they will embrace this new reality is an open question.

Chapter 4 – The Republican Party and the Catholic Church

Despite their historic association with the Democratic Party, the post–World War II period witnessed a perceptible shift among Catholics toward a more conservative worldview. George Nash, in *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, concluded that much of the movement “seemed Catholic in composition.” Nash described it as a postwar coming-of-age for the Catholic minority. Prominent Catholic spokesmen for postwar conservatism included Russell Kirk and William F. Buckley, whose *National Review* was an essential part of the conservative movement’s renaissance. The conservative message was particularly attractive to orthodox and traditionalist Catholics. This conservative movement had a part in the formation of the Conservative Party in New York, whose leadership comprised mainly Catholics. In 1970, their candidate for U.S. Senate, James Buckley, defeated the nominees of two major parties.¹

The conservative movement had enjoyed a long history in the United States, yet the Great Depression damaged many conservative ideas. Many people blamed the financial crisis on the excesses of the capitalist system and corporate greed. Americans came to accept the notion that the federal government had an obligation to them to regulate financial interests. The Social Security Act of 1935 symbolized the new expanded role for the government. While most Americans welcomed the government control, a vocal minority continued to express their hostility to the expanded powers of the federal

1. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 28.

government. This group of conservatives believed that government control would hamper the ability of individuals to create wealth.²

Conservatives also feared that the creation of the welfare state would encourage the spread of communism. American conservatives had warned of the threat of international communism since the Bolshevik Revolution, but their arguments were not heeded until the end of World War II. From 1943 to 1953, conservative intellectuals led by Frederick Hayek, an Austrian-born economist and social philosopher, made the argument that “Rooseveltian liberalism was much deeper than spies or internal subversion.” He argued that there was “a philosophical affinity between any collectivist political movement (like the New Deal) and the forces of totalitarianism.” He believed that communism and German National Socialism were the “mature results of all forms of collectivism.” Hayek’s influential 1944 book *The Road to Serfdom* made the argument that any attempt to control the economic freedom of individuals would lead to serfdom and barbarism. Hayek’s book was one of several writings that were fundamental to the thinking of conservative intellectuals.³

National Review and *Modern Age* were also important in giving voice to the conservative movement. Neither magazine, however, was explicitly Catholic. *National Review* believed itself to be a “conservative journal of opinion” for the entire U.S.

2. Dan T. Carter, “The Rise of Conservatism Since World War II,” *Magazine of History* 17 (January 2003): 11.

3. *Ibid.*, 12.

population. But a large number of Catholics worked there from the beginning, including several of Buckley's siblings. His Catholic staff included Frederick Wilhelmsen, John Lukas, Thomas Molnar, Ralph de Toledano, Arnold Lunn, Willi Schlamm, Eric Von Kuehnelt-Leddihn, James Burnham, James Hitchcock, James McFadden, Michael Novak, John Noonan, and Stephen Tonsor. There were also a significant number of writers who converted to Catholicism—Brent Bozell and Willmore Kendall, as well as Russell Kirk, Jeffrey Hart, Frank Meyer, Joseph Sobran, and Dale Vree. *National Review* also employed non-Catholics who spoke with high praise of the Catholic Church. This group included religious sociologist Will Herberg, Harold O.J. Brown, and Peter Viereck.⁴

According to some, anti-communism was the catalyst for the marriage between Catholicism and conservatism. Lee Edwards, a historian of the conservative movement, believed that the connection was based on good versus evil. “We young conservatives saw Communism as evil...We may not have used that word (maybe we did use it), but the Catholic approach of believing in the devil, believing in good and evil, helped us to be able to make that judgment.”⁵ Fighting communism also fell into Catholics' perception of “American exceptionalism.” American exceptionalism was rooted in the belief that God had set the country apart in order to have a special role in world history. Belief in

4. Patrick Allitt, “American Catholics and the New Conservatism of the 1950s,” *U.S. Catholic Historian* 7 (Winter 1988): 20-21.

5. Deal Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York, NY: Threshold Edition, 2008), 137.

American exceptionalism has been a key reason why Catholic voters have moved toward the Republican Party since 1960.⁶

The critical part of the Catholic conservative movement was its strong foreign policy concentration, which placed significant emphasis on anti-communism. Catholic conservatism did not feel the need to criticize government programs that promoted social welfare, and it did not oppose government action to strengthen civil rights or the expansion of economic and educational opportunities. The displacement of economic issues imperiled the dominant position that the Democratic Party had held for almost forty years. After World War II, the bishops expressed their concern over the spread of secularism and over judicial decisions that they interpreted as “closing much of public life to religion.”⁷

Catholics and Republicans: An Emerging Friendship

During the 1952 presidential election the Republicans made an attempt to capitalize on Catholic voters who had become dissatisfied with the Democratic Party. They used three words to emphasize the failings of the Truman administration: Korea, communism, and corruption. Korea was the primary concern of voters in 1952, and Republicans focused on several alleged misjudgments by the Truman administration. The issue of communism was especially relevant for Catholics, who had heard about the threat of communism from Catholic clergy who experienced it firsthand. When satellite

6. Ibid., 137.

7. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 29.

governments in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia began suppressing the Church, organizations in the U.S. such as the Knights of Columbus were at the forefront of the counterattack movement. Newly established Catholic schools were named after Catholic clergy imprisoned by communist leaders. Additionally, the enactment of the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, allowing 400,000 refugees from Eastern Europe into the United States, created more problems for Truman and the Democrats. A large number of the refugees were well-educated, wealthy, cultured, and motivated by patriotic duty to change the conditions in their homelands. These refugees were well-equipped to be leaders for the many Americans sharing their national origin. They wanted to restore freedom to their homelands, but the policy of containment outlined by George Kennan did not endear the Truman administration to these Catholic immigrants. Instead of containment, they desired the liberation of captive nations under Soviet control.

It was during the 1950s that both parties began to realize the importance of Catholic voters. In 1956, John Bailey, Democratic Party chairman for Connecticut, circulated a memo attributing Adlai Stevenson's loss in the presidential election to the defection of Catholic voters. The memo was an attempt to convince the delegates at the 1956 Democratic National Convention to nominate John F. Kennedy for vice president. Identifying states in which Catholic voters had been lost, the memo stated that "these errant Democrats could be recaptured by placing a well-known Catholic on the ticket in

1956.” Stevenson ultimately concluded that putting a Catholic on the ticket was too risky because of the prejudice still present in the U.S.⁸

Although Catholics did have a long history of allegiance to the Democratic Party, certain cultural changes created a shift in the conservative direction. In presidential elections from 1976 to 2008, the bishops apparently had a decidedly friendlier relationship with the Republican candidates, due mainly to the Republican platform on abortion. The bishops, as leaders of the Catholic Church, wanted to guide Catholics toward pro-life candidates. While the bishops refrained from openly endorsing political parties, most pro-life candidates were Republicans. Republican candidates eager to obtain the support of Catholic voters tried vigorously to show their agreement with the bishops. Thus, the bishops and Republican pro-life candidates enjoyed a symbiotic relationship in which both employed the issue of abortion for their political ends. Republican candidates welcomed and encouraged the active involvement of the hierarchy, and the hierarchy was more than happy to accept their invitation.

Republicans attempted to exploit their similarities with the bishops; however, their attempts did not occur until the 1976 presidential election and were somewhat halfhearted until the election of Ronald Reagan. During the Nixon administration, the president exercised no leadership in the emerging abortion battle or even in opposing the *Roe* decision. When *Roe* was announced, Nixon was in the middle of his own political

8. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 122-123.

troubles, as the 1973 Watergate trial was beginning and Congress was moving toward holding hearings on the administration's obstruction of justice and cover-up activities. Nixon did, however, publicly oppose abortion before he ran for reelection. By 1972, abortion was emerging as a volatile campaign issue. Nixon had reversed a federal regulation making abortions more available in hospitals on military bases, yet he largely avoided controversy by leaving the battle over abortion to the state legislatures. Nixon wanted abortion policy at American military bases to correspond with the laws of the states in which the bases were located. Nixon had also stated, "From personal and religious beliefs, I consider abortion an unacceptable form of population control."⁹

The *Roe* decision in 1973 was followed by another pro-abortion ruling of the Burger Court when it struck down a requirement by the state of Missouri that a woman obtain spousal or parental consent before having an abortion. President Ford, who was running for reelection in 1976, was much more moderate than Nixon and the right wing of the Republican Party. When the Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973, Ford "cautiously and rather ambivalently" opposed the decision by saying that the Court had "gone too far." Ford believed that states should have the power to decide whether and how to restrict abortions. He also opposed a constitutional amendment to limit or overturn *Roe* and filed no amicus curiae briefs in cases that challenged *Roe*. Ford sent some mixed

9. Craig and O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 150.

messages when pro-life and pro-choice leaders demanded that he take a stronger stand on abortion. During a meeting with several members of the NCCB, Ford stated his “grave concern” over the morality of abortion. He went further, saying that each new life is a miracle of creation. Ford even stated, “Since 1973 I have viewed as the most practical means of rectifying the situation created by the Court’s action a constitutional amendment that would restore to each state the authority to enact abortion statutes which fit the concerns and views of its own citizens.”¹⁰ However, one week after making this statement, President Ford vetoed an appropriations bill that included the Hyde Amendment, forbidding federal funding of nontherapeutic abortions under the Medicaid program. His public reasoning for the veto was that the bill was nearly \$4 billion over his budget request. Ford believed that he was forced to choose between offending those who benefited from government programs in the bill and those who were concerned with certain restrictions in the bill. Congress eventually overrode his veto 312-93 in the House and 67-15 in the Senate. The Burger Court also upheld the Hyde Amendment.¹¹

Despite Ford’s mixed messages on abortion, he tried to secure the support of the Catholic bishops in order to win the majority of Catholic votes. Although the bishops were unsuccessful in persuading Catholics to vote for the pro-life candidate, they did impress other groups with their political influence. The members of the conservative movement

10. Ibid., 161.

11. Ibid.

had carefully followed the bishops' tactics in the 1976 election and adopted their own anti-abortion efforts. The new movement was successful because of ideological rifts within the Republican Party. Although attempts to create a third party failed, a new faction within the Republican Party was formed, known as the "New Right."

The New Right's plan was to build a coalition around the central social issue of abortion. The new coalition believed that abortion could be the "Achilles' heel of the Democratic Party" and intended to exploit the issue in order to end the party's dominance. The New Right also expanded the pro-life movement into the pro-family movement, thus allowing them to turn abortion opposition into a broader political agenda.¹² The New Right sought leaders from the right-to-life movement to join forces with them. The leaders of the National Right-to-Life Committee, however, did not want to dilute the single issue of abortion with broader policy concerns. Yet the New Right did succeed in finding some members of the movement who were unhappy with the level of success achieved in obtaining an anti-abortion amendment. Judy and Paul Brown joined forces with the New Right and helped to recast "right to life" within a broader social agenda and a more partisan conservative movement during the 1980 election.¹³

The New Right was not the only group that became visible during the 1980 election. While the Catholic bishops remained on the sidelines, evangelical and

12. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 88.

13. Ibid.

fundamentalist Protestants began to take a more active role in the political process. Many born-again Christians became politically active in 1976, trying to elect fellow born-again Christian Jimmy Carter. They remained active after the Internal Revenue Service revoked the tax-exempt status of racially segregated religious schools known as Christian academies. The loss of the tax exemption signaled a decrease in the emphasis on social and family issues.¹⁴ Both parties were unsure how to deal with this new religio-political movement, yet the New Right saw an opportunity. They reached out to religious leaders, and one leader in particular became their official point of contact: Jerry Falwell, a Baptist minister and host of the *Old Time Gospel Hour*. The leaders of the New Right, Paul Weyrich and Howard Phillips, met with Falwell in Virginia and relayed to him that they were a group of social conservatives who wished to be organized into an effective political organization. Falwell agreed to help fund and build the religious New Right, and the “Moral Majority” was born.¹⁵ Falwell’s plan was to cast abortion as a moral issue and not one of personal choice or constitutional right. He assured Catholic leaders that Protestant ministers had joined the fight against abortion. Falwell even described Pope John Paul II as the “best hope we Baptists ever had.”¹⁶ Falwell made his best attempt to create a

14. Ibid., 89.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 90.

political coalition of socially conservative Catholics and southern conservative Protestants, and sought to end the long-standing fundamentalist anti-Catholic bias.¹⁷

Ronald Reagan and Abortion

Ronald Reagan owed his victory in part to Jimmy Carter's failure to meet the expectations of Christian conservatives. In 1976, Christian conservatives became involved in politics specifically to elect a fellow conservative Christian to the presidency. Carter had led Christian conservatives to believe that he would rely heavily on his faith while in office. Christians quickly became disillusioned with Carter because of his support for the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights, his failure to support mandatory prayer in public schools, and his failure to end abortion. They also felt that his position on arms control and the Panama Canal Treaty made him look soft on communism.¹⁸ Despite repeated advice from the Christian community, Carter refused to reach out and thus further alienated a group that should have been his natural ally. Also, Carter's handling of the abortion issue provided a further impetus for the anti-abortion movement. Carter's faith and his politicizing of the abortion issue pushed abortion into the spotlight and invigorated evangelicals' political involvement. "After observing that the 1976 election re-enfranchised evangelical Christians and brought them into the political arena with gusto after years of political apathy, Carter and his administration's handling of abortion

17. Ibid., 88-90.

18. Andrew R. Flint and Joy Porter, "The Re-emergence of Faith-Based Politics and the Abortion Rights Issue," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35 (March 2005): 35.

provided an impetus for further anti-abortion organization.”¹⁹ James Dobson, one of the leaders of the Moral Majority, said of Carter’s defeat and Reagan’s victory, “Had we not been Baptists we would have danced in the streets.”²⁰

The results of the 1980 election were important for both Republicans and the bishops. The election of Ronald Reagan, a pro-life conservative, signaled that the Church would now have an ally in the fight against abortion. Reagan aggressively championed the pro-life movement early in his campaign. He attacked the Supreme Court’s rulings and stated that they were “an abuse of power as bad as the transgressions of Watergate and the bribery on Capitol Hill.”²¹ He endorsed a constitutional amendment to reverse *Roe*, pledged to appoint pro-life judges to federal benches, and promised to prohibit the use of federal funds for abortion except when the mother’s life was in danger. The 1984 election had a much different tone than the preceding election. *The Christian Century* had as its conclusions for 1984 the caption, “Religion in Politics: ’84’s Top Story.” Both evangelicals and Catholics intended to play a major role in the 1984 presidential election.

Throughout Reagan’s first term, he identified himself as someone who was willing to work toward the anti-abortion cause. He had distinguished himself from other presidents in five ways. First, he gave presidential legitimacy to the legal enforcement of the anti-abortion movement’s moral views. Second, the Reagan administration supported a

19. Ibid., 37.

20. Ibid., 47.

21. Craig and O’Brien, “Abortion and American Politics,” 169.

constitutional amendment and congressional legislation intended to reverse *Roe*. Third, the Department of Justice screened potential appointees to the federal bench for those who were supportive of the pro-life cause. Fourth, Reagan's solicitor general, Charles Fried, aggressively pushed the Supreme Court to stop using *Roe* as precedent. Fifth, the Reagan administration enacted regulations restricting access to abortion. Aside from Reagan's pro-life actions, his rhetoric was so strong that the words of the pro-choice groups paled in comparison.²²

By 1984, the Republican Party had fully aligned itself with pro-life supporters and with traditional religious values. Reagan's attempt to reemphasize his identification with the religious base gave the 1984 campaign a deeply religious tone. After his renomination, Reagan addressed over 10,000 people at a prayer breakfast in Dallas' Reunion Arena, telling the crowd that "politics and morality are inseparable. And, as morality's foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related."²³ That statement, as well as the presence of Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, drew complaints from the Democrats that the Republicans had violated "a liberal consensus of the past half century...that religion ought to...be kept out of the public order."²⁴

Cardinal John O'Connor's vocal support for Ronald Reagan drew some resentment from Mondale. Mondale declined the Cardinal's invitation to attend the Al Smith

22. Ibid., 169.

23. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 187.

24. Ibid.

Memorial banquet. The dinner had been a major attraction to the candidates of the major parties in previous presidential elections. At the 1984 dinner, Reagan appeared without an opponent, giving the dinner the feeling of a campaign rally. Additionally, in 1984, eighteen New England bishops declared abortion to be “the critical issue of the moment.”²⁵ Bishop James W. Malone of Youngstown issued a statement on behalf of the conference cautioning the clergy against expressing support for particular candidates, but he expressed approval of defining Church teaching on the moral aspects of political issues.²⁶

During the 1970s, both Republicans and Democrats equivocated on the issue of abortion. In stark contrast, Ronald Reagan was bold and aggressive in his attempt to overturn *Roe* and elevate abortion to the national political agenda. Ronald Reagan’s experience with abortion began in 1967 during his first term as governor of California. On June 14, 1967, Reagan signed the Therapeutic Abortion Act of 1967. His agony over the Act shaped his position on abortion for the rest of his political career. At the time, Reagan was politically inexperienced and admitted that until that point abortion was something that “I’d never given much thought to and one upon which I didn’t really have an opinion. But now I was governor and abortion turned out to be something that I couldn’t walk away from.”²⁷ Reagan’s admission that he had thought and known little about abortion was more of a “sign of the times” than an indictment of Reagan’s passion, or lack thereof, for

25. Ibid., 189.

26. Ibid., 189.

27. Matthew Sitman, “The Conscience of a President: Ronald Reagan and Abortion,” in *The Reagan Presidency*, ed. Paul Kenger and Peter Schweizer (Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 71.

the issue. Abortion was typically discussed in hushed tones and generally referred to as an “illegal medical procedure.” In order to understand abortion, Reagan immersed himself in the topic. He eventually signed the 1967 bill for purely tactical reasons: many in his own party supported the bill; he had forced some changes in the bill that eliminated its worst features; and a potential veto would be overridden in the state legislature. Reagan’s signing of the bill was called “perhaps [Reagan’s] greatest disappointment in public life.” The difficult situation profoundly changed Reagan’s perception of abortion and produced an intense pro-life leader. From that point on, Reagan believed that one mistake on abortion could lead to a slippery slope with “unforeseen results.”²⁸

Questions arose in 1979 as to whether Reagan would remain pro-life when he ran for president in the 1980 election. During the 1980 race a struggle erupted in the Reagan campaign over his position on abortion. The debate occurred between the movement’s moderates and conservatives (that is, Rockefeller Republicans versus *National Review* Republicans). John Sears, Reagan’s partially moderate campaign manager, was described as a “devout pragmatist who has little affinity for issues in general and even less affinity for conservatives.”²⁹ Sears fired many conservatives who had been with Reagan since he was governor of California, including Lyn Nofziger, and attempted to eliminate the influences of Ed Meese and Mike Deaver. Additionally, Sears urged Reagan to moderate

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., 78.

his policy positions; he especially wanted Reagan to abandon his pro-life position.

Reagan, in frustration, snapped at Sears, saying, “Listen, damn it, I’m running for president, not you. And I’m not changing my position on abortion.”³⁰ Reagan entered the presidency with strong convictions on abortion that had been created during political battles and deep intellectual deliberation. Reagan spoke about abortion in spiritual terms and spoke of the sacred rights granted by God.³¹

In 1983 Ronald Reagan did something previously unheard of for a sitting U.S. president by publishing an essay about abortion in *Human Life Review*. Entitled “Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation,” it stated that since 1973 over 15 million unborn children had been aborted. That number was more than ten times the number of Americans killed in all American wars. President Reagan compared abortion to slavery, writing, “This is not the first time our country has been divided by a Supreme Court decision that denied the value of certain human lives. The Dred Scott decision of 1857 was not overturned in a day, or a year, or even a decade.” He noted that only a small minority of Americans had realized the moral crisis of slavery, and that this minority had persisted until it finally prevailed. It did so by “appealing to the hearts and minds of their countrymen, to the truth of human dignity under God.”³² No president before Reagan had so vigorously or

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ronald Reagan, *Abortion and the Conscience of a Nation* (Nashville, Camden, and NY, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984).

consistently championed the anti-abortion cause. For their part, the pro-life groups had never enjoyed anyone as prominent as an American president championing their cause.

Ronald Reagan used his role as president to mold public opinion on abortion. In his speeches, Reagan spoke of abortion in moral, religious, and spiritual terms. At the 1984 National Religious Broadcasters annual convention, President Reagan made a spiritual appeal for a constitutional amendment to reverse *Roe* and also take abortion out of the hands of the states. Reagan mentioned abortion during his State of the Union addresses and during messages before Congress that were broadcast on national television. During these speeches, Reagan often used bold rhetoric to convey his pro-life message. In 1986 he asserted that “abortion is the taking of human life and it debases the underpinnings of our country.”³³

There was, however, more to Reagan’s anti-abortion strategy. His administration attempted to overturn *Roe* through a series of legal reforms through judicial appointments. Reagan’s Department of Justice put into place what has been described as the “most rigorous and decidedly ideological screening process ever.”³⁴ The Department of Justice used four factors to guide its appointment of judicial nominees. The first was that the Reagan administration had a greater appreciation than any prior administration for the significance of expanding the number of judgeships and for the changing role of the courts

33. Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 170.

34. *Ibid.*, 173.

in U.S. policies. Second, the judges appointed by previous Republican administrations were considered disappointments. Some believed that former Republican administrations had not take judgeships seriously and let political patronage and professional considerations overshadow their own legal and policy goals in the judicial selection process. Third, Jimmy Carter's judicial "affirmative action" prompted a sharp reaction from the Reagan administration. Carter's appointments may have created a more representative bench by appointing more blacks, women, and other minorities, but the Reagan administration saw this as sacrificing judicial merit for the "political symbolism of a more representative federal bench."³⁵ Fourth, Reagan's Justice Department became more aggressive during his second term in defining and pushing its agenda in litigation, arguments before the Supreme Court, and selection of judicial nominees.³⁶

Judicial affairs during Reagan's first term were as much about establishing what they were against as establishing what they were for. Under Attorney General William French Smith, the administration opposed judicial decisions that permitted abortions and affirmative action, as well as those seeking to impose a sharper separation between church and state. In the second term, Attorney General Ed Meese described the administration's goal as a "return to a jurisprudence of original intention." As the Reagan administration worked to change the makeup of the federal judiciary, it became more aggressive in asking

35. Ibid., 175.

36. Ibid., 174-176.

the justices to overturn *Roe* by filing amicus briefs in support of more restrictive state and local laws passed after *Roe*. However, the Burger Court continued to uphold *Roe* throughout the 1980s. In *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* (1983) the Court struck down several restrictions, including the signing of informed consent forms, a twenty-four hour waiting period, a requirement that abortions performed after the first trimester must take place in a hospital, and that the fetal remains be disposed of in a humane and sanitary way. The Solicitor General Rex Lee had asked the justices to reconsider *Roe* but stopped short of asking them to overturn it. This angered the New Right, which desired a vigorous assault on *Roe*. Justice O'Connor expressed a willingness to reconsider, if not overturn, *Roe* in her dissenting opinion. Justice Powell was not as willing, stating that *Roe* had been considered with special care by six other justices and that since *Roe*, "the Court repeatedly and consistently has accepted and applied the basic principle that a woman has a fundamental right to make the highly personal choice whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."³⁷ The justices split 5-4 in upholding a Missouri law requiring pathology reports for all abortions, the presence of a second doctor during abortions performed after the fetus had reached viability, and parental consent for minors. The Court also upheld the constitutionality of a Virginia statute mandating that second-trimester abortions be performed in licensed outpatient clinics. In 1986, the administration

37. Ibid., 186.

renewed its attack on *Roe*, but by this time they were directly questioning the Court's wisdom and urging that *Roe* be overturned.

In 1986, Reagan's second Solicitor General Charles Fried filed what was described as an "extraordinary" amicus curiae brief in support of Pennsylvania governor Richard Thornburgh's appeal of a circuit court ruling striking down a state law limiting the availability of abortions. The brief stated, "The textual, doctrinal, and historical basis for *Roe v. Wade* is so far flawed and...a source of such instability in the law that this Court should reconsider that decision and on reconsideration abandon it."³⁸ Fried and the Reagan administration were dealt a blow when the Burger Court reaffirmed the general principles of *Roe* in *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians*. The 5-4 decision, however, fueled speculation that another Reagan appointee might alter the Court's willingness to overturn *Roe*. Toward the end of the Reagan administration, the Rehnquist Court appeared close to reconsidering and possibly overturning *Roe*. Before the appointment of Justice Kennedy, the Court split 4-4 on an abortion case, thus affirming a lower court's ruling that struck down a law requiring parental notification for teenagers seeking abortions. The *Webster* case was the Reagan administration's final attempt to overturn *Roe*. Assistant Attorney General William Bradford Reynolds and others in the

38. Ibid., 186.

Department of Justice convinced Missouri attorney General William Webster to appeal a lower court's invalidation of the state's abortion restrictions.³⁹

In 1981, Dr. C. Everett Koop was nominated Surgeon General and director of the U.S. Public Health Service. Dr. Koop's nomination was met with immediate opposition from pro-choice and women's rights groups because of his attacks on abortion and the use of contraceptives. Reagan's appointment of Dr. Otis R. Bowen as Secretary of Health and Human Services also drew the ire of the pro-choice community. Bowen had worked with conservatives in Congress to reverse the Public Health Service Act in order to ban provisions for abortion funding. He had also defended the Adolescent Family Life Act, which provided authorization for the funding of religious organizations and restrictions on abortion funding and counseling despite objections that it violated the First Amendment's establishment clause. He sided with members of Congress who wanted to end all funding for organizations that provided counseling and abortion services under Title X of the Public Health Services Act. Congress was unable to agree to those provisions and eventually passed appropriations bills for the Department of Health and Human Services that forbade funding for organizations that performed abortions, yet permitted federally funded family-planning organizations to offer abortion counseling. The Reagan administration responded two years later by issuing new administrative regulations that reinterpreted the HHS act as banning funding for organizations that performed or provided

39. Ibid., 186.

counseling on abortions. The proposed HHS regulations were the first successful attempt at curbing abortions after eight years of tough anti-abortion rhetoric. Despite the fact that *Roe* had not been overturned, Reagan's attempts did reenergize the abortion debate, thus giving legitimacy to the anti-abortion movement. His judicial appointments helped achieve through the courts what he could not accomplish through Congress. This was evident in the Rehnquist Court's *Webster* ruling and in *Rust v. Sullivan*.⁴⁰

Reagan's staunch pro-life agenda influenced how future presidents would deal with abortion. Vice President George H. W. Bush changed his position on abortion over the course of the 1980s. In 1980, Bush opposed a constitutional amendment banning abortion, but in 1988 he called for the "criminalization of abortion." He stated, "Once the illegality [of abortion] is established then we can come to grips with the penalty side, and of course there's got to be some penalties to enforce the law, whatever they may be."⁴¹ Bush also believed that it was the doctors who performed the abortions and not the women undergoing them who should suffer criminal penalties. During his administration, Bush employed the same strategies and tactics as Reagan, and also used the same strong anti-abortion rhetoric. He pressed Congress for a constitutional amendment on abortion slightly less forcefully than Reagan, instead maintaining administrative restrictions on abortion, looking to the federal courts to limit the availability of abortion, and pushing the

40. Ibid., 187.

41. Ibid., 191.

Supreme Court to reverse *Roe*. In 1989, his Secretary of Health and Human Services, Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, extended the Reagan administration's controversial ban on federal scientists' conducting research using fetal tissue transplants. He also vetoed appropriations bills in 1990 that would have restored funding for abortions for poor women in Washington, D.C. who became pregnant by rape or incest. His Department of Justice continued the agenda set forth by the Reagan administration as Bush brought back Reagan's Solicitor General, Charles Fried, to present the Bush administration's position on overturning *Roe* in *Webster*.⁴²

1988 Presidential Election

The 1988 presidential election, pitting Vice President George H. W. Bush against Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis, lacked the passion of the 1984 election. Less than fifty percent of voters showed up at the polls, a turnout that some suggest was due to satisfaction with the status quo. Many saw George H. W. Bush as a means to continue Reagan's policies. Some contend, however, that voters were dissatisfied with both candidates and wished they had another choice. Aside from lack of passion for George Bush or Michael Dukakis, the campaign was also marked by a lack of religious zeal.⁴³

Despite the fact that the 1988 election did not possess the strong religious tones present in the previous elections, the Republican platform still reflected the ideals of the

42. Ibid., 191.

43. Ibid., 194.

Reagan administration. Reagan's support base had centered on conservative Christians, meaning that many of its agenda items were also important to Catholics. George Bush followed Reagan's tradition of espousing "family values." Republicans asserted the right of parents to choose what type of education their children would receive, claiming that "the right and responsibility for education belongs to parents."⁴⁴ The 1988 GOP platform included choice in education, tax credits for students in nonpublic schools, daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools, voluntary prayer, and the teaching of abstinence from premarital sex and from drug use. The platform also included a passage that condemned an attempt by the American Civil Liberties Union to tax the Roman Catholic Church and other religious institutions. The platform also endorsed an anti-abortion constitutional amendment and opposed government funding of abortions.⁴⁵

Abortion continued to be a central issue for many voters. In a poll conducted by ABC, respondents were asked to name issues important to them. Of those polled, 33 percent of respondents cited abortion as the issue most important to them. In 1984, only 15 percent of respondents who were asked a similar question rated abortion as the top issue. Of those who rated abortion as a major priority, 57 percent voted for George Bush, as opposed to 42 percent for Dukakis. A *CNN/Los Angeles Times* poll showed that abortion was cited as an important issue almost as frequently as the deficit and defense.

44. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 196.

45. *Ibid.*, 196.

Among voters who cited abortion as their top issue, 63 percent voted for Bush. The issue of abortion was also a major issue for voters in the states of Colorado, Michigan, and Arkansas, where it was on the ballot in various referenda. In those three states, a majority of the electors endorsed the pro-life position. The Arkansas state constitution was altered when 52 percent of voters adopted the “Unborn Child Amendment,” which declared that life began at conception and banned state funding of abortions. In Michigan, 58 percent of voters favored the prohibition of publicly financed abortions except to save the life of the mother. Colorado voters rejected an attempt to reverse a ban on state funding of abortions by 60 percent.⁴⁶

Despite the religious undertones of the Republican platform, the election, as mentioned before, lacked the religious zeal of the 1984 election. Democrats chose not to expend resources to attract Catholic voters, tacitly acknowledging the new political alignment of Catholics. The bishops, who had aligned themselves with Republicans, were wary of accusations that they were engaging in partisan politics. Fearing that the bishops were walking a fine line, a lawyer for the conference reminded the bishops of the obligations of their tax-exempt status: “During an election campaign [tax] exempt organizations remain free to address issues of concern to them and their membership, even when such issues are relevant to the campaign. However, such discourse must focus on issues and not personalities.” The hierarchy was reminded that individual bishops should

46. Ibid., 196-197.

refrain from participating in political rallies and should avoid circumstances that suggested alignment with or endorsement of a certain candidate or party.⁴⁷ In response, the bishops vowed to be less politically active in the 1988 election. Despite their vow, the bishops did release *Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* in 1986.⁴⁸

Economic Justice for All applied the Church's general economic teachings to the social and political conditions in the current United States. It addressed specific policy issues, including full employment as a foundation for a just economy, an urgent confrontation with the problem of poverty, evaluation and reform of the nation's food production system, and America's commercial relations with dependent economies of the developing world.⁴⁹ The pastoral urged the federal government to take a more active role in solving these problems.

The Democratic Party, having already decided not to pursue Catholics specifically, also ignored the pastoral despite the presence of various areas of agreement between the pastoral and the Democratic Party's platform. In particular, the Democrats could have joined with the bishops in emphasizing the unequal distribution of wealth in America, the staggering number of poor in such a wealthy country, and the idea that money used in defense spending could be used to better human life. Yet the Democrats did not want a

47. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics*, 132.

48. Ibid., 132-133.

49. Ibid.

replay of the problems of previous elections. They were particularly afraid of emphasizing an area of agreement with the bishops and thus bringing up the issue of abortion. Because the 1988 election was decidedly less religious in tone, religious groups were less involved. Despite the less religious tone of the 1988 presidential election, abortion remained a major issue at the state level; as noted previously, three states passed pro-life referenda, and a significant percentage of voters reported that abortion was a top priority. In the year following the election, the Supreme Court upheld the restrictive abortion provisions of a Missouri law, once again making abortion a national political issue. The hierarchy remained divided over how to deal with the issue of abortion in relation to the many other moral and social issues they advocated.

1992 Presidential Election

In 1992, George H. W. Bush ran for reelection against Bill Clinton. Bush faced multiple problems during the campaign, including a recession, a third-party candidate, and the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union removed national security as an issue and allowed many Reagan Democrats to abandon their support of Republican candidates.

In 1992, Catholic voting patterns more closely reflected national voter trends. In 1972, eight percent more Catholics voted for McGovern than the general population; in 1992, only 1 percent more Catholics voted for Clinton than did overall voters. Catholic voting patterns were becoming more mainstream, and yet they retained some

distinctiveness. Compared to other religious groups, Catholics were less Republican than white evangelical Protestants and less Democratic than Jewish and secular voters. Catholics were also more likely to be swing voters. Demographic divisions such as race, economic status, ethnicity, region, and age were decisive in determining how Catholics voted. Blacks, Hispanics, those with income levels below \$15,000, and those over the age of sixty voted more heavily for Clinton. Catholic women preferred Clinton over Bush, and Catholic men chose Bush over Clinton by a slight margin. College-educated Catholics voted for Bush, while those with graduate degrees preferred Clinton. Also, Bush was the winner among southern Catholics. Churchgoers versus non-churchgoers also had identifiable voting patterns. Of the total percentage of Bush's overall votes, 55 percent attended church at least once a week, as compared to 35 percent for Clinton and 33 percent for Perot. Clinton received 62 percent of the votes from those who had no religious affiliation, while Perot received 20 percent and Bush received 18 percent.⁵⁰

As in 1988, the 1992 election lacked a strong religious dimension, but it was not totally absent. Heading into the 1992 presidential election, there was speculation that *Roe* might be overturned. In the 1989 case *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, the Supreme Court upheld four provisions of a Missouri law that enforced restrictions on abortions. While not explicitly overturning *Roe*, *Webster* allowed states to adopt more

50. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 200-201.

restrictive abortion regulations. One particularly important post-*Webster* case came to the Court from Pennsylvania. The Supreme Court was expected to deliver its opinion in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* before the presidential election. At issue were five specific provisions of Pennsylvania law: (1) a requirement that doctors counsel women about the specific risks of abortion, provide detailed material regarding fetal development, provide a list of alternatives to abortion, and obtain written consent from the woman; (2) a requirement that women wait twenty-four hours after giving written consent before abortions could be performed; (3) a requirement that unmarried women under the age of 18 obtain the written consent of at least one parent or a judge and that a parent accompany the teenager for abortion counseling; (4) a requirement that a married woman sign a statement acknowledging that she had informed her husband; and (5) a requirement that doctors submit a report to state authorities on each abortion performed, including copies of the informed consent and parental consent or spousal notification forms, which were open to the public.⁵¹

Citing *stare decisis*, the Supreme Court upheld the central holdings of *Roe* but did allow several provisions of the Pennsylvania law to stand. The Court stated that overruling *Roe* would “address error...at the cost of both profound and unnecessary damage to the Court’s legitimacy, and to the nation’s commitment to the rule of law. It is therefore

51. Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 329.

imperative to adhere to the essence of *Roe*'s original decision, and we do so today."⁵² The Court upheld most of the Pennsylvania provisions, except for the spousal notification and the reporting and public-disclosure requirements. The *Casey* decision was met with mixed reactions from both sides. The Bush White House issued a statement agreeing with the decision and expressing the president's opposition to abortion except in the case of rape, incest, or danger to the mother. Robert Casey, the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania, also offered a positive statement regarding the decision. Although he was disappointed that the Court had not overturned *Roe*, he believed that the decision "clearly returns to the people the power to regulate abortion in reasonable ways, so as to protect maternal health and reduce the number of abortions in our country."⁵³ The pro-choice side was not as kind. Kate Michelman, president of the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL), proclaimed, "*Roe* is dead."⁵⁴ Some members of the pro-life community felt similar disappointment with the decision. Randall Terry, founder of Operation Rescue, said, "Three Reagan/Bush appointees stabbed the pro-life movement in the back."⁵⁵

The bishops had been involved in the debate leading up to, and after, both *Webster* and *Casey*. Their involvement had helped the Republicans. In the aftermath of the *Webster* decision, several bishops spoke about the impact the decision would have on electoral politics. Believing that pro-choice groups had forced abortion into being "the

52. Ibid., 341.

53. Ibid., 326.

54. Ibid.

55. Ibid.

single issue” in political contests across the nation, the hierarchy agreed that abortion was “of overriding concern.”⁵⁶ They released a statement expressing their belief that the issue of abortion had become one of the fundamental issues of the day. “At this particular time, abortion has become the fundamental human rights issue for all men and women of good will.”⁵⁷ The statement reiterated the bishops’ support for a pro-life constitutional amendment, as well as their support for attempts to overturn court decisions that supported abortion rights.

The bishops also considered repercussions for Catholics who supported abortion rights. One possible consequence was excommunication. The possibility of excommunicating pro-choice Catholics was met with some skepticism by several bishops. Archbishop Austin B. Vaughn of New York urged more action from the hierarchy regarding Catholics who were publicly known to support abortion rights and continued to receive communion.⁵⁸ However, many bishops were uncomfortable at the thought of personally delivering punishment to these individuals and believed that the matter needed to be studied more thoroughly.⁵⁹

Despite two major abortion decisions from the Supreme Court, abortion was not pivotal in 1992, but it may have played more of a role than initially believed. According to

56. James L. Franklin, “Bishops Toughen Abortion Stance,” *The Boston Globe*, November 8, 1989. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic.)

57. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Resolution on Abortion*, November 7, 1989.

58. James L. Franklin, “Bishops Toughen Abortion Stance.”

59. Ibid.

surveys conducted by the *National Election Study*, abortion may have had more of an impact on Republican voters than on Democrats. Of those who voted in the 1992 election, 49 percent opposed any restrictions on abortion; 15 percent would allow abortion if a “clear need” existed; 27 percent would allow abortion only in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the mother’s life; and 9 percent opposed abortion under any circumstances.⁶⁰ The large disconnect between those who opposed abortion and those who supported it was enough to cause problems for the Bush campaign.

Roughly 11 percent of Republican voters agreed with Bush’s abortion position, which was actually less restrictive than the overall GOP platform.⁶¹ Bill Clinton, on the other hand, did not face much difficulty with pro-life voters. The number of pro-life defectors from the Democratic Party was significantly lower than that of the Republicans. About 17 percent of pro-choice defectors were Republican voters.⁶² However, this 17 percent of Republican voters did not vote for Clinton; rather, they voted for Ross Perot. Perot seemed to have offered a better alternative to pro-choice Republicans. According to a survey measuring voter knowledge of campaign issues, this was due in part to the fact that Republican voters had more knowledge of their party’s platform and were savvier about the issue of abortion. Clinton had an advantage in that 61 percent of pro-life Democrats were unaware of his position on abortion. Democratic voters did not view

60. Alan I. Abramowitz, “It’s Abortion, Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Election,” *The Journal of Politics* 57 (February 1995): 178.

61. *Ibid.*, 178.

62. *Ibid.*, 179.

abortion as being as important as Republican voters did. At least one-third of Republican voters mentioned abortion when responding to open-ended questions, as compared to less than one-fifth of Democrats. Another problem for Bush was that 72 percent of Democrats who believed that abortion should never be allowed were unaware of Clinton's position on the issue. Republican voters who felt that abortion was an important issue were disproportionately affluent and well-educated. Consequently, they knew their party's position on important issues. Therefore, while abortion was not the major issue of the election, it did have an impact on the outcome. If those 72 percent of Democrats who opposed abortion for any reason had known that Clinton was pro-choice, perhaps they would have cast their votes for George Bush instead.⁶³

1996 Presidential Election

The 1996 presidential election offered some obstacles for pro-life supporters. Neither candidate was eager to address the issue, but the Church prompted a response from both candidates. Senator Bob Dole faced challenges from both members of the Catholic hierarchy and conservative Christian leaders. His main opponent in the Republican primaries, Pat Buchanan, was the favorite of both Christian conservatives and the anti-abortion movement. In every state in which he campaigned, Buchanan was the favorite of both groups and, unlike some other candidates, he was not afraid to express both his political and his religious views. He promised to block gay rights and to oppose abortion

63. Ibid., 178-183.

for any reason. He was quoted as saying, “We should in no circumstances take the innocent life of that baby. If there’s killing to be done, let’s kill the rapists.”⁶⁴ Whereas Buchanan unapologetically supported the pro-life campaign, Dole’s position was less clear. He claimed to be pro-life but generally tried to dodge the issue. Dole ultimately won the Republican primary because of his economic positions. The South Carolina primary cinched the nomination for Dole mainly because Buchanan was opposed to free trade, upon which the South Carolina economy was dependent.⁶⁵

In the general election, Dole seemed to be no match for the incumbent president. Dole was in his seventies, inarticulate, had shifted in his campaign message, was moderately affected by Ross Perot’s candidacy, and was not favored by the media. Clinton was young, articulate, a media favorite, and importantly had not faced a Democratic challenger in the primaries. Dole’s candidacy was particularly disappointing considering the dramatic Republican victory in the 1994 midterm elections. Additionally, Dole seemed uncomfortable advancing the cultural agenda of conservative Republicans. Some questioned his pro-life position and others warned pro-lifers to consider carefully Dole’s true feelings regarding abortion. His awkward position on the issue cost him dearly, as he

64. Martin Walker, “The U.S. Presidential Election, 1996,” *International Affairs* 72 (October 1996): 665.

65. Ibid.

received little of the conservative Christian vote or Catholic vote, receiving only 37 percent of the latter.⁶⁶

Dole's loss of the Catholic vote was attributable to several factors. First and foremost, Dole was a poor candidate. He lacked Clinton's charm and charisma, and he seemed to be uncomfortable with cultural issues, preferring instead to focus on economics. Even Christian conservatives were upset with Dole as the Republican candidate for president. In addition, the 1996 presidential election had the lowest voter turnout in seventy-two years. Seven states with above-average Catholic populations were among fourteen states that set new records for low voter turnout. White, non-Hispanic Catholic voting dropped by 1.2 million from 1992, while the Hispanic vote dramatically increased. Hispanics comprised 14 percent of the total Catholic vote. This change is important because Hispanics were increasingly likely to vote Democratic and were more likely to vote for Clinton regardless of the abortion issue. It has been speculated that the huge Hispanic turnout was most likely due to immigration and welfare legislation passed in the 104th Congress. While the election may have been decided primarily on economic issues, the issue of abortion, particularly the veto of the ban on partial-birth abortions and the protest on the steps of the Capitol, did receive attention.⁶⁷

66. Prendergast, *Catholic Voter*, 206.

67. *Ibid.*, 206-211.

2000 Presidential Election

In 2000, George W. Bush and his strategists understood the importance of capturing the Catholic vote. Bush, who was very comfortable with his faith, appeared to be the perfect choice for religiously motivated voters. Vice President Al Gore was no match for Bush's appeal to and relationship with the bishops. The 2000 presidential election centered on the Catholic rust-belt states of Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois. To capture these heavily Catholic states, the Republican National Committee created a Catholic Task Force to garner Catholic support for Bush's candidacy. The task force included numerous high-profile Catholics such as Thomas Melady, former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican. Bush's efforts to recruit Catholics were spurred by several articles published in *Crisis* magazine by pollster Steve Wagner. The article "The Heart of the Catholic Voter" claimed that social justice Catholics (those who cared about poverty, health care, and ending the death penalty) were old news. They had been replaced by "social renewal" Catholics who supported the Republican Party's goals of small government and toughness on crime. The article was followed by a January 2000 article in which Wagner stated that Mass-attending Catholics and Christian fundamentalists were natural allies. The article expressed the belief that the two groups could form a powerful electoral coalition.⁶⁸

68. Patricia Miller, "Conservative Catholics and the GOP," *USA Today* (November 2002): 16.

Prior to the publication of these articles, Karl Rove phoned Deal Hudson, a former Baptist who had converted to Catholicism and was at the helm of *Crisis*. Rove wanted his perspective on the RNC's Catholic strategy. Hudson knew that the RNC's ethnic approach in courting Catholics (utilizing such tactics as attending St. Patrick's Day events) was not the best approach. He knew that the Republicans needed to appeal to Catholics on a moral level. Rove invited Hudson, along with twenty other prominent Catholics, to two meetings in September 1999 and May 2000. Shortly thereafter, the Republican Party announced that it was escalating its Catholic outreach. Bush's campaign added Florida, New Jersey, and Louisiana to the key rust-belt states. Jim Nicholson, chair of the RNC, said that based on research, Republicans believed that Catholic voters were more inclined to support Republican candidates. Republicans would do all they could to make this a reality. These efforts included a revamping of the Catholic Task Force. A new chair was appointed, Brian Tierney, a high-profile Philadelphia advertising executive and advisor to Philadelphia archbishop Anthony Bevilacqua. Steve Wagner of *Crisis* was named executive director. At the 2000 convention, the Catholic Task Force held a prime spot in one of the luxury sky boxes usually reserved for large corporate donors. The box was filled with prominent Catholics such as Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), a staunch opponent of abortion. Archbishop Bevilacqua gave the prime-time benediction at the convention.⁶⁹

69. Ibid., 17.

The outreach to Catholics in 2000 included introducing George W. Bush to the Catholic community. Hudson had been working at *Crisis* for six years and had a radio and television show on *EWTN*. He had a strong network and used it to promote his message that Bush was a good candidate for Catholics. He set up meetings between Bush and Catholic bishops as a way for the bishops to get to know Bush. Both Rove and Hudson agreed that everything would be off the record and they would not invite the press. Hudson recalled that the bishops were open to Bush from the beginning. Cardinal O'Connor told Hudson that they had to win, saying, "I am hesitant to think what this country would be like if Al Gore wins."⁷⁰

The Task Force also compiled a \$2.5 million direct mail and outreach effort to three million churches. Additionally, Catholics received at least two phone calls and two direct mail pieces during the final months of the campaign. Despite these efforts, Al Gore won Michigan and Pennsylvania, and narrowly won the Catholic vote. Bush was undaunted and continued his efforts to build support for a Catholic base. Bush's first social engagement as president was dinner at the residence of Washington archbishop Theodore McCarrick. The dinner included outgoing Washington archbishop James Hickey and Galveston-Houston bishop Joseph Fiorenza. After the dinner, Bush outlined a plan for a "faith-based initiative." In accordance with Bush's strategy to win the support of Catholic voters, he appointed Catholics to be directors of the White House Office of Faith-

70. Interview with Deal Hudson, February 17, 2010.

Based Services. The first director was John Dilulio, a “born-again” Catholic who was nationally known for proposing the use of faith-based community programs to combat crime in the inner city. Dilulio resigned after six months and was replaced by Jim Towey, a devout Catholic and volunteer counsel to Mother Teresa.⁷¹

In addition to appointing Catholics to the Office of Faith-Based Services, Bush also appointed Catholics to other high-level positions in the administration. He appointed Tommy Thompson, former governor of Wisconsin, to head the Department of Health and Human Services. Jim Nicholson was appointed ambassador to the Vatican, John Negroponte ambassador to the United Nations, and Mel Martinez, a Cuban-American lawyer, was named Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. Also, Scott Evertz was named director of the White House Office of National AIDS Policy. Evertz’s appointment was the first appointment of an openly gay person by a Republican administration.⁷²

In April 2002, the RNC chair announced its new National Catholic Leadership Forum. Deal Hudson was named the GOP’s national chairman for Catholic Outreach. The strategy of the Leadership Forum was to expand the Catholic Task Force. They wanted to recruit Catholic team leaders who would work with policymakers and help recruit additional team leaders. Many members of the task force participated in weekly White House conference calls regarding Catholic strategy.⁷³

71. Miller, “Conservative Catholics,” 17-18.

72. Miller, 18.

73. Ibid.

Bush, Gore, and the Bishops

Abortion was the not the central issue of the 2000 campaign, but there really was no discernible single issue that mobilized voters. However, there was a widening political division between those who were regular churchgoers and those who were not. The United States Conference of Catholic bishops directed a political message to all Catholics heading into the election. In October 1999, the bishops released *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*. *Faithful Citizenship* mirrored the message of the 1996 *Statement on Political Responsibility*, calling on Catholics to become politically involved. The message began by reminding Catholics that the coming of the new millennium also brought important civic challenges. The challenge was to bring the Gospel and democracy together to create a society that was more respectful of human life and dignity and more committed to justice and peace. The bishops avoided any partisanship and instead encouraged Catholics to focus on maintaining human dignity, preserving the family, and taking care of those unable to care for themselves.⁷⁴

Faithful Citizenship listed a number of challenges facing society; topping the list was the millions of unborn children who are killed each year by abortion. The bishops also mentioned the growing number of poor Americans (particularly children), gang violence, bigotry, and racism. They also mentioned the growing number of families without basic

74. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, October 1999.

healthcare or affordable housing. The list was rounded off with the need to combat political scandals, sensationalism, and partisan fighting and ended with the issue of violence. The central idea of the bishops' message was that participation in civic life was both a blessing and a duty that should be free of political affiliation. Every issue discussed by the bishops was essentially a call to promote human dignity and to promote peace and justice within a moral framework. Catholic teaching, they asserted, would offer a consistent set of moral principles that would enable public officials to successfully promote the maintenance of human dignity and peace and justice.⁷⁵

The bishops' message that Catholics should avoid thinking in terms of Democrat and Republican opened the door for both Al Gore and George Bush to court Catholic voters. Bush was off to a promising start when he successfully assured a group of conservative Catholics that he was pro-life and would outlaw partial-birth abortions and prevent federal funding of abortions. Both candidates in the 2000 election campaign were aware that winning the presidency without winning the Catholic vote would be impossible. Bush's pro-Catholic attitude came under fire during the Republican primaries when Arizona senator John McCain, who was also seeking the Republican nomination, made an issue of Bush's speaking engagement at Bob Jones University, an institution with a well-known hostility toward Catholics. Bush sent a letter of apology to the Catholic bishops for not chastising university officials for their anti-Catholic rhetoric. Although the incident

75. Ibid.

garnered significant media attention, the bishops and other Catholic officials downplayed its significance and asked voters to focus instead on the issues of the campaign such as abortion, capital punishment, and poverty. Bishop Thomas V. Daily of Brooklyn stated in an interview with *The New York Times* that voters in Brooklyn “have real concerns about immigrants and poor people trying to survive, living two, three families to an apartment to share the rent.”⁷⁶ Others lessened the event’s significance by pointing out that Bob Jones University is a typical speaking engagement location for politicians and discouraging voters from reading too much into Bush’s appearance. William Donohue, head of the Catholic League, an organization that fights anti-Catholic discrimination, called a truce after Bush sent a letter of apology to Cardinal O’Connor.⁷⁷

Despite the fact that Bush was pro-life, the issue of abortion did factor into his choice of a running mate. Some thought that Bush would choose Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge. Ridge was a Catholic but was also pro-choice. Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pennsylvania reaffirmed a ban on pro-choice Catholics’ appearing at church-related events, which was believed to have been aimed at Ridge. Many prominent Catholics declared that they would not support a Republican ticket with Ridge on it. In the end, Bush selected Dick Cheney as his running mate, but the outcry over the possibility that he might have chosen a pro-choice running mate led the Church to send a strong message to

76. Diana Jean Schemo, “Catholics Minimize Impact of Bush Visit to Bob Jones,” *The New York Times*, March 2, 2000. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

77. Ibid.

politicians and to voters, a message directed particularly to Republican politicians: the Church was not willing to waver on the issue of abortion. As they had stated numerous times, if the right to life of unborn children was denied, then whatever else one accomplished would be futile. Pro-choice politicians would not be allowed to speak at church-affiliated institutions, and they would not receive the support of the Catholic Church in other matters. Ultimately, Bush captured 71 percent of the vote from those who believed abortion should be illegal in all or most cases. He also received 59 percent of the vote of those who attended church at least once a week. Bush had also narrowed the Catholic vote, receiving 47 percent compared to Gore's 49 percent.⁷⁸

2000 Electoral Cleavages

The 2000 presidential election saw several new cleavages become more developed. According to exit polls, divisions had become more pronounced between married and unmarried voters, churchgoers and non-regular churchgoers, and gun owners and non-gun owners.⁷⁹ In terms of religious voting groups, Bush had narrowed the gap among Catholic voters. In the 2000 election, Bush received 47 percent of the Catholic vote as compared to Gore's 49 percent. This was a dramatic improvement from the slim 37 percent that Dole had received in 1996. Bush also captured 63 percent of the White Protestant vote. Bush's gains among Catholics and his strong showing among white Protestants was part of one of

78. Pomper, "The 2000 Presidential Election: Why Gore Lost," 206.

79. Robert S. Erikson, "The 2000 Election in Historical Perspective," *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (Spring 2001): 46.

the cleavages that had deepened in this election. Although Bush was clearly stronger among white Protestants than Catholics, exit polls showed a distinction among those who attended church at least once a week and those who attended less than weekly.⁸⁰ According to the 2000 exit polls, 59 percent of those who attended church at least once a week voted for Bush and 39 percent of that same group cast their vote for Gore. This gap between churchgoers and non-churchgoers was almost identical to the divide between White Protestants and Catholics.⁸¹ Abortion rights produced similar partisan results. Of those surveyed who believed that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases, 71 percent voted for Bush. Those who favored legal abortion in all or most cases supported Gore by 65 percent.⁸² Experts believed that this showed the partisan division over the abortion issue that has been developing over the past twenty years. The issue of pro-life versus pro-choice had a 39 percent gap, which was close to the gap regarding the role of the government in resolving issues.⁸³ This deepening divide brought into focus the role of abortion, religion, and the Catholic bishops in the 2000 election.

A Catholic Alliance

The 2000 presidential election results revealed two potential new voting groups: those who attended church regularly and Catholics. George W. Bush came very close to capturing the Catholic vote from Al Gore; in the 2004 election, Bush's strategists had

80. Ibid., 47.

81. Ibid.

82. Ibid.

83. Ibid.

decided that Catholics would be the key to electoral success. Bush's political strategist, Karl Rove, played his hunch that fundamentalist Christians and Catholics "have more in common than differences of theology or geography." The article by Steve Wagner suggested that conservative Catholics and conservative Christians were natural allies. Conservative Christian leaders and Republican strategists attempted to forge an alliance between the two groups.⁸⁴

The idea of creating an alliance between the two groups was not new. A year before the 1996 presidential election, the Christian Coalition, which estimated that 16 percent or 1.7 million of its members were Catholic, launched a spin-off group called the Catholic Alliance. Its purpose was to create a stronger partnership between conservative Christians and conservative Catholics. The theory was that although they might not agree on theology, they could work together for common political goals.⁸⁵ They had planned to recruit one million conservative Catholics into the Christian Coalition by 2000 and create a powerful pro-life coalition. The Christian Coalition attempted to capitalize on the two groups' agreement on issues such as abortion and school prayer. Despite the enthusiasm for the Catholic Alliance, differences over issues such as welfare, health care, death penalty, and immigration caused many problems. Catholics were more liberal on those

84. Miller, "Conservative," 16.

85. Mark J. Rozell, "Political Marriage of Convenience: The Evolution of the Conservative Catholic-Evangelical Alliance in the Republican Party," in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, ed Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008): 27.

issues than conservative Christians, and several members of the bishops' hierarchy were disturbed by the voter scorecards distributed by the Catholic Alliance. The bishops did not appreciate the organization's attempt to represent Catholicism before Congress and other governmental bodies.⁸⁶

There are various reasons why conservative Christians would seek a partnership with conservative Catholics: (1) on several issues (e.g., abortion), the official positions of the Catholic Church resemble those of the Christian Coalition; (2) significant numbers of Catholics are in substantial agreement regarding certain other issue positions of the Christian Right; (3) Catholics have historically comprised a significant part of earlier right-wing movements and groups; (4) cooperation had already occurred in some dioceses between the Catholic Church and the Christian Coalition; and (5) a small but significant minority of Catholics have adopted evangelical styles of religiosity and are more likely to share evangelical political attitudes on issues where the Church has not staked a position.⁸⁷

Despite these areas of agreement, many issues would prevent a perfect alliance from forming. In some important areas, Catholic teachings and tradition depart from those of the Christian Coalition. The Catholic Church supports social welfare programs and expanded opportunities for women and opposes the death penalty and nuclear weapons. Additionally, the Catholic Church departs from the Christian Coalition in its position on

86. Miller, 16.

87. Mary E. Bendyna, John C. Green, Mark J. Rozell, and Clyde Wilcox, "Uneasy Alliance: Conservative Catholics and the Christian Right," *Sociology of Religion* 62 (Spring 2001): 52.

homosexuality. A committee of the Catholic bishops called for the “acceptance, love, and pastoral care of homosexuals.” The Church still opposes the act of homosexuality, but it separates the act from the actual person. Additionally, the historical animosity and prejudice against Catholics, particularly from southern Protestants, added to the group’s problems. For these reasons, many doubted the possible success of the Christian Coalition’s spin-off group, the Catholic Alliance.⁸⁸

The overall attempts of the Catholic Alliance were unsuccessful. The group’s organizers tried to spin the Alliance off into a separately incorporated entity in 1997, and a Catholic Board of Directors was appointed, which included Deal Hudson. The organization, however, never recovered from its clash with the bishops.⁸⁹

Hudson believed that the creation and collapse of the Catholic Alliance was not an important story—it was more an instructive moment for those attempting to build an alliance between the two groups. Hudson was approached by Ralph Reed, who wanted Hudson to play a part in having evangelicals and Catholics work together. What Hudson learned from the failures of the group was that they did not need the permission of the bishops to start such an organization. Keith Fournier, a former evangelical-turned-Catholic, had a good relationship with Cardinal Law of Boston. He wanted to organize a meeting with Law about the new organization. The eventual meeting with Law did not go

88. Ibid.

89. Miller, “Conservative,” 16.

well, as Hudson had anticipated, confirming his belief that the bishops did not need to be involved in this group. He also felt that Catholics needed to become as politically active as evangelical Christians had been. Hudson also wanted to unite Catholics and Christians under the Bush banner to overcome their mutual prejudices. It was their intention to build a coalition that Bush and the RNC would own.⁹⁰

According to Hudson, the biggest problem facing the Catholic Alliance was the basic difference between Catholic and Protestant Church structure: “the function and authority of priests and bishops.” He felt that the Catholic bishops would not be comfortable losing their authority as teachers of faith and minds, nor did they like the agenda of lay movements. He believes this is why many socially conservative Catholics became involved in evangelical organizations or in the Republican Party.⁹¹

After the fall of the Catholic Alliance, there was cautious optimism that the two groups could work together. Michael Cromartie, vice president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center, points out that the cultural wars have brought conservative Christians and conservative Catholics together in a way that theology could not. They are able to work together on specific moral issues like abortion. However, Catholics’ willingness to work with conservative Christians does not mean that Catholics will join the Christian Coalition. Attempts to unite conservative Christians and conservative Catholics into a single group

90. Interview with Deal Hudson, February 17, 2010.

91. Deal Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers: The Growing Power of Catholics and Evangelicals in the United States* (New York, NY: Threshold Edition, 2008), 147.

have had mixed results and have sometimes been met with criticism. In 1994, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium* (ECT) was released by Father Richard Neuhaus, a Catholic priest and academic; and Chuck Colson, a Watergate co-conspirator and born-again Christian who founded a prison ministry called “Prison Fellowship.” The document was intended to address the similarities and differences between evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics. Despite the document’s intention to unify conservative Christians and Catholics, it was denounced by one hundred evangelical leaders who signed a letter condemning it. The evangelical leaders objected primarily to the implication that they accepted Catholic doctrine. Over one million dollars in donations to the Prison Fellowship were withdrawn. The protests faded, and the document was accepted by Church leaders because it had facilitated dialogue and political cooperation between conservative Christians and Catholics. The relationship was particularly strengthened by the issues of abortion and declining moral values. Conservative Christians and Catholics have been able to form political alliances, but not religious alliances over moral issues. Catholics are willing to work with conservative Christians particularly within the Republican Party, but they are still hesitant actually to join the Christian Coalition. George W. Bush has been a key figure in building an alliance between the two groups. His outreach to conservative Catholics has been a major factor in creating a successful partnership.⁹²

92. Rozell, “Political Marriage,” 37-41.

2004 Presidential Election

The 2004 election pitted George W. Bush against Massachusetts Senator John Kerry. Bush was very vocal about his religious beliefs. Kerry, who was Catholic, felt that his religious beliefs were a private and personal matter. Kerry was the first Catholic to run for the presidency in forty-four years, but his experience was quite different from that of Kennedy's. Kennedy ran at a time when Catholics were viewed with suspicion. He was forced to prove to voters that he was not "too Catholic" and would be able to separate faith and politics. Kerry faced the opposite situation and had to prove that he was Catholic enough. His problems started with his position on abortion. Senator Kerry stated that he was personally opposed to abortion but that it was his public responsibility to uphold the legal right to abortion. Kerry's response to the abortion issue led to a vocal reaction from several bishops.

As in 2000, Republican strategists believed that attracting Catholic voters was the key to victory. Catholic outreach in the 2004 election was an expansion of the efforts from the previous election. Focusing on Catholics in 2004 was not a spur-of-the-moment decision. According to Deal Hudson, the Catholic Outreach in 2004 was a "quantum leap beyond 2000. It was the culmination of three years of constant work."⁹³ From 2001 to 2003, Karl Rove, Ralph Reed, and Hudson conducted regularly scheduled conference calls and coalition meetings. They were looking for a particular type of Catholic: pro-life and

93. Interview with Deal Hudson, February 17, 2010.

conservative. They sought out these individuals, recruiting them from college campuses to Catholic radio and television audiences. Martin Gillespie, director of Catholic Outreach for Bush, provided a budget for the more than thirty field staff members. Gillespie and the Catholic Outreach staff members passed out voter guides at 80 percent of the Catholic parishes in the key battleground states. The sophistication of the 2004 Catholic Outreach was extraordinary. For instance, in Columbus, Ohio, the Catholic Outreach team included a computer on which one could pull up a map, pick a city, and then click on a parish. Within the parish were symbols signifying every person known to the campaign within a two-mile radius. The Catholic Outreach Team included two workers per parish who would go through the database and call voters. Hudson pointed out that all of the Catholics they contacted had voluntarily given their information to the RNC.⁹⁴ Some conflicts erupted between the Catholic Outreach Team and the bishops and priests who were aligned with Kerry and the Democratic Party. Some bishops issued directives to intercept campaign workers handing out voter guides. In his book, Hudson stated that some of the confrontations with the Catholic Left were due to their resentment of the GOP's historic outreach to Catholics. Hudson says, "They could mount nothing of any consequence to combat the momentum."⁹⁵

94. Interview with Deal Hudson, February 17, 2010.

95. Hudson, *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, 195.

2004 Electoral Cleavages

Kerry, unlike Bush, was not comfortable injecting religion into his speeches. When he did quote scripture, it seemed forced and not genuine. Kerry's discomfort highlighted a growing trend among the American electorate. For the past twenty years, the divide between those who attended church regularly and those who attended infrequently or not at all had been growing. In the 2004 election there was a distinct divide that was more pronounced than in the past. Political scientists have divided religious groups into traditionalist, centrist, and modernist. Bush was the clear winner among voters who identified themselves as traditionalists. This group was made up mainly of evangelical Protestants and devout Catholics. According to the *Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics*, 75 percent of traditionalist voters disagreed with the statement that "they were uncomfortable when candidates discuss faith." Of centrist Catholics, 61 percent disagreed with the statement and only 46 percent of modernist Catholics disagreed. Traditionalist evangelical Protestants had the highest percentage of those who disagreed with the statement, at 86 percent. Traditionalist mainline Protestants were closer to traditionalist Catholics, with 78 percent disagreeing with the statement. Interestingly, the modernist groups of each religious denomination had an almost equal disagreement with the statement that "it is important that the president have strong religious beliefs." When asked about the importance of religion in political thinking, the traditionalist groups of each denomination rated it as very important, and the numbers decreased with centrists and

modernists. This shows that religious leaders have a distinct group of individuals that would be receptive to their messages. Also, among the traditionalist groups, abortion was an issue of major importance.⁹⁶

Studies of the voting behavior of these various religious groupings show that cultural issues play a part in their voting decisions. Traditionalist evangelical Protestants and traditionalist Catholics both rate abortion as one of their most important issues. The studies also show that within all of the religious groups, a modest movement has occurred toward the pro-life side. Religious divisions are most evident on the issue of abortion and are less pronounced with regard to embryonic stem cell research and capital punishment. From 1992 to 2004, there was a net increase of 8 percent in Catholics who maintain a pro-life position. There was a 13 percent increase among evangelical Protestants, and a 2 percent increase among mainline Protestants. The shift toward the pro-life side was a welcome occurrence for the Catholic bishops. It signaled to the hierarchy that the 2004 election would provide a receptive audience for their pro-life arguments.⁹⁷

Most likely, those who attend church regularly and are active in their churches are also most receptive to the bishops' messages about the importance of overturning legalized abortion. Regular churchgoers rate issues like abortion as one of the most important topics they consider before making a decision about whom to vote for. In 2004, abortion had

96. Figures are based on the Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics. Report by John C. Green, "Religion and the 2004 Election: A Pre-election Analysis."

97. Ibid.

been elevated to a much higher position because of the attention focused on Kerry's battle over his private and public beliefs. The hierarchy succeeded in delivering the message that Kerry was not part of the pro-life movement and was not open to incorporating his faith into his public policy. The bishops succeeded most among the regular churchgoers, but they also reached Catholics who were not as devout. Many, while not supportive of denying communion to Kerry, felt that if he was going to proclaim that he was Catholic he should be willing to adhere to the tenets of his faith.

The heightened importance of the abortion issue was due in large part to the deepening religious divide in the United States. Embryonic stem cell research and the death penalty did not have the same religious impact. Abortion mobilized voters more intensely than other life issues. Because abortion received so much attention from the hierarchy, it caught the attention of both Catholics and the public. In 2004, abortion struck a chord with voters, especially those who had been classified as traditionalist. They were most likely to be familiar with the church's teachings and with a candidate's position. In 1992, many pro-life Catholics voted for Bill Clinton because they were unaware of his position on abortion. Examination of the elections from the past 28 years shows that not only have voters become more deeply divided by religious cleavages, but they are also more aware of candidates' positions on a number of issues. The Catholic bishops have certainly played a role in ensuring that Catholics know which candidates are pro-life and which are pro-choice. This has helped Republican pro-life candidates attract pro-life

Catholic votes. In the *Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics*, 68 percent of traditionalist Catholics said that social issues were very important to them. They voted overwhelmingly for Bush, giving him 72 percent of their votes. A November 11, 2004 survey report by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press showed that “moral values” was the most frequently cited issue for Bush voters, but was seldom mentioned by Kerry voters. Of those who were given a list of seven issues and asked “What comes to mind when you think about moral values?” 44 percent said “social issues.” This included 28 percent who mentioned abortion, 29 percent who mentioned homosexuality and gay marriage, and 4 percent who mentioned stem cell research.⁹⁸ Centrist Catholics also played a significant role in electing a pro-life president. Centrist Catholics do not attend church as regularly as do traditionalist Catholics, but they are more devout in their faith than modernist Catholics. Bush won 55 percent of the centrist vote, which showed that those who have a semi-regular relationship with the Church use criteria other than economics to decide which candidate to choose. As well, they vote in higher numbers for candidates who have a pro-life position.⁹⁹

The 2004 election results show that faith has become a crucial part of the decision-making process in the voting booth. Many voters in that election were strongly devoted to their religion and paid close attention to Church teachings on certain matters.

98. The Pew Research Center for the People & the Press, “Voters Liked Campaign 2004, But Too Much ‘Mud-Slinging,’” November 11, 2004, <http://people-press.org/report/233/voters-liked-campaign-2004-but-too-much-mud-slinging>.

99. Ibid.

In 2004, there was a deep religious divide in the country, and abortion was a major factor for voters who were regular churchgoers. Exit polls suggest that abortion was the only issue that was so greatly impacted by the deep religious cleavages. Other life issues such as the death penalty, gay marriage, and embryonic stem cell research did not experience the same effect.

Those classified as traditionalist Catholics and traditionalist evangelical Protestants rated social issues such as abortion and gay marriage as very important factors in the voting process. Among those not as devout in their religious faith, the percentage of individuals who rate social issues as very important drops quickly.¹⁰⁰ The religious cleavages showed that the religious landscape of the United States has moved toward the pro-life direction, but only in regard to abortion.¹⁰¹ When asked whether abortion should always be illegal, legal in few circumstances, legal in many circumstances, or legal and up to woman to decide, the answers followed a religious pattern. The majority of those classified as traditionalist said that abortion should always be illegal or legal in few circumstances. The opposite was true for the other issues. And while the electorate has moved toward the pro-life movement by eight percentage points since 1992, the religious divisions were not as pronounced for issues like stem cell research and the death penalty. While traditionalists still oppose both issues in higher numbers than the other groups, the

100. Ibid.

101. Ibid.

difference in the percentages is far less significant. When asked if there should be a ban on stem cell research, 50 percent of traditionalist evangelical Protestants agreed, as did 51 percent of traditionalist Catholics. However, 32 percent of centrist Catholics, 34 percent of centrist evangelicals, and 15 percent of modernist Catholics also agreed with the statement. The numbers for the death penalty are even more interesting: the majority of each religious classification disagreed with the statement that the penalty should be life in prison instead of the death penalty.¹⁰²

Of those traditionalist evangelical Protestants who responded to the death penalty question, 59 percent disagreed with exchanging a life sentence for putting the criminal to death. Traditionalist evangelical Protestants had the highest percentages of disagreement, but the other groups were not far behind. Traditionalist mainline Protestants favored the death penalty by 43 percent, as did 45 percent of traditionalist Catholics. Overall, 53 percent of Catholics, 48 percent of mainline Protestants, and 59 percent of evangelical Protestants disagreed that life in prison should be exchanged for the death penalty. When asked about same-sex marriages, the traditionalists and centrists had the most similar responses. Modernist Catholics and modernist mainline Protestants had the sharpest differences. Most of the Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and mainline Protestants favored traditional marriage, and most of these three groups favored gay rights as well.

102. Ibid.

From 1992 to 2004, there was a net increase of six percent of those who agree that homosexuals should have the same rights as other Americans. This is interesting, since most of those polled favored traditional marriage.¹⁰³ These numbers beg the following questions: why was the abortion issue so much more divisive, why did it receive so much more attention, and why was there so much division along religious cleavages? Also, why have Republicans been able to avoid criticism from the bishops regarding issues aside from abortion?

Bishops' Positions on Other Issues

Although the NCCB/USCC may agree with Republicans on the issue of abortion, in some areas the two groups are not as cohesive, such as on capital punishment. Yet this does not appear to interfere with supporting a pro-life candidate who may not agree with the bishops on other issues. Also, when the bishops disagree with pro-life Republicans on certain issues, the media does not usually spend much time or many resources reporting on it. The Church's position on capital punishment has not always been as clear. The bishops have ignored a candidate's pro-capital punishment position in favor of highlighting the politician's position on abortion. In 2000 and 2004, the bishops chose not to bring attention to Bush's history of using capital punishment while governor of Texas. Instead, the focus shifted to John Kerry's support of legalized abortion. There were no public

103. Ibid.

statements warning Bush to change his position on the death penalty, but several bishops said that Kerry would be denied communion in their diocese because of his position on abortion. Additionally, there have not been as many statements on capital punishment as there have been on abortion. Another important factor is the media attention that both issues attract. By far, abortion attracts much more attention than the debate over capital punishment. During the campaign of 2004, the media spent a great amount of time discussing the problems Kerry faced with the Catholic hierarchy. But it was not just in 2004 that the capital punishment issue was ignored. In a March 5, 2001 article, *The Washington Times* discussed how Bush sought to use faith-based programs to address issues such as crime and punishment. The bishops had released a statement entitled *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*. The statement rejected solutions that tried to encompass all criminals and urged flexibility and accountability for people who are trying to change their lives. The statement also criticized the criminal justice system, asserting that the conditions of the facilities and treatment of prisoners exacerbates problems rather than fixing them. The statement also pointed out the hardships caused by placing prisons in out-of-the-way locations, making it harder for family members to visit on a regular basis. The media largely ignored the statement.¹⁰⁴

104. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*.

One reason that abortion receives more attention than other issues is that it is seen as more clear-cut than other issues such as the death penalty. The argument in *The Pastoral Plan* was that if society cannot protect the right to life of an unborn child, what difference do other achievements make? An editorial in the liberal *National Catholic Reporter* stated that other issues such as the war in Iraq, poverty, the death penalty, and welfare should have trumped the issue of abortion in the 2004 election. This is not to say that the bishops have not spoken out against the war or the death penalty, but what they have said often goes unnoticed by the public. In addition, no other issue has received the detailed plan of action that abortion has. Another reason for the lack of attention toward capital punishment may be that those who receive a death sentence are not very sympathetic figures. Voters may not have compassion for someone who has brutally murdered another person and thus may not pay attention to mistakes that have been made in convictions. Abortion differs markedly in that the unborn child is innocent and helpless. Those on the pro-choice side may be more energized by the government's perceived intrusion on a woman's right to reproductive freedom. Abortion provides a much clearer picture of the victim.

President Bush made a concerted effort to draw attention away from the Catholic Church's criticism over the war in Iraq by asking the Vatican to highlight his focus on cultural issues like same-sex marriage and abortion. A *New York Times* article from June 2003 detailed a meeting between Bush and Vatican officials in which he promised to

champion aggressively these cultural issues and asked for support from the Catholic bishops.¹⁰⁵ The Vatican did not disclose the exact details of what was discussed during the meeting. Bush's alleged promise to promote aggressively issues such as gay marriage and abortion is important in light of the fact that, a week before the meeting, Pope John Paul II had announced his opposition to the war in Iraq. There was some confusion over what Bush's position on issues like the Iraq war and capital punishment meant for Catholic voters. Would it be a sin to vote for Bush, or was voting for Kerry, who supported abortion, a graver sin? It appeared that in the 2004 election the Iraq war was muted by the attention paid to Kerry's stance on abortion. Some members of the hierarchy opposed some of Bush's policies, but the media paid much more attention to the several bishops who had publicly announced that Kerry was not allowed to receive communion in their diocese. The lack of attention paid to criticisms of Bush was perhaps confounding to the Kerry campaign in light of the fact that Iraq was a major issue in the campaign.

2008 Election

Having been a part of the effort to build a Catholic base for the Republican Party in 2000 and 2004, Deal Hudson lamented the road that Sen. John McCain had taken in the 2008 election. McCain's first misstep came in February 2008, when he stated that he was "proud" to receive the endorsement of Texas televangelist John Hagee. Hagee had a long

105. David D. Kirkpatrick, "Bush Sought Vatican Official's Help on Issues, Report Says," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2004. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

history of anti-Catholic rhetoric, calling the religion a “false cult” and stating that Catholics had contributed to Hitler’s persecution of the Jews. Hagee’s endorsement, combined with his history of anti-Catholicism, was so problematic that McCain had to distance himself from the anti-Catholic comments. Calls for McCain to reject the pastor’s endorsement were made by Bill Donohue of the Catholic League and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. McCain sought to lessen the harm done by the Hagee endorsement by repudiating any anti-Catholic comments made by Hagee or anyone else and by strengthening the National Catholics for McCain Committee.

The National Catholics for McCain Committee was co-chaired by Kansas senator Sam Brownback and former Oklahoma governor Frank Keating.¹⁰⁶ In December 2007, various Catholic leaders announced their support for McCain’s presidential campaign. Senator Brownback said of the committee, “As Catholics, we are proud to announce our support for John McCain, a genuine American hero with a conservative record who has what it takes to lead this country.” Governor Keating applauded McCain’s 24-year pro-life record and expressed his belief that McCain possessed all the qualities that Catholic voters in 2008 would be seeking. Despite his outreach efforts, McCain still faced criticism from some within the Catholic community. Austin Reese, of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute (C-FAM) chided McCain for his position on embryonic stem cell research.

106. Liz Halloran, “McCain Is Fighting to Win the Catholic Vote,” March 12, 2008, *U.S. News & World Report*. (This article was retrieved through <http://www.usnews.com>.)

McCain responded by saying that there was little scientific evidence to change his position, but he pledged that he would continue to examine the issue. In the 2008 election, Catholic groups that supported Barack Obama tried to characterize McCain as unconcerned with social justice issues such as helping the poor.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the 2008 election, Steve Wagner stated that the social justice issues championed by Democrats might be successful in capturing Catholic voters; as such, Republican candidates must be successful in articulating their own vision of social justice. McCain lacked George W. Bush's ability to "talk Catholic" and to express his vision of "compassionate conservatism." Ultimately, McCain was unsuccessful in capturing the Catholic vote. He managed to win only 45 percent, as compared to Obama's 54 percent, of the Catholic vote.¹⁰⁸ In the estimation of Deal Hudson, McCain failed to follow the advice he was given and did not build upon or utilize the tremendous Catholic base that had been built during the 2000 and 2004 elections.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

It took the Republicans many years to nurture their relationship with the Catholic bishops and Catholic voters. Ronald Reagan opened the door and George W. Bush flung it wide open. Reagan and Bush were able to capitalize on the alienation that many Catholics

107. Jeffrey Sewell, "John McCain 2008 Announces National Catholics for McCain Leadership Team," December 28, 2007, *South Carolina Hotline*. (This article was retrieved through <http://www.schotlinepress.com>.)

108. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "How the Faithful Voted," November 5, 2008.

109. Emily Stimpson, "Courting the Elusive Catholic Swing Vote," *Our Sunday Visitor*. (This article was retrieved through <http://www.osv.com>).

in the Democratic Party felt. The Republicans were able to provide a place for Catholic voters who felt that morality was just as important as social issues. Republicans centered their appeals on regular churchgoing Catholics who were very traditional in their faith. These Catholics were troubled by the legalization of abortion and the overall decline of morals in the United States.

The Bush campaign ran a highly sophisticated Catholic Outreach in 2000 and 2004. Bush was able to assure the bishops and Catholic voters that he understood their concerns, and for the first time since 1988, Bush recaptured the Catholic vote in 2004. Surprisingly, he did this while running against a Catholic. Republicans, especially during George W. Bush's term, have been able to build coalitions within the party between conservative Christians and conservative Catholics. The Republicans have been able to capitalize on the deepening of religious cleavages within the U.S. From 2000 to 2004, the RNC put together a powerful coalition whose goal was to end abortion. Unfortunately, John McCain did not capitalize on the efforts put forth by the RNC. Several missteps during the campaign, such as the endorsement from Rev. John Hagee, prevented McCain from capturing the Catholic vote. Despite his lackluster appeal to Catholics, he still received support from the bishops because of his pro-life record.

Republicans have undoubtedly been the beneficiary of the Catholic Church's position on abortion. Despite certain areas of disagreement, such as the war in Iraq and the death penalty, Republican candidates and the Catholic bishops have developed a powerful

alliance based on the issue of abortion. In recent elections, the bishops have become a powerful political force and have brought the issue of abortion to the national political stage. The Republican Party has benefited from the bishop's actions because the party's pro-life platform has allowed the hierarchy to look past the areas in which they do not agree. They have been spared the public denials of communion and calls for Catholics to vote against them. But the question remains: what would occur if a pro-choice Catholic Republican were to run for president or vice president? For now, Republicans and Catholic bishops have worked together, and both have benefited from the partnership.

Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This dissertation has focused on the significant role abortion has played in the American Catholic bishops' increased political leverage. It has considered that leverage largely within the context of presidential campaigns. Despite the fact that pro-life candidates have not always won the presidency, the bishops' involvement in the elections from 1976 to 2008 has emerged as an important political factor. Their focus on abortion seems to be the key element of their success. Even in elections in which abortion has not been a major campaign issue, the bishops' ability to raise the issue ensures that it regularly receives the attention of candidates, voters, and the media. A summary of the presidential elections from 1976 to 2008 shows that abortion has been the fulcrum in the bishops' ability to leverage political power.

Before Roe v. Wade

Prior to the 1960s, the American Catholic bishops were mainly concerned with assimilating poor, immigrant Catholics into American society. Historical animosity between Protestants and Catholics prevented the bishops from participating actively in politics. The bishops generally acted on an individual basis at the local level and only spoke on issues that directly impacted Catholics, such as government funding for parochial schools. When John F. Kennedy became the first Catholic president in 1960, Catholics began to move up both socially and economically and were no longer viewed with hostility. It was also during this time that the bishops' role shifted from the local level to the national level. This shift marked the first time that the bishops would be communicating their message not just to Catholics, but to all Americans.

It was not just the social and economic success of American Catholics that elevated the bishops' political profile. Changes made during Vatican II allowed the American bishops more leeway in conducting their affairs in the United States. The most important document to emerge from Vatican II was *Gaudium et Spes*, which called on leaders of the church to be agents of social change. The American bishops were also motivated by *Dignitatis Humanae*, which urged the hierarchy to scrutinize the signs of the times and interpret them in the light of the Gospel. These documents spurred the bishops to pay greater attention to issues such as racial justice, war and peace in the Middle East, justice for farm workers, and prisoners of war. For the first time in their history, the hierarchy released a statement that criticized the U.S. government. In 1971, after several attempts to ask the U.S. to rethink its military strategies in Vietnam, the bishops criticized American military involvement. The bishops urged the government to end the war and provide the same type of recovery aid that had been provided to Europe after World War II. The bishops continued to release statements about racial equality, farm labor, and military initiatives. However, social change in the late 1960s and 1970s brought a fundamental and dramatic increase in episcopal involvement.

In the late 1960s the bishops became concerned with the moral ambivalence that had engulfed not just American Catholics, but non-Catholics as well. They were particularly alarmed by the growing acceptance of birth control and the practice of abortion. The bishops had waged a tepid battle against birth control in the 1920s and

1930s, but this effort paled in comparison to the campaign they would wage from the late 1960s onward. In 1968, the bishops released *Human Life in Our Day* in response to Pope Paul VI's condemnation of artificial birth control. Based on principles set forth by the Vatican and basic Judeo-Christian traditions, the document stated that "human life should be inviolable from the moment of conception" and that abortion was "contrary to Judeo-Christian traditions inspired by love for life and Anglo-Saxon legal traditions protective of life and persons."¹ *Human Life in Our Day* was followed by three successive statements: *Statement on Abortion* (1969), *Statement on Abortion and Declaration on Abortion* (1970), and *Population and the American Future: A Response* (1972). Each statement became more aggressive in tone and advanced arguments based on Catholic doctrine and American legal principles, but none included any specific political strategies. The Supreme Court's 1973 decision legalizing abortion in *Roe v. Wade* served as a dramatic call to arms for the American hierarchy. The bishops' outrage over the decision fundamentally changed their approach to political activity.

Roe was the impetus for extraordinary changes in the bishops' political involvement. For the first time in their history, the bishops advocated disobeying civil laws and openly denounced a decision of the Supreme Court. The legalization of abortion forced the issue of abortion onto the national political stage and brought the bishops into a more active national role. The nationalization of the abortion debate was important not

1. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops*, 55.

only because it forced the bishops to participate more directly but also because it forced them to change their political strategies. Generic responses, such as releasing a pastoral statement, would not be sufficient. The abortion debate would require much more than a few words expressing disappointment over the Court's decision. It would require a strategic, well-planned, and coordinated operation that would reach both Catholics and non-Catholics. The bishops' first response was to promote the passage of a constitutional amendment outlawing abortion, which they urged in testimony before Congress. Yet by the time of the 1976 presidential election, the bishops had realized that much more was needed in order to wage what they viewed as the Church's most critical fight.

1976-2008 Presidential Elections

In 1975, the American Catholic bishops released *The Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities*. The *Pastoral Plan* has been described as “the most ‘focused and aggressive political leadership’ ever exerted by the American Catholic hierarchy.”² The *Pastoral Plan* addressed four specific areas: public information and education, pastoral care, public policy, and prayer and worship. While it discussed other issues, The *Pastoral Plan* clearly stated that abortion was the most important issue facing Americans. The bishops reasoned that if the life of an unborn child could not be protected, then addressing other social issues was pointless. The *Pastoral Plan* was the foundation of the Church's fight against abortion and was emblematic of its new approach to political involvement. The *Pastoral*

2. Ibid., 58.

Plan was not merely a general call for national action; it demanded activity at all levels: local, state, and national. The *Pastoral Plan* called on all members of the Catholic Church to become involved in the effort to overturn legalized abortion, from parishioners to the highest church officials.

The bishops' abortion strategy was fundamental to their accumulation of political power. In 1976, both candidates looked to the bishops for a Catholic endorsement. Catholics had traditionally been a core constituency of the Democratic Party. Indeed, it has been said that to be born Catholic is to be born a Democrat. Yet in 1972, Republican Richard Nixon won 52 percent of the Catholic vote, the largest margin since modern polling began. Both Jimmy Carter, the 1976 Democratic nominee, and Gerald Ford as the Republican nominee knew they needed the support of the hierarchy. Carter was determined to bring Catholics back to the Democratic Party, but the fact that he was a born-again Southern Baptist made this task difficult. There was a long history of animosity between Catholics and evangelical Christians, and Carter feared he had a "Catholic problem." President Ford was not headed for an easy victory either. He knew that he would most likely lose the South to Carter, so he needed the heavily Catholic Northeast and Upper Midwest to remain in office. Both candidates looked to the bishops as leaders of a key electoral group. Carter tried desperately to appease the bishops with his position on abortion, but to no avail. Yet despite facing public criticism from the bishops, Carter not only won the election but also secured the majority of the Catholic vote. While

the bishops did not have as much influence as they would have liked, the 1976 presidential election marked a new beginning for them.

The 1976 presidential election illustrates how one issue can become central to a candidate's electoral fortunes. Both Carter and Ford, in an attempt to capture the Catholic vote, tried to assuage the bishops with their position on abortion. Both candidates recognized how important abortion was to the hierarchy, and they knew that in order to gain their support, they needed to anticipate a position on abortion that would be endorsed by the Catholic Church. Carter and Ford looked to the members of the hierarchy to direct Catholics toward the best candidate. Despite Carter's victory, the 1976 presidential election served as an incubator for the bishops' emerging political power. With each preceding election, the bishops had been able to increase significantly their power and prestige. In the 1980 presidential election, the members of the hierarchy worried that they would appear too partisan and thus avoided overt participation in the election. Their subtle approach to the abortion issue, however, caught the attention of other groups, who attempted to copy the hierarchy's style in order to advance their agendas. Members of the conservative movement known as the "New Right" had paid close attention to the bishops' involvement in the 1976 election and adopted their own anti-abortion agenda and tactics. Their plan was to build a coalition around a central social issue—abortion. The bishops' involvement also laid the foundation for the involvement of other religious groups within the electoral process. Members of the evangelical Christian movement, along with the

New Right, reached out to Catholic leaders in an effort to combat abortion. Even though the Catholic bishops did not directly mobilize Catholics to vote in favor of pro-life candidates, they did draw attention to the pro-life movement and inspired other religious and social leaders to highlight the issue.

The power of the Catholic bishops became more evident in the 1984 election, when several prominent bishops brought attention to pro-choice Catholic politicians. Cardinals O'Connor of New York and Law of Boston paid particular attention to Mario Cuomo, governor of New York; and Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice-presidential candidate. Both were Catholic, pro-choice, and at odds with the Church over the issue of abortion. O'Connor publicly accused Ferraro of misrepresenting the Church's views on abortion when she signed a statement saying that Catholic teaching was divided on the subject of abortion. O'Connor's efforts resulted in Ferraro's releasing a statement saying that she understood that the Catholic Church's position on abortion was monolithic.

Initially, abortion was not a central issue of the 1996 presidential campaign. However, President Clinton's veto of legislation banning partial-birth abortions prompted the bishops to react with extraordinary force. A prayer vigil was organized on the steps of the U.S. Capitol, and members of the hierarchy asked Catholics to send postcards to their congressmen requesting that they override the president's veto. The bishops' efforts had two effects: (1) Clinton wrote a letter to the bishops apologizing for vetoing the bill, and (2) Bob Dole, who was not a particularly zealous pro-life supporter, spoke out against the

procedure. The pressure placed upon Clinton forced him to write a letter to Archbishop James Hickey of Washington, D.C., explaining his reasons for the veto. He also expressed the great agony that the decision had caused him and his desire that the practice would only be used in the case of a severe health risk to the mother. Bob Dole, whose own pro-life bona fides were in question, was also compelled to address the issue. He criticized Clinton for vetoing the bill and compared the practice of partial-birth abortion to infanticide. The 1996 presidential election again showed that the Catholic bishops were capable of highlighting the issue of abortion even when it was not a major issue in a campaign. The bishops succeeded in forcing both major party candidates to address the issue and seek common ground with the hierarchy in order to garner Catholic votes. Although the bishops did not achieve the goal of electing a pro-life president, they had once again steered the national debate back to the issue of abortion.

The bishops' two decades of advocating for the end of legalized abortion began to bear fruit in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. The bishops drew support from the deepening religious cleavages that had been developing in the U.S. electorate over the previous twenty years. The 2000 election showed that there a distinct difference existed between voters who attended church regularly and those who did not. Those who attended church once a week or more voted disproportionately in favor of George Bush. Voters who attended church infrequently or never chose Al Gore in disproportionate numbers. Bush was very open about his religious beliefs and frequently interjected them into his

political statements. Bush was also able to narrow the gap among Catholic voters. He managed to win 47 percent of the Catholic vote as compared to Gore's 49 percent.³

No single issue dominated the 2000 campaign, but the hierarchy was once again successful in pushing abortion onto the national political agenda. In the early part of the campaign Bush faced some criticism after he spoke at the notoriously anti-Catholic Bob Jones University. In response, Bush sent a letter of apology to the bishops for not chastising the university for its anti-Catholic rhetoric. The issue quickly faded and was overshadowed by the issue of abortion. Bishop James Timlin of Scranton, Pennsylvania refused to allow Gore to speak at a Catholic-affiliated hospital because of Gore's pro-choice position. Timlin stated that he had not been offended by Bush's appearance at Bob Jones University and that Bush's speech was not comparable to Gore's support of abortion. Gore spoke at a separate venue and expressed his belief that Bishop Timlin should have his own views even if he disagreed with them. However, when speculation arose that Bush was considering a Catholic pro-choice running-mate, several bishops spoke out in opposition. Bishop Donald Trautman of Erie, Pennsylvania reaffirmed the ban on pro-choice Catholics' appearance at church-related events. Most people assumed this was aimed at former Pennsylvania governor Tom Ridge, a potential Bush running mate. These events showed that the Catholic bishops were unwilling to back down on the issue of

3. Gerald M. Pomper, "The 2000 Presidential Election: Why Gore Lost," *Political Science Quarterly* 116 (Summer 2001): 208.

abortion. Whether or not it had been explicitly agreed upon, there appeared to be an understanding that abortion occupied the primary position on the bishops' agenda. No other issue was as important as abortion, and there was no room for candidates that were not pro-life.

The 2004 presidential election was perhaps the clearest example of how adept the bishops had become at leveraging political power. Their singular emphasis on abortion in 2004 attracted the attention of both Catholics and non-Catholics. The 2004 election also showed how far the bishops had come in their mission to help Catholics become an accepted part of American society. When John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, he faced many obstacles because of his religion. Voters from other religious denominations worried that Kennedy was "too Catholic" and would face undue influence from the Vatican. Kennedy was repeatedly forced to assure Americans that his religion was separate from his public policy objectives. John Kerry's experience 44 years later was quite different.

John Kerry faced criticism from the American Catholic bishops, who were unhappy with his position on abortion. Unlike Kennedy, Kerry had to prove that he was Catholic enough. Kerry ran as a pro-choice candidate, although he stated that he was personally opposed to abortion. Despite his personal opposition, Kerry felt it was his public duty to uphold abortion laws. Kerry found himself at the center of a media storm over his position on abortion. His platform led several bishops to threaten to deny him communion. The

attention generated by these threats forced the bishops to address the issue of pro-choice Catholic politicians. While most bishops did not agree with the public denials of communion, the threats provided the media with a novel narrative. The media attention was particularly impressive given that abortion was not a major campaign issue and the country was in the midst of an unpopular war. It was difficult for Kerry to deflect attention away from his position on abortion and focus it on his other agenda items. Despite Bush's long record of death penalty use as governor of Texas, the members of the hierarchy chose instead to focus on the issue of abortion. As in the 2000 election, Bush may not have embodied all the ideals that the bishops advocated, but he was with them on the issue that mattered most.

The Kerry communion controversy illustrates an important element of the bishops' political power. Voters followed the story in the media regardless of whether or not they agreed with the bishops' tactics. It also caused Catholics to consider Kerry's record more carefully than they otherwise might have. Some Catholics were uncomfortable with Kerry expressing his personal opposition to abortion yet proclaiming that he had a public duty to uphold the law. Some felt that if he was going to proclaim himself a Catholic he should be willing to support the tenets of his faith. According to a Zogby poll from June 2004, 51 million Catholics in the United States said that they were not comfortable with Kerry. Additionally, two-thirds of those Catholics polled said they would be less likely to support

a Catholic presidential candidate who would use a *Roe v. Wade* litmus test to appoint pro-choice judges.⁴

The bishops' implicit message that voting for Kerry was unacceptable appeared to have bolstered conservative Catholic voters, which was one of several factors why Kerry lost the Catholic vote. Kerry received 47 percent of the non-Latino Catholic vote as compared to Bush's 53 percent.⁵ Kerry did well among Catholics who attended church infrequently or never. Bush won the majority of Catholics who attended church at least once a week or more. Bush's pro-life position and his openness with his faith helped to capture this group of regular churchgoers. Those voters were exposed to the Church's message on a regular basis and would be more likely to seek out the Church's position on important issues such as abortion. The election results showed that Catholics who attended church regularly got the message that it was not acceptable to vote for John Kerry.

The 2004 election was a major victory for the American Catholic bishops. They had successfully drawn national attention to the issue of abortion, and they had held a pro-choice Catholic candidate accountable for his position. It also marked the first time since 1972 that the Republican pro-life candidate had been the winner of the Catholic vote. Also, the attention paid to bishops who threatened to deny Kerry communion showed that the bishops had the power to force a discussion of abortion in an election in which the

4. John Leo, "Kerry's Abortion Problem," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 14, 2004. (This article was retrieved through Lexis-Nexis Academic).

5. John C. Green, Corwin E. Smidt, James L. Guth, and Lyman A. Kellstedt, "The American Religious Landscape and the 2004 Presidential Vote: Increased Polarization." Pew Forum Publications.

issue was not otherwise on the electorate's radar. In 2006, in order to avert future conflicts over with who should and should not receive Holy Communion, the bishops issued a set of guidelines for preparing oneself to receive Holy Communion.

2004 Election Aftermath

The 2004 election was important for the bishops not only because it lifted the abortion debate to new levels but also because it forced Democrats to examine how they approached faith and morality. For decades, Democrats had been losing support among religiously motivated voters (Catholics in particular) because they had decided that moral issues were not an important part of their political agenda and that the government should stay out of the business of "legislating morality." This attitude was in direct contrast to that of the Republicans, who had been building a solid base of support among those who had left the Democratic Party due to their libertarian view of morality. On Thursday, November 1, 2007, John Kerry was invited by the Pew Forum to discuss his religious beliefs and the effects those beliefs had on his public policy views. In his opening remarks, Kerry spoke of how the Catholic Church of his youth was markedly different from today's Church.

But the bottom line is that the Catholicism that I grew up with is quite different from the Catholicism that we have today, and that is partly due to Vatican II and to a reevaluation within the church about how the church would reach out and talk to its flock. When I grew up, as we learned in Matthew, chapter 6, you pray. You go

into your room and shut the door and pray in secret, and the Lord hears your prayers in secret and then rewards you.⁶

Kerry's assessment of the changes that have occurred in the way Catholicism is practiced reflects a larger change in how many Americans practice their faith. These changes are an important element in the bishops' struggle with abortion because of Americans' changing perceptions of sin and morality. Kerry touched upon the notion that religion had become more public. This also helped to explain some of the problems Kerry faced during his campaign. Whereas faith was once a private matter between the individual and God, it had become more public and evangelical.

In *The Transformation of American Religion*, Alan Wolfe maps the changing religious landscape of the United States. Wolfe's most valuable contribution is his discussion of the changing emphasis on sin in American religious life. One example is the declining number of Catholics who regularly participate in the sacrament of Reconciliation. Wolfe notes that Catholics are uneasy with the thought of walking into a small, dark room and confessing their sins to a priest who may or may not be sympathetic. In a Notre Dame Study of Catholic Life, the authors noted that "there seems to be a movement away from a 'checklist' form of Confession in favor of longer personal discussions of guilt and healing."⁷ In addition, changes have occurred in the perception of what sin actually is. Wolfe observes that Catholics may be increasingly unwilling to label

6. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life Event transcript, "Faith and the Public Dialogue: A Conversation with Sen. John Kerry," November 1, 2007.

7. Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion*, 121.

themselves as sinners. As a result, the definition of sin has changed. The Church has tried to move away from measuring sins on a scale ranging from venial (less serious) to mortal (most serious) and has adopted an emphasis on God as loving, compassionate, and forgiving. The lessening of the significance of the sacrament of confession shows that many Catholics have abandoned the practice because they do not want to be labeled as sinners. The unwillingness to admit to sin is part of larger psychological shift away from a culture of guilt. Consequently, any religion that “insists on the stain of human depravity, upholds a commanding and authoritative God as an alternative, and demands of ordinary believers that they look into their hearts in order to correct their sinful ways” will not be able to sustain a large following. Americans do not dismiss the idea of holiness; rather, they will not adhere to the teachings of those who profess to be “holier than thou.” Wolfe finds this movement away from sin and judgment troubling for society, “for the ease with which American religious believers adopt nonjudgmental language and a psychological understanding of wrongdoing is detrimental to anyone, religious or not, who believes that individuals should judge their actions against the highest possible ideals of human conduct, however those ideals are established.”⁸

The change in religious attitudes that has permeated the country poses a problem for the leaders of the Catholic Church who want Catholics to bear witness to the evils of abortion. The hierarchy has framed the abortion debate in terms of morality and sin, yet

8. Ibid., 184.

the Church's conception of sin and morality may be different from what many Catholics believe it to be. If American Catholics are unwilling to identify themselves as sinners or deserving of punishment, then they may be unreceptive to a message that is framed in terms of sin and morality. Some Catholics may desire to separate their faith from public policy entirely. Some Catholics may believe that other evils such as poverty or war are more deserving of the Church's attention. Yet despite potential changes in Catholic attitudes toward sin, the bishops' influence remains greatest with traditionalist Catholics who attend church regularly and who worry about the state of morality in the United States. This arrangement has created a symbiotic relationship between traditionalist Catholics and the bishops. The bishops know that traditionalist Catholics can be counted on as foot soldiers in the battle against abortion. In turn, traditionalist Catholics, eager for episcopal leadership, support the bishops' efforts in drawing attention to abortion as a political issue.

2008 Presidential Election

The 2008 election provided a fertile environment for progressive Catholic organizations. The bishops were met with vocal opposition from other Catholic groups. These groups might have been seen as a threat to the bishops and their relationship with Catholics, but that was not the case. As a result of these groups speaking out, many Catholic politicians reached out to the bishops and asked that they start working together. Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) reached out to Cardinal McCarrick, noting that although they

did not agree on everything, there were still opportunities to work together. The bishops have, in fact, been able to work with pro-choice Catholic politicians, particularly on issues such as immigration, the environment, and social justice. However, it should be noted that agreement on these issues has not bridged their disagreements about abortion.⁹

The pro-choice Catholic groups have created some issues for the Church; however, the Church has faced problems like this before. Judging by the hierarchy's previous reactions, it is likely that the bishops will become even stronger in their pro-life message. The USCCB reacted to the 2008 election by releasing a statement on November 6, 2008 that it would be revising its guidelines for Catholics to consider before voting. The bishops seemed prepared to scrap *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*. Although it had been approved by all but four bishops in November 2007, it was ineffective because its application lacked unity of purpose. As previously noted, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Vice President Joe Biden both publicly discussed the Church's position on abortion, but they described the Church's position incorrectly. The bishops are concerned that 54 percent of Catholic voters supported Barack Obama, and, by extension, his pro-choice Catholic vice president. Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput has said, "We need a new approach to conscience formation in the public square." The bishops have criticized Catholics like Nicholas Cafardi, who used *Forming Consciences for Faithful*

9. Interview with Michael Sean Winters.

Citizenship to support his argument that Catholics could vote for a pro-choice candidate in good conscience.¹⁰

Another problem for the bishops is that no candidate or party completely fits into their ideological spectrum. For instance, the Church opposes abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty, but it also supports immigration, social welfare programs for the poor, and accessible healthcare. This range of issues cuts across both the Democratic and Republican platforms. Therefore, many political scientists contend that Catholics will find it difficult to vote for a candidate whose platform is entirely consistent with the Church's teachings. Despite these difficulties, the Church has always encouraged civic participation from Catholics. In 1999 the hierarchy expressed encouragement to all Catholic voters in *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*. The bishops expressed their hope that the new millennium would provide an opportunity for renewed political participation. The bishops have urged Catholics to challenge both parties and all candidates to defend human life and dignity as well as pursue justice and peace and uphold family life.

In 2002, the Vatican addressed the problem as well. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith released a doctrinal note, *The Participation of Catholics in Political Life*, which states that a well-formed Christian mind would not vote for a candidate or

10. Daniel Burke, "On Heels of Biden Win, Bishops to Debate Catholics in Political Life," *Religious News Service*, November 6, 2008.

party who contradicts the fundamental aspects of the faith and of morality. Realizing the limitations this directive puts on Catholics, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith defended the tradition of civic participation by reminding Catholics of their responsibility toward the common good and warning them that Catholics cannot delegate their Christian responsibilities to others. Therefore Catholics should participate in the political process, but they should not base their voting decisions on support for a candidate who clearly violates Church teachings. Catholics must choose the candidate that is “the lesser of two evils” and base their decision on whether or not the candidate has a policy platform that is consistent with Church teachings. For the Catholic bishops, choosing the lesser of two evils means voting for the candidate who defends life through opposition to abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, and the death penalty.¹¹

The Future of the Bishops’ Political Involvement

The future of the bishops’ political involvement looks to be one of greater influence. Recent Supreme Court rulings have raised the possibility that *Roe* may someday be overturned. On April 18, 2007, the Supreme Court upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act in *Gonzales v. Carhart* in a 5-4 ruling. The decision, which did not affect the legal status of abortion, was met with strong reactions from both the pro-life and the pro-choice communities. Cardinal Rigali, Archbishop of Philadelphia and Chairman of

11. Mark M. Gray and Mary E. Bendyna, “Between Church, Party, and Conscience: Protecting Life and Promoting Social Justice Among U.S. Catholics,” in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 75-77.

the Committee for Pro-Life Activities of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), responded to the decision by noting:

The Court's decision does not affect the legal status of the great majority of abortions, and does not reverse past decisions claiming to find a right to abortion in the Constitution. However, it provides reasons for renewed hope and renewed effort on the part of pro-life Americans. The Court is taking a clearer and more unobstructed look at the tragic reality of abortion, and speaking about that reality more candidly, than it has in many years.¹²

One reason for Rigali's optimism is that *Carhart* will likely elevate the importance of the abortion issue in future elections. The Democratic senator from California, Barbara Boxer, noted that the decision "confirms that elections have consequences." President Obama has already appointed two justices, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he may have more. The American Catholic bishops know that electing a pro-life president increases the chance that pro-life justices will be appointed and *Roe* will be overturned. Accordingly, it can be expected that the bishops will seek to play an active role in future presidential elections.¹³

As stated previously, public opinion regarding abortion ebbs and flows. Accordingly, public opinion is again changing. Recent polling data suggest that support for abortion is declining. An October 2009 survey conducted by the Pew Forum on

12. Statement from Justin Cardinal Rigali, Chairman of the Committee for Pro-Life Activities, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), "Cardinal Welcomes Supreme Court Decision Upholding Federal Partial-Birth Abortion Ban," April 18, 2007.

13. Margaret Ross Sammon, "The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops: The Centrality of Abortion," in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 22.

Religion & Public Life reports that in 2007 and 2008 supporters of legal abortion outnumbered the opponents. By 2009, Americans were evenly divided on the issue. There have been modest increases in the number of Americans who favor reducing abortions or making them harder to obtain. The Pew survey shows that 41 percent favor making abortions more difficult to obtain; 65 percent said it would be good to reduce the number of abortions, and 76 percent favor parental notification for minors. A key shift has taken place among white, non-Hispanic Catholics who attend Mass at least weekly; this group saw a ten-point shift. Additionally, Democratic men have experienced a nine-point decline in support for abortion. President Obama's core supporters—African-Americans, young people, and those who are religiously unaffiliated—have not changed their position on abortion. Yet 52 percent of conservative Republicans say they are worried that the Obama administration will go too far in supporting abortion rights. While levels of support for abortion have plateaued, opposition to abortion has grown among conservatives. Conservatives have become less supportive of finding a middle ground on the issue and will make a very receptive audience for the bishops.¹⁴

Conclusion

Candidates seek the approval of the Catholic bishops because they lead one of the most important electoral groups in America. Many candidates believe that if the leaders of

14. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Support for Abortion Slips: Issue Ranks Lower on the Agenda," October 1, 2009. <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=441>.

the Church tell their members that it is acceptable to vote for one candidate over another, Catholics will listen and vote accordingly. As noted, abortion is often not the major issue in an election. Yet the nature of abortion makes it a topic that garners a great deal of attention from the media, candidates, and voters. The emphasis that the bishops have placed on abortion has also forced many candidates to point out areas of agreement with the bishops in the hopes of obtaining Catholic voters.

The presidential elections from 1976 to 2008 show the evolution of the bishops' political power and their ability to make candidates take a stand on the abortion issue. The 1976 election set the stage for the new political role that the Catholic bishops would play. In the 1996 presidential election, the bishops were able to prompt President Clinton to explain his support for partial birth abortions, which also caused the moderately pro-life Bob Dole to express his opposition to legal abortion. In 2004, during an election in which the country was in the midst of two wars and a declining economy, the bishops were able to refocus the national spotlight on abortion. While some may not agree with the bishops' tactics, no one can deny that they have been successful in drawing attention to the abortion issue. The Church's consistent emphasis on abortion, often at the expense of other social issues, compelled John Kerry to reassure voters that he was indeed "Catholic enough." This need presented a striking reversal of the situation in 1960, when the Catholic John F. Kennedy had to assure voters that he was not a tool of his church's hierarchy. Voters in the 2008 presidential election were primarily concerned about the economy; abortion was

not an especially relevant issue. Some Catholics were speaking publicly about their support for Obama, urging others to vote for him and telling Catholics that it would be acceptable for them to do so. The bishops, however, seemed undaunted by these obstacles. They reacted with their usual fervor and made it clear that being pro-choice was not acceptable. Obama's election makes their involvement in the next presidential election even more important.

The American Catholic bishops were once the leaders of an embattled minority. Their members were poor, uneducated, unskilled, and newly arrived in America. The members of the hierarchy avoided political involvement in order to avert the further alienation of immigrant Catholics. Yet when abortion was legalized in 1973, the bishops devoted tremendous time and energy to attempting to reverse the decision. The upward mobility of Catholics gave the bishops the opportunity to speak out, but it was *how* they spoke out that led to their newfound political power. Focusing on abortion, the bishops did not have to support one party over the other; candidates, seeking Catholic voters, attempted to win the support of the bishops. In many ways, abortion was the perfect vehicle for the bishops' expansion of their political power: all members of the hierarchy acknowledged the evils of abortion, and abortion never suffered for lack of media coverage. The bishops' rise to power was gradual, but they are now a permanent voice in the national political dialogue. Only time will tell if they will continue to focus primarily on abortion. The bishops have worked successfully with both parties on a number of issues (for example,

their recent work with Democrats on healthcare and immigration). Yet if past is prologue, abortion will continue to be the prime mover of the American Catholic hierarchy's political effort

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