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Political Responsibility: Choices for the Future

"The church's participation in public affairs is not a threat to the political process or to genuine pluralism, but an affirmation of their importance," says the U.S. Catholic Conference Administrative Board in a statement released Oct. 14 and dated September 1987. "The church recognizes the legitimate autonomy of government and the right of all, including the church itself, to be heard in the formulation of public policy," the board adds. A statement on political responsibility has been issued by the board in connection with each U.S. presidential election since 1976. The updated statement for 1988 appears on the following pages. In it the board gives an alphabetical listing of "some issues which we believe are important in the national debate during 1988" and the USCC position on the issues. It adds, "these issues are not the concerns of Catholics alone." In the United States, the "role of religion in our public life has been visible and constant," says the board. "But the 1980s have brought a new edge to this topic....From medical technology to military technology, from economic policy to foreign policy, the choices before the country are laden with moral content," it says. The text of the statement follows.

I. Introduction

A notable characteristic in the 1980s has been the increasing visibility of religious questions and themes in the political life of the United States. "Religion and politics," once thought to be topics never joined in polite conversation or public debate, have become part of our daily discourse at every level of society.

In one sense the role of religion in public life is neither new nor surprising. From the inaugural addresses of Washington and Lincoln to the public opinion polls of the 1980s, Americans affirm, in diverse ways, that religious conviction is woven through our national history and heritage. In our Constitution, whose 200th anniversary we

commemorate this year, as well as in our courts and legislatures, we have set forth the disestablishment principle to govern relations between church and state. The purpose of this principle has been to distinguish key elements in our heritage, not to silence or suppress religious witness or influence. Indeed, such suppression of religion would violate an equally important element of our heritage - the free exercise of religion. These constitutional precepts serve a useful function in keeping the religious community free to speak and act without the need for government endorsement or the fear of retaliation.

The role of religion in our public life has been visible and constant. But the 1980s have brought a new edge to this topic. Many reasons are offered to explain the role of religious themes. In our view, a primary feature is the centrality of moral questions for a broad range of public policy choices which we face as a nation. From medical technology to military technology, from economic policy to foreign policy, the choices before the country are laden with moral content. The moral dimension arises from the human significance of these choices, the possibility of either enhancing human dignity or eroding it by the policies we pursue as a people. Precisely because the moral content of public choice is so central today, the religious communities are inevitably drawn more deeply into the public life of the nation. These communities possess long and systematically developed moral traditions which can serve as a crucial resource in shaping the moral vision needed for the future.

II. The Church and the Political Order

It is appropriate in this context to offer our own reflections on the role of the church in the political order. Christians believe that Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbor should extend beyond individual relationships to infuse and transform all human relations from the family to the entire human community. Jesus came to "bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, new sight to the blind and to set the downtrodden free" (Lk. 4:18). He called us to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the sick and afflicted, and to comfort the victims of injustice (Mt. 25). His example and words require individual acts of charity and concern from each of us. Yet they also require understanding and action on a broader scale in pursuit of peace and in opposition to poverty, hunger and injustice. Such action necessarily involves the institutions and structures of society, the economy and politics.

The church, the people of God, is itself an expression of this love and is required by the Gospel and its long tradition to promote and defend human rights and human dignity.⁽¹⁾ In his encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II declares that the church "must be aware of the threats to (humanity) and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor 'to make human life ever more human' and make every element of life correspond to humanity's true dignity - in a word (the church) must be aware of all

that is opposed to that process."(2) This view of the church's ministry and mission requires it to relate positively to the political order, since social injustice and the denial of human rights can often be remedied only through governmental action. In today's world, concern for social justice and human development necessarily requires persons and organizations to participate in the political process in accordance with their own responsibilities and roles.

Christian responsibility in the area of human rights includes two complementary pastoral actions: the affirmation and promotion of human rights, and the denunciation and condemnation of violations of these rights. In addition, it is the church's role as a community of faith to call attention to the moral and religious dimension 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 the Christian faith for a just transformation of society. Such a ministry on the part of every individual as well as the organizational church inevitably involves political consequences and touches upon public affairs.

Responsibility of All Members of the Church

The church's responsibility in this area falls on all its members. As citizens we are all called to become informed, active and responsible participants in the political process. It is the laity who are primarily responsible for activity in political affairs, for it is they who have the major responsibility for renewal of the temporal order. In the words of the Second Vatican Council:

"The laity, by their special vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. Today they are called by God, that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven."(3)

The hierarchy also has a distinct and weighty responsibility in this area. As teachers and pastors, they must provide norms for the formation of conscience of the faithful, support efforts to gain greater peace and justice, and provide guidance and even leadership on occasions when human rights are in jeopardy. Drawing on their own experience and exercising their distinctive roles within the Christian community, bishops, clergy, religious and laity should join together in common witness and effective action to bring about Pope John Paul II's vision of a well-ordered society based on truth, justice, charity and freedom.(4)

Distinct Role of the Church

The church's role in the political order includes the following:

- Education regarding the teachings of the church and the responsibilities of the faithful.
- Analysis of issues for their social and moral dimensions.
- Measuring public policy against Gospel values.
- Participating with other concerned parties in debate over public policy; and speaking out with courage, skill and concern on public issues involving human rights, social justice and the life of the church in society.

Unfortunately, our efforts in this area are sometimes misunderstood. The church's participation in public affairs is not a threat to the political process or to genuine pluralism, but an affirmation of their importance. The church recognizes the legitimate autonomy of government and the right of all, including the church itself, to be heard in the formulation of public policy. As Vatican II declared:

"By preaching the truth of the Gospel and shedding light on all areas of human activity through her teaching and the example of the faithful, she (the church) shows respect for the political freedom and responsibility of citizens and fosters these values. She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls makes such judgments necessary."(5)

A proper understanding of the role of the church will not confuse its mission with that of government, but rather see its ministry as advocating the critical values of human rights and social justice.

It is the role of Christian communities to analyze the situation in their own country, to reflect upon the meaning of the Gospel and to draw norms of judgment and plans of action from the teaching of the church and their own experience.(6) In carrying out this pastoral activity in the social arena we are confronted with complexity. As the 1971 Synod of Bishops pointed out: "It does not belong to the church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world."(7) At the same time, it is essential to recall the words of Pope John XXIII:

"It must not be forgotten that the church has the right and duty not only to safeguard the principles of ethics and religion, but also to intervene authoritatively with her

children in the temporal sphere when there is a question of judging the application of these principles to concrete cases."(8)

The application of Gospel values to real situations is an essential work of the Christian community. Christians believe the Gospel is the measure of human realities. However, specific political proposals do not in themselves constitute the Gospel. Christians and Christian organizations must certainly participate in public debate over alternative policies and legislative proposals, yet it is critical that the nature of their participation not be misunderstood.

We bishops specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We do, however, have a right and a responsibility as teachers to analyze the moral dimensions of the major issues of our day. We urge citizens to avoid choosing candidates simply on the basis of narrow self-interest. We hope that voters will examine the positions of candidates on the full range of issues as well as their personal integrity, philosophy and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which we address all issues in the political arena. In this consistent ethic we address a spectrum of issues, seeking to protect human life and promote human dignity from the inception of life to its final moment.

As bishops we seek to promote a greater understanding of the important link between faith and politics and to express our belief that our nation is enriched when its citizens and social groups approach public affairs from positions grounded in moral conviction and religious belief. Our view is expressed very well by Pope John Paul II when he said:

"Christians know from the church's luminous teachings that, without any need to follow a one-sided or partisan political formula, they ought to contribute to forming a more worthy society, one more respectful of the rights of man, based on the principles of justice and peace."(9)

As religious leaders and pastors, our intention is to reflect our concern that politics receive its rightful importance and attention and that it become an effective forum for the achievement of the common good. For, in the words of John Paul II, "(Humanity's) situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice and even more of social love.... We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent."(10)

III. Issues

Without reference to political candidates, parties or platforms, we wish to offer a listing of some issues which we believe are important in the national debate during 1988. These brief summaries are not intended to indicate in any depth the details of our positions in these matters. We refer the reader to fuller discussions of our point of view in the documents listed in the summary which appears below. We wish to point out that these issues are not the concerns of Catholics alone; in every case we have joined with others to advocate these positions. They represent a broad range of topics on which the bishops of the United States have already expressed themselves and are recalled here in alphabetical order to emphasize their relevance in a period of national debate and decision.

A. Abortion

The right to life is the most basic human right, and it demands the protection of law.

Abortion is the deliberate destruction of an unborn human being and therefore violates this right. We do not accept the concept that anyone has the right to choose an abortion. We reject the 1973 Supreme Court decisions on abortion, which refuse appropriate legal protection to the unborn child. We support the passage of a constitutional amendment to restore the basic constitutional protection of the right to life for the unborn child. We reject the public funding of abortion (Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion, 1974, 1976, 1981; Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities: A Reaffirmation, 1985).

B. Arms Control and Disarmament

The pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response" (1983) gave "strictly conditional moral acceptance" to the policy of nuclear deterrence. The strict conditions include: 1) a condemnation of counter-city or counterpopulation uses of nuclear weapons; 2) support for a policy of "no first use" of nuclear weapons; and 3) an endorsement of a series of arms control measures. The arms control provisions included support for a comprehensive test ban treaty, support for ratification of the Threshold Test Ban Treaty and the Treaty on Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes, and support for specific initiatives which the United States could take to restrain the quantitative and qualitative developments of the arms race ("The Challenge of Peace," 1983).

C. Capital Punishment

In view of our commitment to the value and dignity of human life, we oppose the use of capital punishment. We believe that a return to the use of the death penalty is leading to, indeed can only lead to, further erosion of respect for life in our society.

We do not question society's right to punish the offender, but we believe that there are better approaches to protecting our people from violent crimes than resorting to executions. In its application, the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent and racial minorities. Our society should reject the death penalty and seek methods of dealing with violent crime which are more consistent with the Gospel vision of respect for life and Christ's message of healing love ("Community and Crime," 1978; U.S. Bishops' Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980).

D. Civil Rights

Discrimination based on sex, race, ethnicity or age continues to exist in our nation. Such discrimination constitutes a grave injustice and an affront to human dignity. It must be aggressively resisted by every individual and rooted out of every social institution and structure.

Racism is a particularly serious form of discrimination. Despite significant strides in eliminating racial prejudices in our country, there remains an urgent need for continued reconciliation in this area. Racism is not merely one sin among many. It is a radical evil dividing the human family. The struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structures of our society ("Brothers and Sisters to Us: A Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day," 1979; "The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment," 1983).

E. The Economy

The pastoral letter "Economic Justice for All" presents the basic moral principles that should guide economic life. For example:

- Every economic decision and institution should be judged in light of whether it protects or undermines the dignity of the human person. The economy must be at the service of all people, especially the poor.

- Human dignity can be realized and protected only in community.

- Human rights are the minimum conditions for life in community. All people have a right to life, food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, education and employment. Society as a whole, acting through private and government institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights.

The most urgent priority for domestic economic policy is to create jobs with adequate pay and decent working conditions. High levels of unemployment and underemployment are morally unacceptable in a nation with our economic capacity.

The minimum wage, which has not been adjusted since 1981, should be raised. We reaffirm the church's traditional teaching in support of the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively.

The fact that so many people are poor in a nation as wealthy as ours is a social and moral scandal that must not be ignored. Dealing with poverty is not a luxury to which our nation can attend when it finds the time and resources. Rather, it is a moral imperative of the highest priority.

In view of the increasing importance of U.S. international economic relations, especially relations with the developing countries, it is essential that all aspects of international economic policy - trade, aid, finance, investment - reflect basic moral principles. America's role in the international economy must be re-evaluated and concern for the poor made a policy priority. We have a moral obligation to take the lead in helping to reduce poverty in the Third World ("Economic Justice for All," 1986).

F. Education

All persons of whatever race, sex, condition or age, by virtue of their dignity as human beings, have an inalienable right to education. We advocate:

- Sufficient public and private funding to make an adequate education available for all citizens and residents of the United States of America and to provide assistance for education in our nation's program of foreign aid.

- Governmental and voluntary action to reduce inequalities of educational opportunity by improving the opportunities available to economically disadvantaged persons.

- Orderly compliance with legal requirements for racially integrated schools.

- Voluntary efforts to increase racial ethnic integration in public and non-public schools.

- Equitable tax support for the education of pupils in public and non-public schools to implement parental freedom in the education of their children ("To Teach as Jesus Did," 1972; "Sharing the Light of Faith," 1979).

G. Family Life

The well-being of society is intimately linked to the health and vitality of family life. The family is the most basic unit of social organization and is instrumental in

humanizing and personalizing society. This nation's institutions, laws and policies must support and positively defend the rights and duties of the family. All programs, policies and services must be evaluated in light of their impact on the life and stability of the family (Charter of the Rights of the Family, Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry and Apostolic Exhortation on the Family).

H. Food and Agricultural Policy

The right to eat flows directly from the right to life. We support a national policy aimed at securing the right to eat for all the world's people. This policy is promoted through our policies on agricultural production and domestic and international food assistance.

The United States, through its income-support programs, its credit and research programs, its tax and trade policies, its strategies for rural development and its foreign aid, should support the maintenance of an agricultural system based on small and moderate-sized family farms both at home and abroad. The preservation and conservation of our natural resource base should also be a key element of U.S. national agricultural policy.

We support legislation to protect the rights of farm workers, and we call for measures to improve the working conditions and the general welfare of farm-worker families.

Domestically, nutrition programs should help meet the needs of hungry and malnourished Americans, especially children, the poor, the unemployed and the elderly. It is essential that the food stamp program, the school lunch and child nutrition programs be funded at adequate levels.

Internationally, U.S. food aid should be given to the poorest countries and neediest people without regard to political considerations, principally in emergency situations to combat global hunger and malnutrition. Development assistance should emphasize equitable distribution of benefits and help other nations move toward food self-reliance ("Food Policy and the Church: Specific Proposals," 1975; "Economic Justice for All," 1986).

I. Health

Adequate health care is a basic human right. Access to appropriate health care must be guaranteed for all people without regard to economic, social or legal status. Special efforts should be made to remove barriers to prompt, personalized and comprehensive care for the poor.

Government also has a responsibility to remove or alleviate environmental, social and economic conditions that cause much ill health and suffering for its citizens. Greater emphasis is required on programs of health promotion and disease prevention.

We support the adoption of a national health insurance program as the best means of ensuring access to high-quality health care for all. Until a comprehensive and universal program can be enacted, we urge the following:

- Requiring employers to provide a minimum health insurance benefit to employees.
- Strengthening existing programs for the poor, the elderly and disabled people.
- Expanding Medicaid coverage to all people with poverty-level incomes.
- Special aid to hospitals that provide disproportionate amounts of charity care to the poor ("Health and Health Care, A Pastoral of the American Catholic Bishops," 1981).

J. Housing

Decent housing is a basic human right. A greater commitment of will and resources is required to meet our national housing goal of a decent home for every American family. To meet this housing need, the government must continue to adequately fund housing assistance programs that will assist people to obtain affordable housing. Continuation of housing production and preservation programs is vital to maintaining the stock of affordable housing. Housing policy must better meet the needs of low- and middle-income families, the elderly, rural families and minorities. It should also promote reinvestment in central cities and equal housing opportunity. Preservation of existing housing stock and a renewed concern for neighborhoods are required ("The Right to a Decent Home," 1975).

K. Human Rights

Human dignity requires the defense and promotion of human rights in global and domestic affairs. With respect to international human rights, there is a pressing need for the United States to pursue a double task: 1) to strengthen and expand international mechanisms by which human rights can be protected and promoted; and 2) to take seriously the human rights dimensions of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, we support U.S. ratification of the international covenants on civil and political rights, and on economic, social and cultural rights. Further, we support a policy which gives greater weight to the protection of human rights in the conduct of U.S. affairs. The pervasive presence of U.S. power creates a responsibility to use that power in the

service of human rights ("U.S. Foreign Policy: A Critique From Catholic Tradition," congressional testimony, January 1976).

L. Immigration and Refugee Policy

A number of unresolved issues remain in the immigration-policy area. They include the fate of the residual population of undocumented aliens who did not qualify under the ongoing legalization program and the matter of indiscriminate firings and discrimination in hiring decisions resulting from employer sanctions. Another area of fundamental concern is improving the working and living conditions for all workers in the migrant-labor stream and discouraging agricultural employers from continuing to rely on temporary foreign agricultural labor.

A third area of concern is the maintenance of the principle which has governed legal immigration to the United States for most of this century. That principle is rooted in the concept of family reunification and recognizes that legal immigration is a source of cultural, social and economic enrichment for the United States. A fourth area of concern is refugees. The 1980 Refugee Act considered 50,000 refugees as the "normal flow." As we are approaching this figure, we must not forget that "special humanitarian concern" implies a spirit of generosity belied by the constantly contracting size of refugee admissions to the United States. Our final concern is about people who are in temporary need of special consideration. A safe-haven policy would meet the immediate needs of foreign nationals stranded here or fleeing to the United States from countries beset by civil strife, war or natural calamity (bishops' resolution, November 1985; policy statements by the U.S. Catholic Conference general secretary and testimony on behalf of the USCC on all of the above concerns).

M. Mass Media

The philosophy of marketplace economics, as applied to telecommunications industries during the past decade, has led to the relaxation or elimination of policies that protect the public's access to modern means of sending and receiving messages and exchanging ideas. We are concerned that these changes are adversely affecting the free flow of information required in a democratic society and increasing the gap between the information rich and the information poor in our society and the world. We urge legislative initiatives in the Congress which restore the public accountability of broadcasters, cable operators and others who use the public resource of the airwaves. Specifically, we support passage of legislation to require broadcasters to cover controversial issues and to provide balance in such discussions (the Federal Communications Commission policy known as the fairness doctrine), to prohibit the rapid buying and selling of broadcast stations (which amounts to speculating in a

public resource), and to require the FCC to hold broadcast licensees strictly accountable under the public interest standard.

We support the concept of universal and affordable telephone service for all Americans and the provision of so-called "lifelines" or subsidized telephone rates for the poor.

We support reasonable and constitutionally acceptable regulations to limit the distribution of indecent, pornographic or sexually explicit materials through the electronic media, including the telephone, so that they are not accessible to minors.

We oppose advertisements or public service announcements concerning contraceptives, since such presentations infringe on the right of parents to teach their children about responsible sexuality (Statements and testimony by the USCC Department of Communication before Congress and the FCC).

N. Regional Conflict in the World

Three situations of regional conflict which are of significance for the whole international system and where U.S. policy has a substantial, indeed a decisive, influence are: Central America, the Middle East and southern Africa.

Central America has for some time been the most visible focus of our attention to regional conflicts. Our position concerning the indigenous roots of the conflicts, the imperative need for fundamental social change, the futility and immorality of proposed military solutions, has been stated often and is well-known. As the dominant external actor, our government should join with our hemispheric allies to advance realistic proposals of dialogue leading to negotiated settlements and guaranteed processes of political and social reform.

Direct military intervention by any outside power, including the United States, and military aid to irregular forces in the area cannot be justified under any foreseeable circumstances. Substantial and sustained levels of U.S. economic assistance to the region, rigidly monitored to assure maximum benefit to the people, especially the poorest, should replace the excessively high levels of military assistance. We express continued concern over the militarization of the region, the still-present danger of a more generalized conflict, the violations of human rights, the inadequate judicial systems and the wrenching tragedy of countless refugees and displaced persons. We urge special consideration by our government for all Central American refugees here who have fled the violence of their homelands (USCC testimony on Central America, 1983, 1984 and 1985.)

In the Middle East the quest for peace continues, and the relevant parties bear distinct yet interdependent responsibilities. First, the international community, especially its principal diplomatic actors, inevitably influences the future of the Middle East. Second, the United Nations is a vital element in any Middle East negotiations, and its diplomatic and peacekeeping role will undoubtedly be crucial to a long-term resolution of the conflict. Third, the regional parties, whose conflicting claims of justice are the essence of the political and moral problem in the Middle East, are the key to peace. Finally, the religious communities with roots in the Middle East must reflect the best of our traditions in supporting the movement for peace with justice for all the people of the region. We have a continuing concern for the protection of the basic rights, both civil and religious, of the Christian minorities in the Middle East, and we encourage the local churches there to continue their steadfast witness to the faith ("The Middle East: The Pursuit of Peace With Justice," 1978).

The position of South Africa has long been of grave moral concern to the world because of its internal racial policies and its occupation of Namibia-South West Africa. In recent years it has become a threat to the entire area of southern Africa because of its military incursions into the territories of several of its neighbors and its effort to destabilize them by economic pressure and the support of guerrilla movements.

The bishops of southern Africa and many others have repeatedly pointed out the path to justice and peace. U.S. foreign policy, corporate activity and even private initiatives can influence what happens inside that country and South Africa's relations with neighboring states (Administrative Board statements of Sept. 11, 1985, and Sept. 10, 1986).

This is not an exclusive listing of the issues that concern us. As Pope John Paul II has said, "The church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves true human welfare any more than she can remain indifferent to whatever threatens it...."(11) Thus we are advocates on many other social justice concerns, such as welfare reform, the civil and political rights of the elderly and the handicapped, the reform of our criminal justice system and the protection of the land and the environment. We are also concerned about the growing crisis of AIDS and the need for compassionate and effective policies in dealing with this serious disease.

IV. Conclusion

In summary, we believe that the church has a proper role and responsibility in public affairs flowing from its Gospel mandate and its respect for the dignity of the human person. We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our

land, both in terms of citizen participation in the electoral process and the integrity and accountability of those who seek and hold public office.

We urge all citizens to use their franchise by registering to vote and going to the polls. We encourage them to demand information from the campaigns themselves as well as from the media coverage of those campaigns and to take stands on the candidates and the issues. If the campaign year is to engage the values of the American people, the campaigners and voters alike must share the responsibility for making it happen. All are urged to become involved in the campaign or party of their choice, to learn about the issues and to inform their conscience.

We pray that Christians will provide courageous leadership in promoting a spirit of responsible political involvement. May they follow the example of Jesus in giving special concern for the poor, and may all their actions be guided by a deep love of God and neighbor.

Footnotes

1 1974 Synod of Bishops, Statement on Human Rights.

2 No. 14.

3 Lumen Gentium, 31.

4 Pope John Paul II, Familiaris Consortio.

5 Gaudium et Spes, 76.

6 Pope Paul VI, Octogesima Adveniens, 4.

7 "Justice in the World," 37.

I Pacem in Terris, 160.

9 Address to Lay Representatives in Toledo, Spain, Origins, Vol. 12, No. 23, p. 373.

10 Redemptor Hominis, 16.

II Ibid., 13.

MARGIN NOTES

The U.S. Catholic Conference statement on political responsibility presented here updates statements issued by the conference during the last three national elections. For the texts of the earlier statements - which began in 1975 - see the following issues of *Origins*:

-1984 statement, issued March 22, 1984, vol. 13, pp. 732ff.

-1980 statement, issued Oct. 26, 1979, vol. 9, pp. 349ff.

-1976 statement, issued Feb. 15, 1976, vol. 5, pp.- 567ff.

Also in 1976, the U.S. bishops, meeting in general session in Chicago, adopted a resolution on political responsibility (vol. 6, p. 7), which voiced concern over the number of voters not participating in the electoral process.

In addition, the USCC has addressed the content of the Democratic and Republican parties' national platforms during those three elections.

In 1976, the USCC issued an issue-by-issue analysis listing the positions it had taken in testimony submitted to the two parties' platform committees and the positions taken in each of the party platforms (vol. 6, pp. 237ff). The analysis was issued at a press conference at which representatives of the U.S. bishops denied in a separate statement that the bishops had endorsed the candidacy of President Ford (vol. 6, p. 236). For coverage of that controversy, which developed after leaders of the episcopal conference met with Ford and with Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter, and issued statements contrasting their positions on a constitutional amendment banning abortion, see in vol. 6, pp. 169-173; 207, 216-218; 341-345.

For the text of testimony submitted by the USCC to the Democratic and Republican platform committees in 1980, see vol. 10, pp. 65ff.

For the text of the testimony submitted to the platform committees in 1984, see vol. 14, pp. 116ff.

The consistent ethic of life and the framework it can provide for the approach by the church and Catholic office seekers to political affairs was discussed in a text by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago that appeared in *Origins*, vol. 16, pp. 345ff. "Some commentators on the consistent ethic saw it primarily as a political policy. They missed its primary meaning," Bernardin said. "It is a moral vision and an ethical argument sustaining the vision. But the moral vision does have political consequences. The consistent ethic is meant to shape the public witness of the Catholic Church in our society."

In his address, Bernardin spelled out a number of questions regarding the consistent ethic and the church in politics that he said still needed discussion and reflection, e.g., "What is the difference between a bishop's role and a politician's in the public debate about moral issues which the consistent ethic embraces?...Must a Catholic office seeker or officeholder work for all clearly identified Catholic concerns simultaneously and with the same vigor? Is that possible?... What are the consequences if a Catholic office seeker or officeholder does not follow the church's teaching in the campaign for or exercise of public office? What is a Catholic officeholder's responsibility, in light of the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Liberty, to protect the religious beliefs of non-Catholics? What is his or her responsibility under the Constitution? How are these responsibilities related?

"How is the distinction between accepting a moral principle and making prudential judgments about applying it in particular circumstances - for example, in regard to specific legislation - worked out in the political order? What is the responsibility of a Catholic officeholder or office seeker when the bishops have made a prudential judgment regarding specific legislation? How are Catholic voters to evaluate a Catholic officeholder or office seeker who accepts a moral principle, and not only disagrees with the bishops regarding specific legislation but supports its defeat?"

QUOTE FROM A PAST TEXT OF CURRENT INTEREST:

"We Catholics have grown beyond the need to prove ourselves to the nation of which we are a part. We have moved into a new willingness to criticize our culture in its economic inequalities, its military posture, its foreign interventions and in its countenance of a massive slaughter of the unborn.

"We are insistently willing to respect genuine difference and the rich pluralism of our nation, but this allegiance has not stopped whatever isolated but prophetic stand the Gospel demands. Some of these will be popular with one group, some with another. But there is scarcely another group in the United States which couples a horror at abortion with a preferential option for the poor, a concern for a more generous immigration policy with a recognition of what easy divorce has done to the family, the resettlement of refugees from Southeast Asia with a condemnation of military aid to the contras. The church in the United States has become something of a sign of contradiction, and this may well be one of the signs of her health."

(From the Nov. 10, 1986, presidential address to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops by Bishop James Malone of Youngstown, Ohio. Malone is past NCCB president; in *Origins*, vol. 16, quote on p. 396.)