



ELEPHANTS IN THE LIVING ROOM

Website: elephantsinthelivingroom.org



STEPHEN POPE
OUR MOTHER OF PERPETUAL HELP PARISH
OUR LADY OF FATIMA CAMPUS
OAK PARK, MI
FRIDAY, MARCH 17, 2017

Introduction

This is one of the few times that we've had a repeat speaker, someone who spoke to us before, and so most of you have already have a sense of familiarity with Dr. Stephen Pope, and your presence here shows that you certainly appreciated his past talk; and I am sure you will appreciate his talk today. Just as a reminder, Dr. Pope comes to us from Boston College, which is a university.

He got his doctorate in philosophy at the University of Chicago in social ethics.



Bishop Tom Gumbleton

He comes to us today at a very important time, and certainly with the presence here of so many, indicates how we do feel his topic is important. As you probably know, just yesterday, President Trump presented his budget to the Congress. That budget indicates so clearly that much of the program of President Trump is in opposition to very important core gospel teachings, teachings such as: preferential option for the poor, the common good, stewardship of our planet, the intrinsic dignity and worth of every person. And a good part of the budget is directed toward what will come to be increased war making, as he increases our defense budget by ten percent, and diminishes the budget for the State Department, where we might pursue peace through diplomacy. Dr. Pope will address this conflict between the proposals of President Trump, his policies, and our Catholic teaching. And sometimes, I am sure, he will make this clear, as followers of Jesus, we do have to stand in opposition to the policies of our own government and what may also be difficult for many of us identifying destruction in our Catholic community.

I love that reading that we had today; Bishop McElroy is very on the mark when he says, "That this is the time for destruction". So, within our own Catholic community, we will be facing some of that, as we confront the possibility that some of our government's policies are going to be in profound disagreement with our Catholic teaching. Dr. Pope, today, I hope and expect, will help us to understand where those conflicts are, and also, give us guidance on how to resolve the conflicts with our government, and even more perhaps, without our own Catholic Christian community. And so, I ask you to please welcome Dr. Stephen Pope once more. (applause)

A Catholic Response to the Presidency of Donald Trump

Stephen Pope



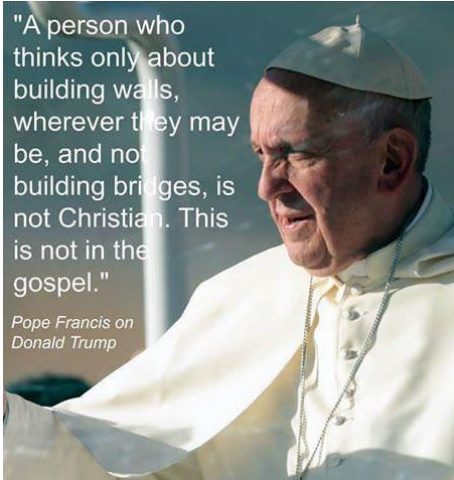
I want to thank you for coming out to listen to me. I want to lower your expectations. I do not have a lot of answers about how to resolve what seem to be intractable disputes or conflicts between Catholicism and the current presidential administration. I do think that we have learn to live and act within those conflicts in a way that is dignified and Christian, in a way that is

constructive, rather than causing unnecessary conflict and destructive relationships. So, I want to begin the talk by making it clear that I am going to speak as a moral theologian, rather than as a political scientist, public policy expert, or community organizer, or politician. I am a Catholic theologian interested in what the norms of Catholic social ethics tell us about how to be engaged in our wider political community under the administration of President Donald Trump. And, not just the Trump administration, but also the judicial and legislative branches of government as well. The issue isn't just one person.



I take it that we are convinced that the Gospel calls us to give our primary loyalty to Christ and his community of disciples, the Church, and to view all other loyalties, including those of family and country as secondary—good, but secondary. We have a duty to obey legitimate laws, and to respect legitimate state authority; but, in cases of conflict, as St. Peter says in Acts of the Apostles, "We must obey God rather than human beings." How then are we, as Catholics, supposed to respond to the Trump presidency in particular?

My answer is that we are all called—each and every one of us—to exercise prophetic citizenship. Citizenship is a status that confers a set of rights and responsibilities. We exercise these rights and duties in a prophetic way when we act in tune with the ancient biblical prophets' message of justice



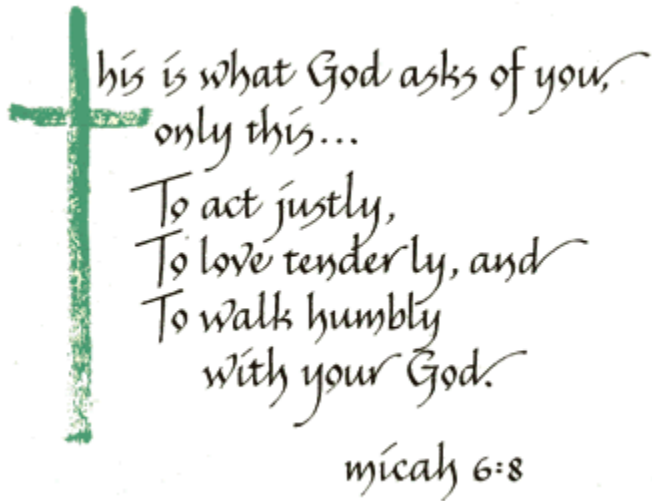
and mercy. The person, I think today, who is the most visible prophet of justice and mercy is Pope Francis. (phone ringing) He may be calling right now. (laughter) But you recall on his flight, coming back from Mexico, he was asked a question about what he thought about the proposal of the then candidate Trump to build a wall. And he famously said "A person who only thinks about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian. This is not in the gospel."

(applause) The two words for the Pope, *Pontifex Maximus*, in Latin means: a great bridge builder, not the wall builder.

But each of us, as Christians, are all supposed to be a little bridge builder in some way. So, we have to try hard not to be building walls with people in our own communities that voted differently than we did, or have different political priorities than we did or do. How do we build bridges in our lives? The candidate did not appreciate papal commentary. (laughter) "That is not a nice thing to say." Yeah! Breaking news! But then, there are a lot of things in the Bible that aren't nice. There is the Bible as a two-edged sword. There's the Bible that divides, not intentionally, not for the sake of division, but out of integrity.



There is the Cross, a sign of contradiction. There is a cultural tension between the culture of Christianity and the dominant culture of many societies, in fact, really, all societies. And we tend to lose this in societies that call themselves, and have historically been Christian.



This is the priority I think that Pope Francis is talking about, that Jesus called us to, that the prophets spoke to. And I think it is the most pithy summary of the message of the entire Bible. This is what God asks of you only this: *“To act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God.”* (Micah 6:8) That's not easy: to be loving and just and humble, not taking turns with those virtues but embodying them every moment.

So, the eighth century prophet Isaiah captures the imperative addressed to all of us when he says, “Learn to do right, seek justice, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.” Jesus did not just defend the oppressed; he went a step further. As we heard from the readings today, from the Gospel of Matthew, he identified with the oppressed. It wasn't concern from a distance, it was incarnation. So, that we go to the poor, not to bring Christ to the poor, but to have the poor bring Christ to us. Thus, the message of the prophets.



So, I'd like to start with a disclaimer. While I tried to be fair, I do not pretend to be completely unbiased. I don't think anyone is. So, I will say it, and confess I speak as a grudging and dissatisfied Democrat, who voted for Hilary Clinton, despite her elitism; her contempt for the deplorables was a huge mistake, I think—I don't mind saying it, but the reality of it!

But, I think, her elitism, her shady financial dealings, her hawkish tendencies on foreign policy, which I was most worried about, and her uncompromising pro-choice agenda. But, despite these I judged her to be less a threat to human dignity and the common good than her competitor.

I proceed today by describing a few salient features of our current context, as I understand them, and then try to respond to them, in light of a Catholic account of the duties and responsibilities of citizenship.

My main point is that citizenship, in the face of governmental or social injustice, requires each of us to act prophetically. We must commit ourselves to undertaking specific and concrete commitments for the sake of the common good. We have *to do* something, and not just be obsessed with the news. And it has to be focused on the common good, which the Church defines as the sum total of conditions, which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more readily and more easily. The common good has three components:

1. Respect for every person and protection of his or her rights.
2. Promotion of the integral human development of all members of the community, and access to basic goods, such as food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information and the right to establish a family, and so on.
3. Protection of the peace and security of the community through the use of legitimate or licit means, not unjust means.

In this perspective, each citizen has a duty to participate in civic life in whatever ways are appropriate and possible for us for the sake of the common good. So, those are the three dimensions: respect for the dignity of the individual, and meeting of basic needs, and protection of peace and security.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council suggested that Christian engagement in the world best proceeds when we read the sign of the times, and respond to them in light of the Gospel. As responsible citizens, we ought to respond to the opportunities and dangers that we encounter today. As Catholics, we are called to address these threats and challenges through the normative lens provided by the Gospel and Catholic social teachings.

Before we act, we need to pay attention to what's going on, understand how it's affecting people, especially the most vulnerable, and identify the conditions or causes that led to it.

So, we can begin with a brief review of the events that happened in the last year.

There seem to be countless post op theories about how a candidate with the high negatives that Donald Trump had, managed to pull off the electoral college win.

Salon Magazine, among many others, counted fourteen factors; but there are probably more. These include: voter fear, resentment, white supremacy, misogyny, declining economic mobility, media bias, antipathy to cultural elites, Russian meddling, FBI Director Comey's intervention, voter suppression and gerrymandering, skepticism about Hilary Clinton, *etc.*

It's enough to make your head swim. But from what I can tell, being a simple person, just to boil it down to some fundamental factors. It seems to me, Trump was victorious because of the strange convergence of two contradictory sentiments coming from different sectors of our society. And I really just throw this as a hypothesis; so, if it matches your experience, maybe it would make sense, maybe not; but this is my sense of it:



On the one hand, a significant number of traditionally Democratic voters broke ranks this election because they thought Trump would shake things up. They're accurate!

On the other hand, a significant number of voters, who supported Barak Obama in his two presidential runs, decided to stay home last November, because they really didn't think either candidate would make any significant difference for their lives.

The former group was significantly motivated by a strong dose of politically charged anger.

The latter seems to have been influenced by some kind of a mix of political resignation, disappointment, and maybe even fatalism. What neither of these groups realized is what my Irish forebears did: *that there is nothing so bad, that it can't be worse*. Happy St. Patrick's Day. (laughter)

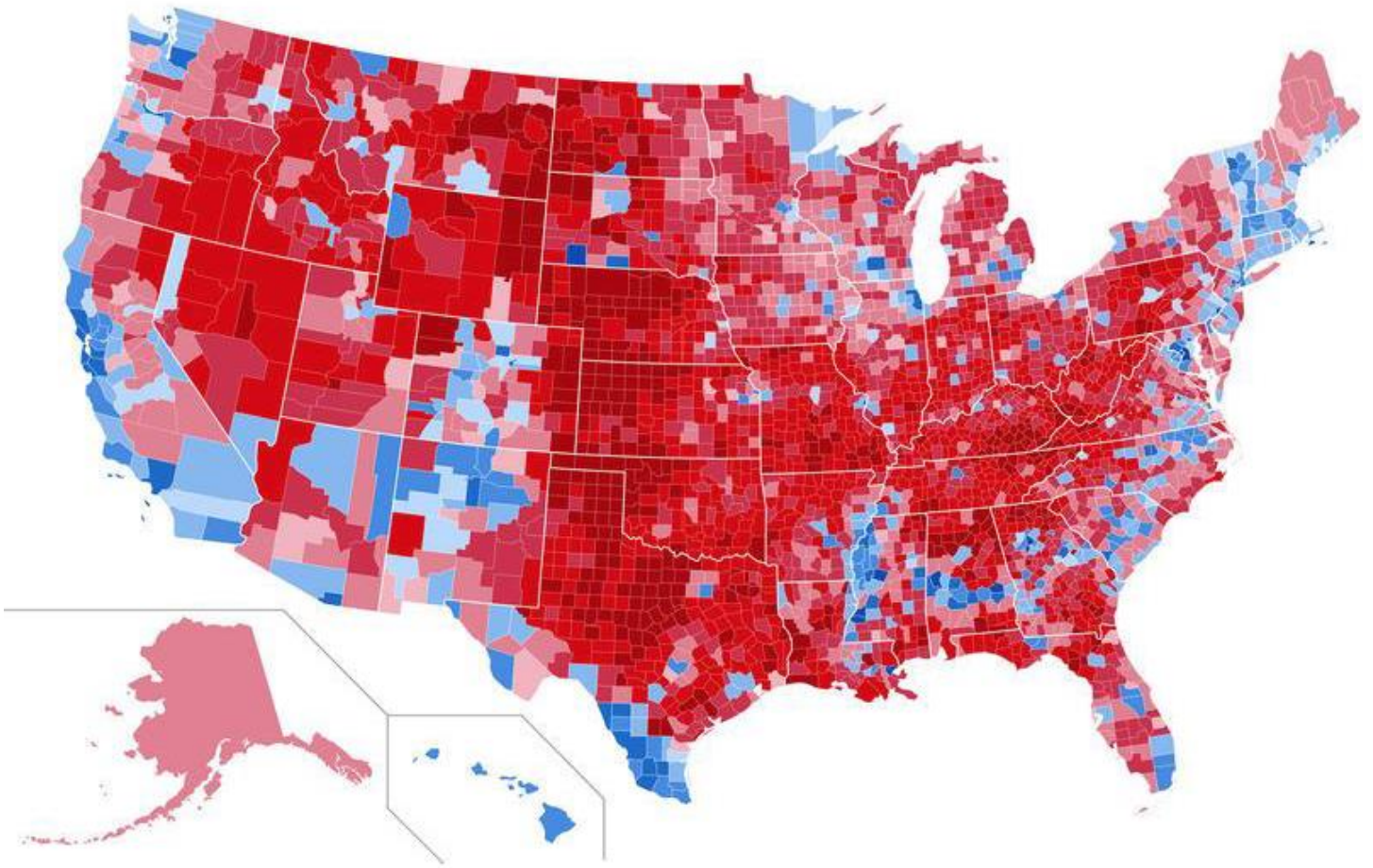
Change was, of course, the major concern for the majority of the people who showed up at the polls. Obama energized a significant sector of the electorate in 2008, on the promise of real change.

Bernie Sanders drew his energy from people clamoring for substantial change; and Trump did the same with working class voters in 2016. He convinced them that he knows them, and he cares about them, and that he will improve their lot. The American economy has doubled in the last 50 years, but real wages have stayed flat for the bottom half of American households.



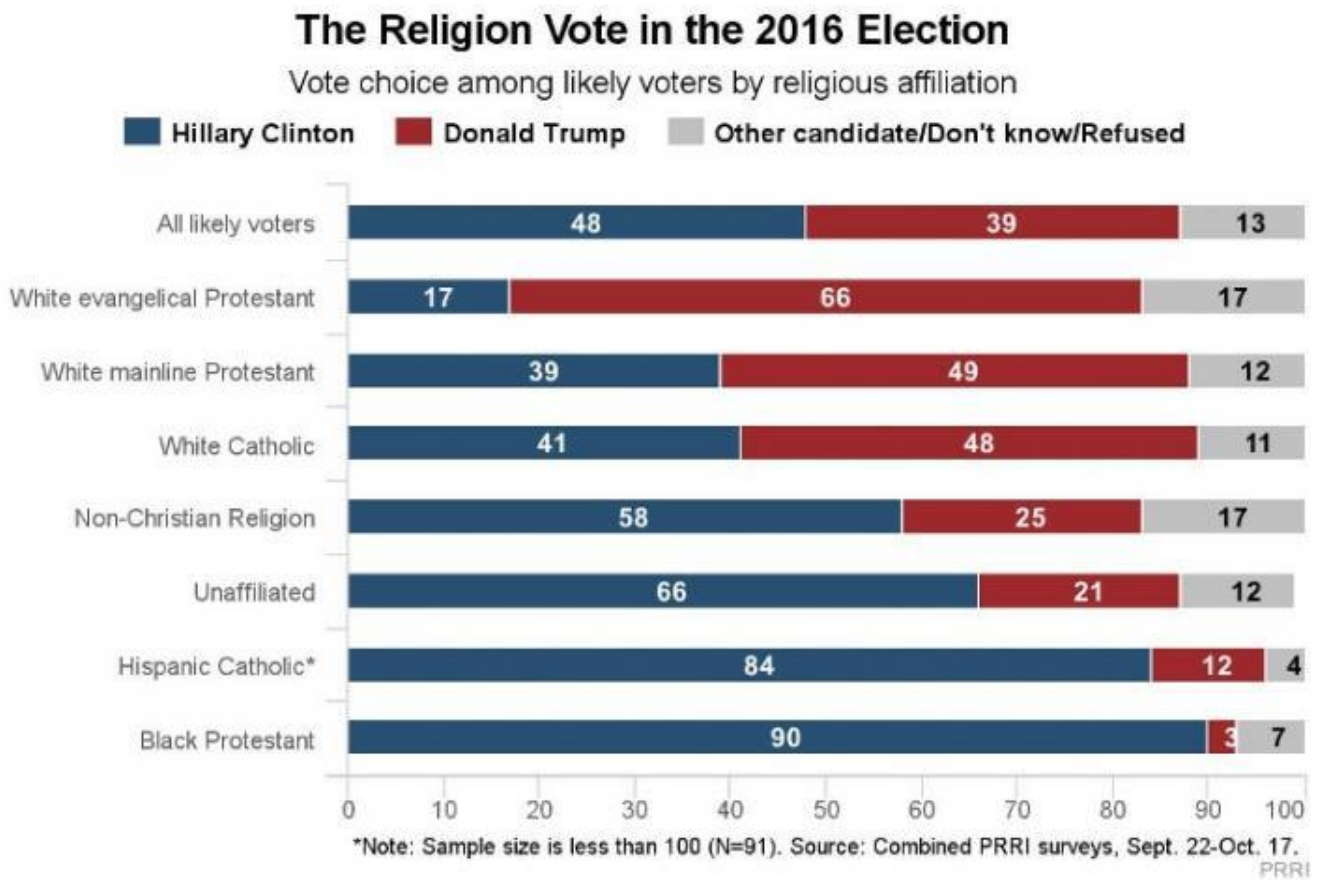
The wealthiest 100 households own as much wealth as all fourteen million African-American households. Donald Trump convinced people that they will move economically; enough people - certainly not all people - but enough people to move the dial in his favor. It is interesting to know, however, that Trump's white/blue collar supporters tend to be both more affluent and more pessimistic than non-Trump blue collar voters. They typically live in communities marked by a majority white population, marked by downward economic mobility, and declining public health. They tend to be displeased by their financial situation, and dismayed about their children's prospects. They were not convinced that they would be helped by Clinton's proposal to fund worker training, apprentice-ship programs, and college affordability. Trump was much more effective in communicating, verbally and nonverbally, signals to these men and their families—and I stressed **men** and their families—that he knew their pain, and would do something about it.

As strange as it sounds, Trump came off to many people, to millions of voters, as the more empathic, more empathically attuned to their pain.



That's a red and blue distinguish map for who voted, where.

This is a bar (chart) about Catholic voting.



So, the Catholic vote was decisive in this election. Catholics comprised 23% of the electorate. 52% of Catholic voters overall cast their vote for Trump, and 45% for Clinton. This marks a significant change from the previous two presidential elections, when Catholics voted for Obama by margins of 9% in 2008 and 2% in 2012.

White Catholics supported Trump over Clinton by a 23% margin, 60-37 percent. 56% of Catholics, who go to church regularly, voted for Trump.

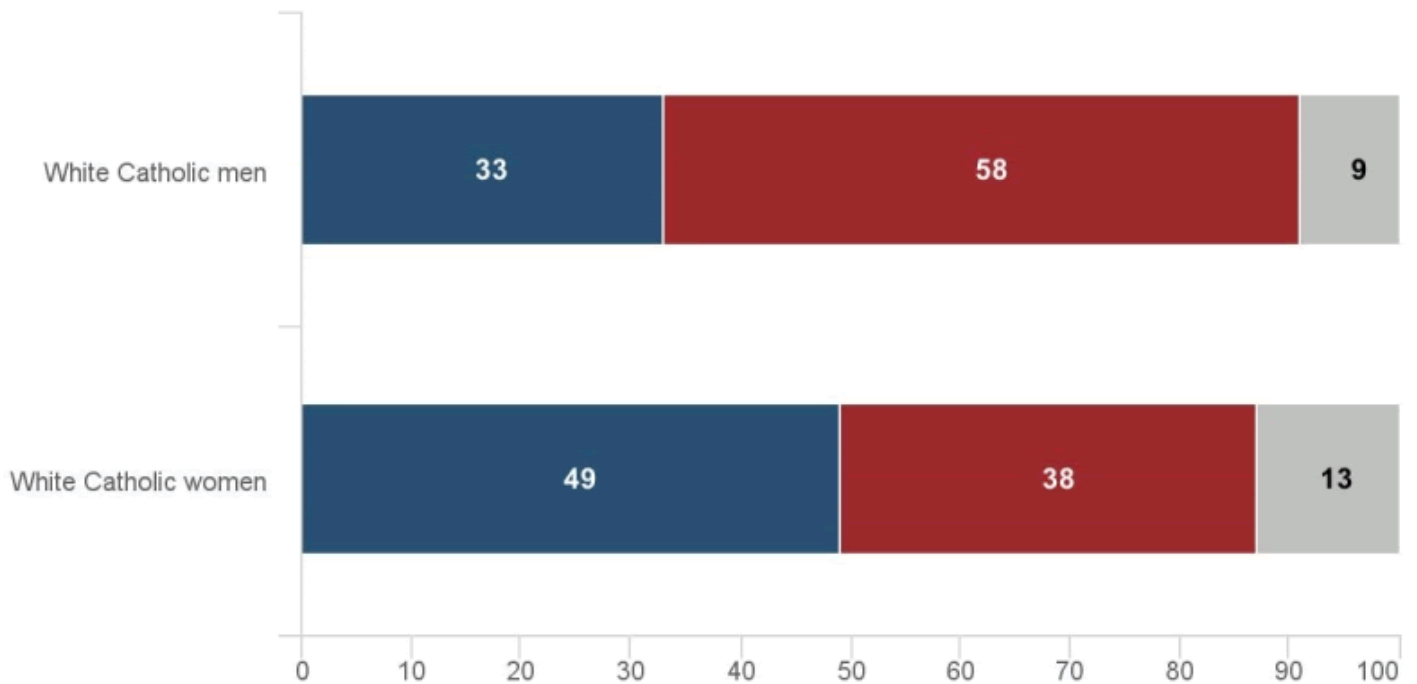
So, the more you went to church, the more likely you were to vote for Trump. Trump was preferred by both white working class and, by a slimmer margin, by college educated white male Catholics.

Latino Catholics went for Clinton over Trump by a 41% margin. So, you can see the white Catholic gender gap here.

The White Catholic Gender Gap

Vote choice among white Catholic likely voters by gender

■ Hillary Clinton ■ Donald Trump ■ Other candidate/Don't know/Refused



Source: Combined PRRI surveys, Sept. 22-Oct. 17.

PRRI

White Catholic men: 33% voted for Hilary Clinton: 58% voted for Donald Trump. The majority of Catholic white women voted for Hilary Clinton: 38% voted for Donald Trump: but 4 out of 10, all most Catholic women, voted for Donald Trump, after, and in light of, the disclosures about his sexual predator behavior; it still wasn't enough to sway their vote. So, I personally found that mind boggling.

Now about you. Rust-belt Catholics were decisive.

According to George Marlin, a statistician socio-analyst, Pennsylvania Catholics came out in force for the first time in decades, and gave Trump his one percent margin of victory.

Trump became the first Republican to take the state of Wisconsin in 32 years; he did so with 50.4% of the vote, because of high voting turnout among white collar voters, and low turnout of African American voters.

And, of course, in Michigan, Clinton lost by 11,000 votes out of 4.5 million cast—11,000 out of 4.5 million—because of the increase in white/blue collar Catholic voters and a decrease in African-American turnout compared to other elections. That's a lot to absorb, isn't it? The slimmest of margins!

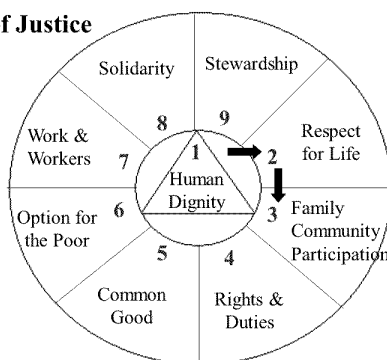
At the present time, Trump has given every indication he intends to fulfill all of his campaign promises. He has only been in office two months; but viewed from the lens of Catholic social ethics, he has given us plenty of grounds for grave concern; and the budget, that Bishop Gumbleton just mentioned, is high on that list of things that concern.

Statements he made on the campaign trail failed to meet even a minimal interpretation of the standards advanced by Catholic social and moral teaching. From what I can tell, the one topic that Catholics point to, who supported his presidency, is the opposition to abortion, a position he adopted in 2011. The man who, what is he 70? and he took this policy, when he decided to become a political figure—just a coincidence, maybe.

So, his pro-life stance has pleased many Catholics; yet he's miles away from a Catholic interpretation of moral standards that pertain to immigration and refugees, the use of torture, targeting non-combatants, racial justice, the dignity of women, religious tolerance, environmental responsibility, and the right to health care. That's a lot!

Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Wheel of Justice



These are the basic principles of Catholic social teaching. We have the principle of human dignity that is said to be the foundation, or the central moral value, the dignity of the person is made in God's image, and that each of the other principles is a way of defending and extending respect for human dignity, in work, in our identification with the poor, in solidarity, in stewardship, in care for the environment,

the respect for life, not only *in utero* but as Cardinal Bernardin—the late, great Cardinal Bernardin—said, "from womb to tomb." Remember the consistent ethic of life (the right to life does not end at birth): care for the family, participation in the community, the common good, and the rights and duties of individuals; and then the option for the poor, and the right to work and to work under decent employment conditions.

So, the president has appointed Scott Pruitt, an avid climate change denier, to head the EPA, and Betsy DeVos—she's one of yours, I think [a lot of people talking among themselves after he said that,] and so he says, "Okay! I take it back, yours in a broad sense; she's not an Elephant; I know that—someone with no demonstrated knowledge or commitment to public education as Secretary of Education! It seems the fox is in charge of the chicken coop.

These disparities are not just fantasies of empirical judgment, but about empirically complex matters, but rather fundamental moral norms. It's not that we disagree about how to get a particular way of respecting women most efficiently distributed in place; it's really (at a) much more core level of disagreement, more fundamental; but rather about fundamental alarms.

But most notably, the equal dignity of every human being, regardless of your color, your religion; the hospitality to the stranger as a binding moral norm, not just a nice idea; the preferential option for the poor as a way of imitating Jesus; and stewardship for the environment, as something that is a grave moral obligation that we have, not just *cool*, if you have the time and money to do it.

But, instead of going point by point through these and other issues, I'll confine my comments to two very significant domains in which Donald Trump's values run directly contrary to the core convictions, not just of Catholic social teaching, but to our faith to Jesus.

I want to emphasize these norms of Catholic social teachings don't constitute uniquely Catholic convictions, but rather pertain to what the tradition calls the natural moral law. That is, what we can expect any reasonable person, who is morally decent, to recognize as binding.

The topics I want to talk about first is ethno-nationalism, and secondly, lying. And they're closely related, actually.

So, the first major topic concerns Trump's adoption of ethno-nationalism and the second, his indifference, even hostility, to truth. It's important to remember that Jesus identified love and truth as two sides of the same coin, two intimately related and complimentary values. Conversely, we can infer that cruelty and deception are also two sides of the other coin. They're two constant companions and inextricably linked evils; wherever you find cruelty, you find lying. To anticipate prophetic citizenship requires us to identify and denounce lies and cruelty, wherever they are found; and to protect and promote truth, wherever we can.

Ethno-Nationalism

Trump's core message has been defined as nation/state populism, or in Patrick Buchanan's term, ethno-nationalism. Ethno-nationalism is marked by suspicion of outsiders, and hostility to immigration, free trade agreements, global trans-national ethical requirements. Ethno-nationalists use code language to signal what they take to be the dangers presented to our country by escalating racial, religious, and cultural diversity. They try to build national unity, especially to energize their base, by stoking fear of the other; both the enemy without: terrorists, Mexicans, Chinese—fill in the blank—and the enemy within: criminals, immigrants, refugees, the media, the enemy of the people. Ethno-nationalists warn us that we can only be made safe by overpowering national security i.e., having an overpowering force of national security and the military. Ethno-nationalism is most successful when advanced by authoritarian control of government and civil society. It's important to recognize the implications that people naturally draw from an ethno-nationalist perspective on the world; and they give them permission to vent the bigotry and hatred that they have harbored quietly, but then too afraid to utter publicly, because it would be disapproved of.

And, you know these swastikas are in many places in this country. Something like a hundred different Jewish cemeteries have been desecrated since the Trump election.



And that is just one example of the kind of implications people draw from the permission given by ethno-nationalists to privilege our own *white Christian nation*, the way they conceive of it.

The Catholic tradition praises authentic or properly ordered patriotism, which is simply the healthy love of your own country. Patriotism is a reasonable attachment to one's land and culture and people. It flows from gratitude for benefits received, and generates a sense of duty to serve the common good of one's country. John Paul II, who praised Polish patriotism highly, because he saw that it could provide leverage against the Communists. He says, "Patriotism is a love for everything to do with our native land. Every danger that threatens the overall good of our native land becomes an occasion to demonstrate this love. Patriotism justifies the right use of a country to reasonable and just means to secure its borders. It is also fully consistent with recognizing the right of human beings to migrate when they cannot attain a dignified life in their home country, especially when they are fleeing criminal, political, or state sponsored violence." So, patriotism isn't the enemy of migration, and it's not the enemy of hospitality.

CTS: endorses patriotism but repudiates ethno-nationalism

John Paul:

- "one thing must be avoided at all costs: the risk of allowing the essential function of the nation to lead to an unhealthy nationalism."
- unhealthy nationalism "involves recognizing and pursuing the good of one's own nation alone, without regard for the rights of others."
- generates "contempt for other nations or cultures" and seeks to "seek to advance the well-being of one's own nation at the expense of others."



The question is: how do you order them and balance them? Catholic teachings affirm patriotism, but repudiate ethno-nationalism. Ethno-nationalism flows from fear, generates hostility to the other, and gives rise to dehumanizing attitudes to anyone who is defined as *not one of us*. We can see its ugly affects today in xenophobic violence in Myanmar, China, and South Africa, among many other places.

We must be honest and recognize that Catholicism has a history of lending itself to ethno-nationalists and authoritarian movements. Catholics in Bavaria were among the first and strongest supporters of Adolf Hitler. Catholics defended the torture and disappearances of thousands during the dirty war in Argentina in the 1980s, in purported defense of western Christian civilization. Catholic heritage did not make the Croat paramilitaries any less prone to engage in ethnic cleansing than their Serbian orthodox enemies in the 1990s. And, in 1994, Rwanda, the most Catholic country in Africa, saw the genocide of 800,000 Tutsi and Hutu moderates.

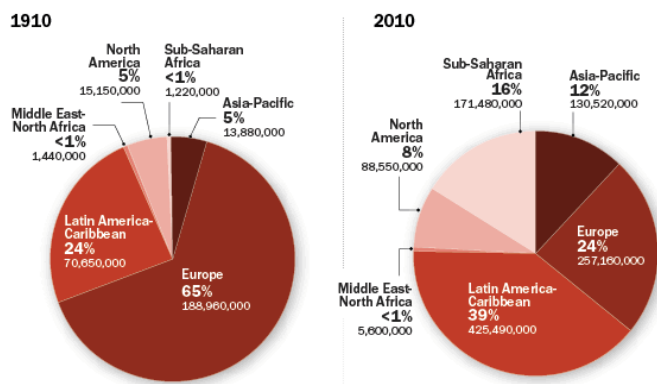
Many were killed in churches, because they trusted their pastors, who told them to go to the churches. The Interahamwe, the death squads, locked the parish doors, threw hand grenades in the windows, and set the building ablaze. And you can go to Rwanda, as I did with students from Boston College, and you can go to churches that are now memorials to that massacres. It is extremely powerful to see a place that historically has been treated as a sanctuary for hundreds and hundreds of years, a sanctuary, where no one would be hurt, now become a building, used to massacre innocent people.

A friend of mine, who is a priest in Burundi, invited me there; and I went there to give a talk; and afterwards, we went to this incredible three hour Mass. And it sounds dreadful, but it actually feels like it was 20 minutes, because it was so exciting. The service concluded, and I said, "Father, how could massacres have happened in Burundi, because it has a similar history to Rwanda?" And he said, "You know, in 1993, when the massacre started—300,000 were killed that year—we had the same exact celebration: joy, exuberance, and people went home, and they got their machetes, and they started killing their neighbors after receiving the Eucharist."

So, Catholicism can be both providing principles to oppose that behavior; but, in many cases, historically, it has been caught up in the genocidal behavior, or oppressive behavior, or ethnic-nationalism.

By its very nature, however, Catholicism, and of course catholic means universal, is radically opposed to ethno-nationalism. In its bones, Catholicism is opposed to ethno-nationalism, and especially its tendency to divide us from them. This is a regional distribution of Catholics.

Regional Distribution of Catholics, 1910 and 2010
Percentage of all Catholics that live in each region as of ...



Figures for 1910 are from Pew Research Center analysis of data from the World Christian Database. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.
Pew Research Center

You can see for example the number of Catholics in Africa is exploding. The majority of the biggest Catholic country in the world is Brazil. Most Catholics in the world are not white; they are not northern; they are not European ancestry.

Ethno-nationalism is dualistic, but Catholicism is pluralistic—racially, culturally, historically. Catholicism in practice has been intensely multi-cultural. It flourishes and flourished in this country among the Irish, and the German, and the French, the descendants of Europeans. But, elsewhere in the world, it has flourished among the Congolese and Burundians, among the Vietnamese and the Filipinos, among the Mexicans and the Brazilians. If that is not multi-cultural what is?

So, we have to call something by its proper name, as Thomas Aquinas would say. We have to recognize that what happened, in many cases, is the hijacking of Catholicism by nationalists, the hijacking of Catholicism by right-wing, ethno-nationalist movements. We acknowledge, in contrast, God is the creator and redeemer, not of our own tribe, but of all human beings. We acknowledge that each of us is made in God's image, and not just people that look like us. Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, asked rhetorically, “Have we not all one Father? Has not one God made us?”

At least from the time of Pope John XXIII, Catholic teachers have repeatedly urged us to work hard to build a global order of family and nations, a universal common good. These convictions require Catholics to denounce injustice and cruelty, and the lies that try to justify them. We cannot abide the slogan, *America first*, if that means we care only about ourselves and our own national self interest. As we have seen, Pope Francis says, “We cannot focus on building walls rather than building bridges.” [A cell phone is ringing again, and he says, “We cannot tolerate any cell phones.” (laughter) “No, I didn't say that.” (Then laughter and applause.)] We cannot tolerate any ideology of racial supremacy, including the white identity politics that played a role in the last election. Finally, we cannot accept any form of religious bigotry, including that represented in the post-election resurgence of anti-Semitism I just noted. All this means is we have to exercise prophetic citizenship.

Americans are entitled to believe that our power and other advantages provide us with special opportunities and special responsibilities to promote justice, peace, and human rights throughout the world. Ethno-nationalism is not only a moral horror, it is also a religious evil that the prophets would identify as idolatry. Ethno-nationalism tells us to have faith in a tribal god, not the maker of heaven and earth.

Every age tends to worship a god made in its own image; and we in the United States do it just as much as the Babylonians did. But the practice of idolatry rises to a dramatic level in ethno-nationalism. If there is one lesson to be learned from the prophets, it is that idolatry and injustice go hand in hand. So, it behooves us to keep in mind that God is not an American; that



God doesn't love Americans more than Mexicans or Syrians; that God doesn't favor America over all other nations. Indeed—all due respect, and my name is Pope—God is not a Roman Catholic. (laughter and applause) God loves Palestinians and Iraqis, no more and no less, than God loves Catholics, even Irish Catholics, even today. (laughter) See, I speak with good authority here.

Pope Francis says, "I believe in God, not in a Catholic God. There is no Catholic God." Quite amazing to hear a Pope say that though, isn't it?

It's theologically sound; you could find this in Aquinas; but still, to say it, is quite amazing to me. See there's the bell, good timing (the church bell rang outside). Pope Francis has a far reach. (more laughter)

Lying

So, the second topic on lying, the one you really have been waiting for. One of the most disconcerting signs of the times is presented by the president's habitual and complete disregard for the truth. Can I get an Amen? (A very loud Amen followed). All right!

From the beginning of his campaign, we have been confronted with a steady flow of gross exaggerations, uninformed generalizations, outright fabrications, alternative facts, and just flat out lies. Here's one: "President Obama is the founder of ISIS." How can you say that with a straight face? Even when confronted with incontrovertible truth, Trump has a habit of refusing to amend his claims. All this from a president who bitterly attacks the press for its dishonesty.



So, let's consider for just a moment Trump's habit of making assertions without any evidence.

Really, the principle underlying this is straight forward—you tell people a lie three times; they will believe anything. You tell people what they want to hear, play to their fantasies, and then you close the deal. This is him! Sometimes words and reality do match. So, we see this habit expressed in trivial matters from the size of the crowd at his inauguration to the number of floors in his buildings.

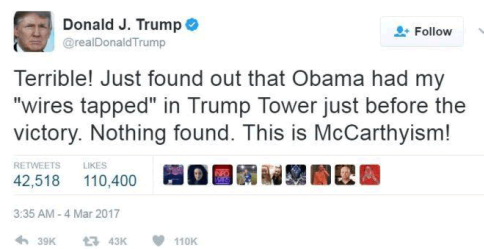
“You tell people a lie 3 times, they will believe anything. You tell people what they want to hear, play to their fantasies, and then you close the deal.”

Donald Trump, in Art Of The Deal

But, also, when it comes to significant accusations like his birthism campaign, or his insistence that Muslims in New Jersey celebrated on 9/11, or his bizarre post election claim that he was defrauded of a popular vote by three to five million illegal votes.

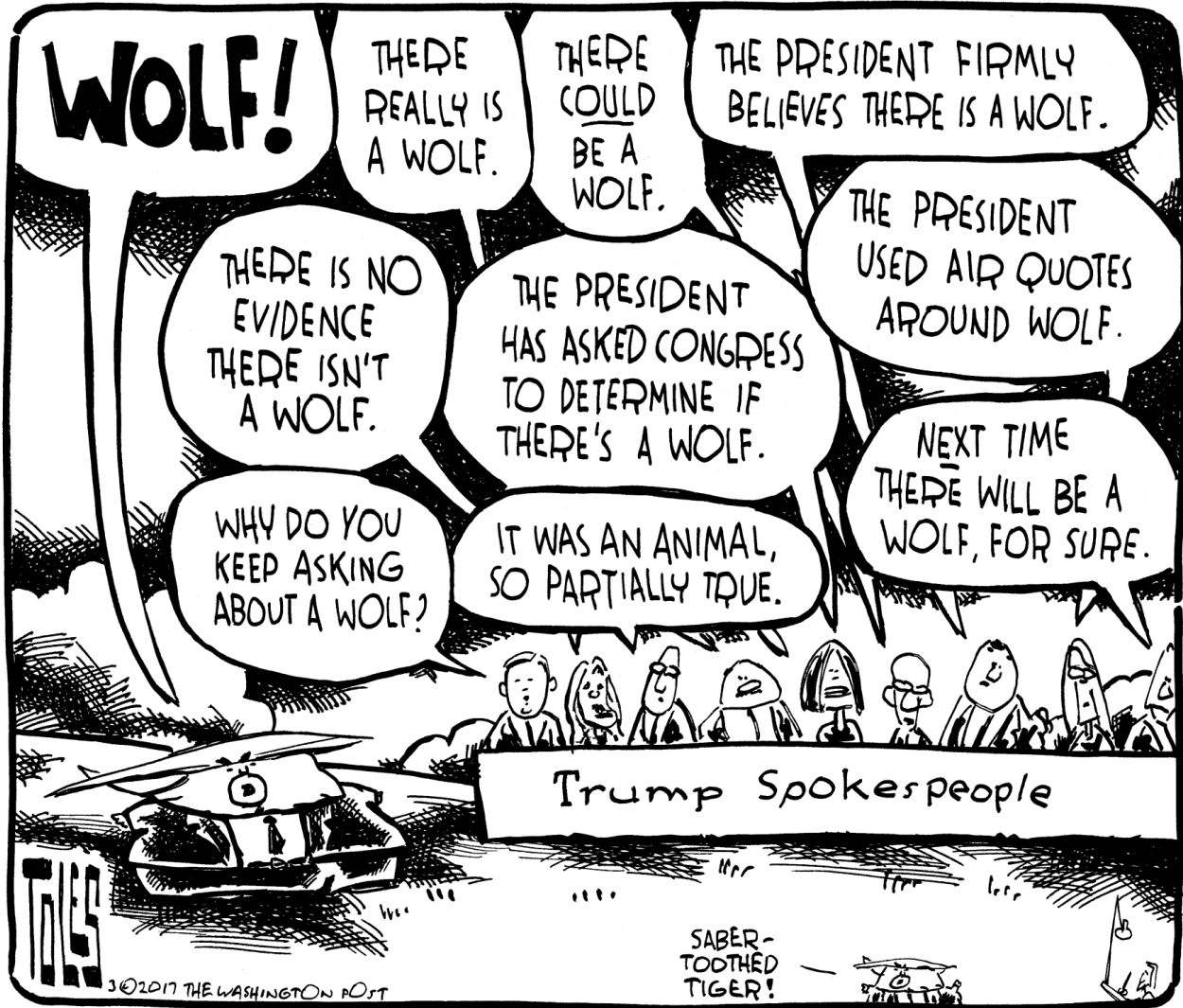
His false statements and lies are most obnoxious when they're used to fuel the fears of his base. He recently asserted, for example, that the U. S. murder rate is at a 47-year high, when, in fact, violent crimes, including murder, have been steadily declining since the early 1990s.

The more recent outrageous lie about the wire tapping. But, remember, the Mexicans were not pleased when they were described as drug dealers and rapists. The Swedes—and who would pick on the Swedes, especially in the Midwest—Swedes were surprised to hear that their recently arrived immigrants were responsible for a major surge in crime and rising unemployment, neither of which is true.



Closer to home, Trump continues to assert, contrary to widely accepted evidence, that undocumented immigrants routinely victimize Americans, disregard the rule of law, and pose a threat to people across the United States. Research, in fact, shows lower levels of crime among immigrants than among native born Americans.

A little lighter moment. This cartoon, maybe you have seen it, and maybe not, it is someone calling wolf.



Someone says there really is a wolf; there is no evidence there isn't a wolf. Why do you keep asking about a wolf? There could be a wolf. The president has asked Congress if there is a wolf? There was an animal, so it is partially true. The president firmly believes there is a wolf. The president used air quotes around wolf (laughter). Next time, there will be a wolf for sure. (much laughter) It would be funny, if it was just a boy crying wolf; but he is doing this to hurt people.

Perhaps a biblical analogy: So as a theologian, I have to draw on something I know about, because a biblical analogy will be helpful for our understanding what is going on, or thinking about what is going on.

Trump's pro-life Catholic defenders have sometimes likened him to the Persian King Cyrus, who liberated the Jews from their Babylonian captivity, and allowed them to rebuild their homeland. But it seems to me a more apt biblical comparison is the Roman Prefect Pontius Pilate. And I really don't say this as a joke; I am dead serious. One particularly appointed episode from the Gospel of John comes to mind. Jesus is hauled before Pilate and



asked to give an account of himself. But he says, somewhat enigmatically to Pilate, "I came into the world to bear witness to the truth." Pilate asked cynically, "What is truth? There is no truth. This

power is what I determine, and your life is in my hands. Now don't you want to convince me I shouldn't dispatch you?" Pilate had no interest in truth. He only cared about keeping a lid on potential disturbances in Jerusalem so that he could keep his job. He wanted to stay under the radar that Caesar had on.

Neither does Trump care about truth, though he, unlike Pilate, seems is more driven by money and glory than power itself. Jesus refused to submit to this twisted use of power, and it got him killed. Another figure from antiquity also comes to mind, Thrasymachus, who is Socrates antagonist in Plato's Republic. The Sophist, as Plato characterized him, is only interested in marshalling persuasive arguments for whatever position he is paid to defend. The truth of the matter is irrelevant. Thrasymachus's cynical definition of justice followed suit. Justice is the powerful control over the weak. This is exactly the lowly, perverse dynamic that Plato himself saw firsthand when, as a young man, he witnessed the teacher he revered, Socrates, be condemned to death by the Athenian jury. This is the mentality with which Trump ran his business enterprises.

Consider this single story! In 1993 when Trump decided he wanted to build a special limousine parking lot around his Atlantic city casino and hotel he had used all his influence to get the state of New Jersey to steal the home of an elderly widow named Vera Coking, by declaring eminent domain over her property, as well as over a nearby pawn shop, and a small family run Italian restaurant. She refused to sell, having lived there for 35 years.

Moreover, the state offered her only one fourth of what she had been offered for the same house years before; and Trump could then buy it at a bargain rate. The affair involved a poor woman in an exhausting legal battle, which amazingly she won with the assistance of an NGO called the Institute for Justice. We know it's a travesty of justice when a real estate developer exploits Polish workers, or pays only sixty cents on every dollar promised to a subcontractor. But what happens when the same person is governing the United States in the same way?

Plato, and Thomas Aquinas after him, believed a political leader can only effectively promote justice and the common good when motivated by an uncompromising commitment to the truth. If they are right, then the reverse implication also holds: that complete indifference to the truth leads to the exercise of political power in the pursuit of private gain; and the gathering of power of some, a few, at the expense of the many. Publicly established truth, accepting narratives based on what is known, are essential for the promotion of justice. This framework makes sense of the ferocity of Trump's attacks on the press, because the press is the single social institution that has the capacity to hold him, and all other government officials, accountable for their actions.

The last part of the talk is called: What Now?

Given these rather grim signs of the times, and their resonance with some of the darkest episodes in our history, we have to think about what to do now. The most general principal, of course, is that we have a responsibility to use whatever opportunities we have to promote policies that support human dignity and the common good; and to use whatever opportunities we have to resist those which do not. It's important to recognize that these duties are true today, whether one voted for Trump or not.

Citizens who voted for Trump for principled reasons, and specifically because of his promise to appoint pro life Supreme Court justices, must still do what they can to speak out against any proposed legislation or policies that violate post-partum human dignity. Unfortunately, many Americans mistakenly, and unthinkingly, assume that when a president wins an election, the entire country must submit to his agenda. Yet, at least in Catholic terms, voting for someone should not be taken to imply unqualified and uncritical support for his or her entire agenda.

Regardless of the regime and power, citizens always have a responsibility to access particular policies in light of the common good and human dignity.



- 4 themes: dignity, subsidiarity, common good, solidarity
- Secondary significance given to preferential option for the poor, labor rights, ecology
- Forming consciences for the [largely over] culture wars
- Same-sex marriage mentioned 10 times and equated with racism as intrinsically evil
- “The Church’s leaders avoid endorsing or opposing particular candidates” but the words from the previous version “or telling people how to vote” have been dropped.

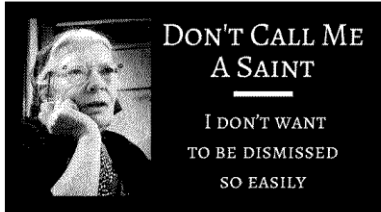
So, now I would like to offer five suggestions about what we ought to do. I suggest:

1. In short what I want is to develop political consciences shaped more strongly by the Gospel.
2. We ought to become better informed citizens.
3. We ought to engage in respectful dialogue with people with whom we disagree.
4. We ought to enter into greater solidarity with the marginalized.
5. We ought to undertake concrete commitments to engage in advocacy, to speak up for people.

So, first we have an obligation to cultivate our political, and not just personal moral consciences, according to the criteria of truth, justice and mercy. This is essentially Pope Francis' agenda.

Dorothy Day

In 1952 Day observed: "when it came to private morality the Catholics shone but when it came to social and political morality, they were often conscienceless" (*The Long Loneliness*, 205)



Dorothy Day observed in 1952, of the Catholics that she was thinking about joining religiously, when it came to private morality, the Catholics shown that, when it came to social and political morality, they were often consciousness. I think the same is still true. That we compartmentalize personal morality and our political views. But what we really need is an integration, so that we're not bifurcating morality in the private sphere, self interest in the public sphere. Many

Americans, and especially young Americans today that I teach, and that you know and raised, appreciate the values of compassion, service and volunteerism; but they shy away from thinking about the wider social, economic, and especially, political causes of the suffering they want to ameliorate.

"It is no longer possible to claim that religion should be restricted to the private sphere; and that it exists only to prepare souls to go to heaven." This is a quotation from Pope Francis. Christian conversion demands reviewing all areas of our life related to the social order and the pursuit of the common good. Political conscience demands that we examine and correct the large scale, to the extent possible, the large-scale causes of injustice, and not just address the unfortunate situation of individuals that we happen to encounter on a day to day basis.

This is the document that is issued by the American Bishops every four years. It is supposed to help us form our consciences. It's been widely criticized. And if you trace the reading every four years of the document, you can see how the agenda of the bishops changes a bit here and there. So, instead of giving that whole wheel of Catholic social teaching, it really focuses on four: dignity, subsidiary, the common good, and solidarity. It demotes the preferential option for the poor, labor rights and ecology. It gives them secondary significance.

Some people say that this document, instead of forming consciences for faithful citizenship, should have been called forming consciences for the culture wars. But the irony is the culture wars are pretty much over. Pretty much, people in our society accept gay marriage; and that is the main topic that comes up in this document. Same sex marriage is mentioned ten times, and is equated with racism, because both are said to be intrinsically evil.

The document said the Church's leaders avoid endorsing or opposing particular candidates, which I think we would all agree is a good idea. But they dropped the wording from the previous four-year document that said or telling people how to vote. Now, we are supposed to take the criteria and decide for ourselves how to vote; but the way the criteria are framed, underline some norms much more than other norms.

Pope Francis writes this, "Each individual Christian, in every community, is called to be an instrument of God for the liberation and promotion of the poor. A lack of solidarity to his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God." That's a very strong statement. "There is one sign," he says. "we should never lack: the option for those who have the least, those whom society has discarded."

I think since time is going on I am not going to dwell on this second one. The second obligation is to become more informed, to read multiple sources, to educate yourself, and not to just accept one stream, not to fall into the habit we have from reading social media, where views are just fed back to us that mirror what we already believe.

The third is to function as prophetic citizens, by working hard to treat others with respect, and to engage in dialogue with people who do not agree with us. We must listen to the reasoned arguments of those who disagree with us, and try to understand their concerns and aspirations. Engaging in respectful conversation helps to build community and civility. We can only do so to the extent to which we are able to exercise the virtue of intellectual humility, which includes an awareness of the fact that we all have biases and blind spots.

"Nor can there be authentic dialogue unless we are capable of opening our minds and hearts, in empathy and sincere receptivity, to those with whom we speak."
Pope Francis



So, Pope Francis says, "There cannot be authentic dialogue in which we are capable of opening our minds and hearts in empathy, and sincere receptivity to those with whom we speak." I think the hardest thing for us, socially, is for us to be around people that have very different political

views, and to be able to speak to them in a way that's enlightening for both people, instead of becoming a debate, where there is a winner and a loser; to expand our empathies; to expand our understanding. As Catholic, engaging with dialogue within a worship community, can play a valuable role in building religious solidarity and fraternity. But we also need to engage in humble dialogue.

The path ahead, the Pope has said, is dialogue: among yourselves, dialogue among priests, dialogue with laypersons, dialogue with families, dialogue with society. Unfortunately, in my experience, and with some exceptions, Catholic communities do not usually function as communities of moral dialogue. That's been my experience; and I go to two parishes and I love them both. One is a Jesuit parish; when I need a break from the Jesuits, I go to the diocesan clergy, and get a breath of fresh air. (laughter)

The fourth suggestion is we have to make concrete commitments to increase our solidarity with marginalized individuals and communities.

A person's conscience and political conscience usually reflects whatever groups he or she belongs to. So, if we want our consciences to be truly Christian, we have to do our best to enter into solidarity with the marginalized, with people that are not like us.

An example of this is Oscar Romero, my favorite example, there are many other examples. Solidarity means two things. It means supporting a cause; and it means committing oneself to concrete actions to support that cause. For the strongest sense of solidarity, we use the word accompaniment.

Accompaniment is to walk with people, to be their companion.

Accompaniment



We can, among other things, write emails, call our elected representatives, send financial contributions to a worthy cause, stuff envelopes, knock on doors, write letters to editors, attend political meetings, volunteer in voter registration drives, get involved in grass root organizations, attend town meetings, etc. I say all these things a little bit tediously, but people go, "What can I really do?" Well, actually, there is a lot. You might not solve the whole world's problems, but you can do something concretely.

I am going to conclude with some signs of hope, which is always good to have. I think one set of hopeful signals comes from American society. Many people are turning their negative emotions about the recent election into constructive action. Americans are getting more politically aware and engaged. We are reading more, talking more, thinking more than we ever have before about politics.

One sign of hope includes the massive turnout for the Women's march in Washington the day after the election. But there are many other protests, many other marches that have occurred in cities around the country.

Boycotts, like the *Grab your Wallet* campaign, offer an organized way to respond to injustice. Young people in particular are showing an increase in careers in public service and politics.

The Sanctuary movement in cities, universities and parishes: where they started constitutes another set of expressions of prophetic citizenship.

The Church itself offers a lot of signs of hope; and we need to hear about those as well. First, of course, as I have stressed earlier, is our Pope Francis, who is the most outspoken defender of the marginalized in the world today.

Catholic theology holds that resistance to injustice is incumbent on every citizen, regardless of religious conviction. But the core values of our tradition give Catholics an especially strong set of reasons for defending justice. Addressing the U. S. Regional World Meeting of Popular Movements in California, Pope Francis wrote, "The grave danger is to disown our neighbors. When we do so, we deny their humanity, and our own humanity, without realizing it.

We deny ourselves, and we deny the most important commitments of Jesus." The Pope goes on to say, "Do not classify others in order to say who is a neighbor and who is not. You can become neighbor to whomever you meet in need; and you will do so if you have compassion in your heart."

Secondly, Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, president of the Conference of Catholic Bishops, and Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, the vice president of that organization, wrote, "Over the past several days, many brother bishops have spoken out in defense of God's people." He's talking about immigrants here. "We are grateful for their witness. Now, we call upon all the Catholic faithful to join us, as we unite our voices with all who speak in defense of human dignity."

He's asking every Catholic in this country to be an advocate for immigrants. They also urge Catholics to extend hospitality to refugees. "Welcoming the stranger and those in flight is not one option among many in the Christian life," they write, "it is the very form of Christianity itself.," they said. "Our actions must remind people of Jesus."

Third. In response to President Trump's temporary ban on Muslims from Muslim majority countries, Catholic young people organized a Mass of solidarity celebrated by Fr. Quinn Connors, and held at Lafayette Square, just across the street from the White House. "The Mass is a form of protest," Fr. Connors said, "and it is a beautiful thing, because the sacrament itself tears down borders. It is subversive to the powers that be, that we all come together and receive; that we are transformed. We are truly one body."

A student there said, "If we are truly one body, if one part of our body is hurting, we must respond." This was referred to earlier in the prayer and that purposely coordinated.

The fourth sign of hope, I think, is that clergy and laity are taking the side of immigrants, and especially Muslims today.



At the conference on the dignity of labor last January, San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy said, "It cannot be said too strongly that using market mechanisms for the establishment of benefit levels in American society for our most vulnerable populations will unleash a series of silent killers in our nation that are all the more invidious, because they are aimed at those

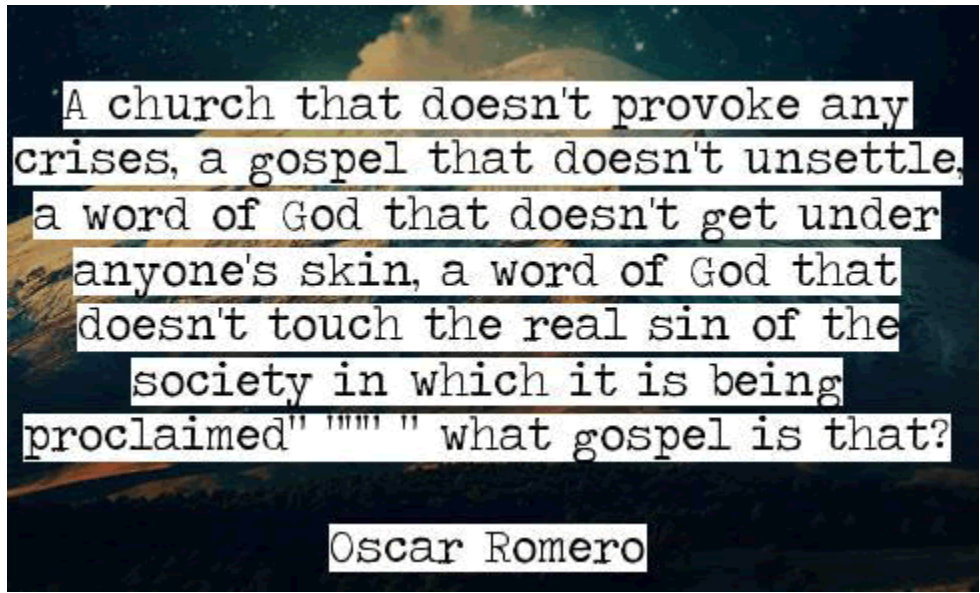
without a power." The proposed budget, coming right into this, is worthy of evaluation from this perspective.

McElroy calls Christians to be disrupters, people who exercise prophetic citizenship. He writes, "We must disrupt those who would seek to send troops into our streets to deport the undocumented, to rip fathers and mothers from their families. We must disrupt those who portray refugees as enemies, rather than our brothers and sisters in terrible need. We must disrupt those who train us to see Muslim men, women, and children as forces of fear, rather than as children of God. We must disrupt those who seek to rob our medical care, especially from the poor. We must disrupt those who take food stamps and nutrition assistance from the mouths of children."

McElroy endorses patriotism, but patriotism shaped in light of a firm commitment to human dignity. He writes, "We have to rebuild this nation, so that we have placed at its heart the service of the dignity of the human person, and assert what the flag behind him is our heritage. Every man, woman and child is equal in the nation, and called to be equal."

A few other signs of hope. Ordinary Catholics have stood up in solidarity with refugees and immigrants facing deportation. Parishes like Holy Rosary Parish in Richmond, Virginia have declared themselves sanctuaries. St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, Maryland offers detailed instructions to immigrants who have to deal with immigration officials. Transfiguration Parish in Marietta, Georgia is strongly supporting programs that help refugees achieve financial and social sufficiency within six months of their arrival. Parishioners from St. Paul Catholic Church and two other parishes in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago have signed up to care for children, if their parents are deported or detained. These parishes have organized a

Rapid Response Team that help ensure immigrants have access to legal protection and know their rights. They lead protests when people are arrested. They alert the neighborhood about deportations, and they communicate with the media.



I will close with a quotation that bears on all of this, and anticipates an objection. The objection is: Should the Church really be involved in politics? Should the Church be involved in controversial issues? Should the Church be involved in the public

square, when it's real job is to help people find Jesus? The person I want to quote is Oscar Romero, a person who died, because he took a stance in a very, very oppressive, political context.

He wrote in 1979: "A Church that doesn't provoke any crises, a Gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed, what Gospel is that? Very nice, pious considerations don't bother anyone. That's the way many would like preaching to be. Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter, so as not to be harassed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties, do not light up the world they live in. The Gospel is courageous; it's good news about Him who came to take away the world's sin." So, my urging is that you go out and bother people. Thank you. (Applause)

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