

ETHICS AND CHURCH-STATE ISSUES

The Note gathers contributions from four scholars around the world who highlight recent publications on ethical issues currently surrounding matters of church and state in their home countries. Included are representative contributions from Germany, Kenya, the United States, and Venezuela.

CATHOLICS' ETHICAL INTERVENTIONS IN POLITICAL DEBATES: THE SITUATION IN GERMANY

MARIANNE HEIMBACH-STEINS

BISHOPS, MORAL THEOLOGIANS, AND LAY MOVEMENTS in Germany articulate Catholic and Christian ethical positions on a broad variety of matters that affect the common good. Before pointing out some relevant issues, I must mention two important points.

(1) The Christian churches, namely Roman Catholic and Lutheran, are still influential voices in the public arena in Germany. Yet, as in most modern societies, they can no longer claim an exclusive status as “moral agents,” finding themselves within a wide plurality of religious and worldview-oriented public agents. To describe the churches’ role in society and their influence on the political sphere properly, it would be necessary to focus on the special relationship between state and church in Germany, which is very different from the U.S. model. Though based on institutional separation and on the precept of religious neutrality of the state, Germans face a long history of law-based cooperation between state and church in fields that affect the common good such as childcare institutions, schools, social welfare, and health care. In any evaluation of the political or social interventions of church representatives, this

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context of institutional cooperation and the resulting expectations on both sides have to be kept in mind. Moreover, the process of European unification and institution-building and its consequences on the level of the member states concerning the (legal) relationship between state and church would have to be considered as well.¹

(2) Interventions are made on social, political, and legal levels. On the one hand, Catholic agents enter into public discussions, be it in social, family, economic, or environmental politics. Bishops, lay leaders, and theologians contribute to the way the wider public perceives human dignity and social justice. On the other hand, there are interventions that refer more directly to legislative procedures. Controversial positions among the wider public as well as among Catholics have been articulated concerning the legislation on, for example, the urgent issue of embryonic stem cell research.² Another urgent issue is the further development of the legal framework of the church-state relationship itself and the legal status of non-Christian religious organizations, especially of Muslim communities in Germany. Church leaders, Christian organizations, and theologians offer criteria for making decisions, often with regard to very practical issues such as building mosques or establishing Islamic religious education in schools and the related training of teachers in German universities.

A precise description of these issues, however, cannot be given without treating the details of the German state-church system. Such a task is beyond the scope of this contribution. Therefore, in the following sections, I will confine myself to sketching some social justice issues highlighted in recent Catholic interventions.

INTERVENTIONS CONCERNING SOCIAL POLITICS

Whenever issues of the development of the welfare state are at stake, the Christian churches in Germany still raise a powerful voice.

Within the last decade, the Central Committee of German Catholics and the Catholic Bishops' Conference, together with the Evangelical Church in Germany, published several sociopolitical interventions. The most important of these is probably the ecumenical statement *For a Future Founded on Solidarity and Justice: A Statement on the Economic and Social Situation in Germany* (1997).³ This document was based on a consultation

¹ See Gerhard Robbers, *State and Church in the European Union*, 2nd ed. (Baden-Baden: Nomos 2005).

² See Johannes Reiter, "Menschenwürde oder Forschungsfreiheit? Die Stammzellforschung bleibt umstritten," *Herder-Korrespondenz* 62 (2008) 173–78.

³ http://www.dbk.de/imperia/md/content/schriften/dbk6.gemeinsametexte/gt_09a_engl.pdf (this and all other URLs referenced in this Note were accessed November 24, 2008). See also Marianne Heimbach-Steins and Andreas Lienkamp, "Für eine

process involving both church members and a broad range of societal agents. Grounded on an analysis of the socioeconomic situation after the reunification of the two German states (1989/90), the document formulated a consensus of ecumenical social ethics that focuses on basic elements of biblical anthropology as well as on the main principles of Catholic social teaching, and sets out an agenda of social politics and social responsibility on both local and global levels. Thus the document became a major reference for all subsequent church-based interventions. Its relevance for the public discussion may be compared to the U.S. bishops' letter *Economic Justice For All* (1986).

One of the political demands in the 1997 paper referred to the necessity of establishing regular reports on poverty and wealth in order to ensure the availability of reliable data on the distribution and development of wealth in Germany (see no. 219). When first articulated, this demand caused a lot of controversy, but it did not remain without success. In 2008, the third report on poverty and wealth was published, the first one having appeared in 2001.⁴ Among others, the national Catholic organization Caritas (Deutscher Caritas-Verband) published a critical comment on the report that highlights the most scandalizing aspects such as child poverty and the close relationship between social status of private households, participation in education, and the risks of passing poverty on to future generations.⁵

Catholics have always emphasized the principle of distributive justice in their interventions and will, rightly, continue to do so. But the way issues of justice are treated in both official documents⁶ and theological research⁷ has changed. There has been a shift to the principle of contributive or—more precisely—participatory justice. This shift may be interpreted as a search for balancing the responsibilities of individuals, societal agents, and the state concerning well-being and social welfare, strategies to avoid

Zukunft in Solidarität und Gerechtigkeit: Eine Relecture des Wirtschafts- und Sozialwortes nach zehn Jahren," http://www.icep-berlin.de/fileadmin/templates/images/argumente_Arbeitspapiere/Arbeitspapier_ICEP_02_2007.pdf.

⁴ Abbreviated version in English at: http://www.bmas.de/coremedia/generator/27506/property=pdf/dritter_armuts_und_reichtumsbericht_englisch_kurzfassung.pdf.

⁵ "Armutbericht zeigt massiven Handlungsbedarf," <http://www.caritas.de/49897.html>.

⁶ See the Catholic bishops' paper *Die Soziale neu denken: Für eine langfristig angelegte Reformpolitik (Rethinking the Social: In favor of a Sustainable Reform-oriented Politics)* (December 13, 2003), http://www.dbk.de/imperia/md/content/schriften/dbk1b.kommissionen/ko_28.pdf.

⁷ See, among others: Stefan Kurzke-Maasmeier et al., eds., *Baustelle Sozialstaat: Sozialethische Sondierungen in unübersichtlichem Gelände* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2006); Michael Schramm et al., eds., *Der fraglich gewordene Sozialstaat: Aktuelle Streifelder—ethische Grundlagenprobleme* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006).

poverty and to emphasize the social duty emerging from private property. The 1997 document provoked a new and ongoing discussion about the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, and has stimulated fruitful research especially among younger social ethicists.

One outcome of this development is a new focus on prevention and preventive social politics. In this context a variety of recent interventions have highlighted the importance of lifelong education as a means of social participation and poverty prevention.⁸ Since the strong correlation between social status and educational success in Germany has clearly persisted, free access to educational institutions beginning in early childhood and real participation of children from all social and cultural backgrounds in learning on all levels emerge as major issues of participatory justice. Along with a lively public discussion on these issues, the research of Christian social ethicists on educational justice has developed further, and statements of bishops and lay representatives have focused on this subject.⁹

FAMILY ISSUES AND GENDER-JUSTICE

The area of family politics is, to some extent, closely linked to educational justice. In Germany it is treated in a highly controversial manner both among Catholics and in society as a whole. One focus of controversy is whether or not (and to what extent) the state is allowed or obliged to intervene in the sphere of the family, to cooperate with the parents (who have the primary responsibility for their children), and to institutionally support the duties of raising and educating children. Conservative Catholic voices espouse restrictive positions against any state intervention, especially in the area of early child care. This position conflicts with the existence of a broad infrastructure of church-run early child-care institutions. The critical voices target mainly the current family politics and especially the current family minister, herself mother of seven children and a member of the Christian Democratic Union. Her strategy is focused on empowering mothers and fathers to share paid work, housework, and rearing children as they see fit, without having to face economic and social disadvantage. The Central Committee of German Catholics generally favors this development, as it seems appropriate to improve gender and intergenerational justice. The Committee's recently issued position paper emphasizes the necessity of combining both aims in German family politics and tries

⁸ See, e.g., the 2005 declaration by the Central Committee of German Catholics, "Lernen und Arbeiten im Lebenslauf: Teilhabefördernde Bildungspolitik als Aufgabe des Sozialstaats," [http://www.zdk.de/data/erklarungen/pdf/Lernen_und_Arbeiten_1.Aufl._2005_11_18_A_\(2\)_1137680031.pdf](http://www.zdk.de/data/erklarungen/pdf/Lernen_und_Arbeiten_1.Aufl._2005_11_18_A_(2)_1137680031.pdf).

⁹ See, e.g., <http://www.menschenrecht-auf-bildung.de> (with further links).

to overcome the unnecessary opposition between gender issues and the well-being of children by focusing on a range of political measures to improve the quality of early child-care institutions.¹⁰

ECOLOGICAL ISSUES

Finally I want to draw attention to Catholic emphasis on ecological responsibility and justice. A very important contribution is the 2006 report *Climate Change: A Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice* published by the Bishops' Conference.¹¹ Cardinal Karl Lehmann, then president of the Bishops' Conference, writes in the document's foreword: "Global climate change probably represents the greatest existential threat for the present and, to a much greater extent, for coming generations, as well as for non-human nature. Consequently, the biological, social and spatial consequences are a serious challenge for humankind." The report describes the state of scientific insight concerning anthropogenic climate change and addresses it as a major challenge of ecological responsibility. At the same time, it focuses on climate change as a major problem of global justice with regard to the world's living population, especially the poor, and with respect to coming generations, who need us to safeguard natural resources for them now.

¹⁰ "Familienpolitik: Geschlechter- und generationengerecht" (May 21, 2008), http://www.zdk.de/data/erklarungen/pdf/Familienpolitik_geschlechter_und_generationengerecht_1225453699.pdf.

¹¹ http://www.dbk.de/imperia/md/content/schriften/dbk1b.kommissionen/ko_29_2nd_edition_engl.pdf.

CHURCH, STATE, AND CATHOLIC ETHICS: THE KENYAN DILEMMA

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COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY, AND UNCERTAINTY characterize the relationship of church, state, and Catholic ethics in Africa. The East African country of Kenya provides a microcosmic sample of the larger continental profile. The scant literature contains three main lines that indicate an incompatibility of purposes in this relationship. The first recognizes the threefold religious heritage of Africa (indigenous religions, Christianity, and Islam) and the deep affinity between religion and public life in Africa.¹ “In any African society, there has never been a dichotomy between the secular and the religious or religion and politics.”² The second assesses the role of churches in the public sphere.³ The third, which defines the focus of

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¹ Two excellent works representative of this strand are Jeff Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Zed, 1996); and Stephen Ellis and Gerrie ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (New York: Oxford, 2004).

² Gideon Gichuhi Githiga, *The Church as the Bulwark against Authoritarianism: Development of Church and State Relations in Kenya with Particular Reference to the Years after Political Independence 1963–1992* (Irvine, Calif.: Regnum, 2001) 202. See also Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (New York: Orbis, 2008) 1–25.

³ Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1998); Gifford, ed., *The Christian Churches and Democratisation of Africa* (New York: Brill, 1995); Galia Sabar, *Church, State, and Society in Kenya: From Mediation to Opposition, 1963–1993* (London: Frank Cass, 2002). In East Africa, the most authoritative volume remains Holger Bernt Hansen and Michael

this Note, concerns particular ethical issues related to the sociopolitical contexts of Kenya. Characteristic of this last strand is a somewhat checked evolution of church-state relationship. The literature identifies three phases of this evolution.

At Kenya's independence the assumed position envisaged the churches cooperating with the state to consolidate the gains of political emancipation. For example, under the regime of founding president Jomo Kenyatta (1963–78), ecclesial bodies like the Kenya Episcopal Conference accepted their cordial role as the conscience of society, a role they fulfilled by issuing pastoral letters and exhortations to public office holders.⁴ When the postcolonial political arrangement degenerated into authoritarianism under the presidency of Daniel arap Moi (1978–2002), cooperation evolved into opposition.⁵ The emphasis shifted to “shaping Kenya's emerging civil society and . . . developing an alternative politics.”⁶ The opposition was spearheaded by individual church leaders renowned for their strident denunciation of political figures, usually in the form of “political sermons,” and proclamation of the virtues and values of Christian social ethics.⁷ The third phase, which extends to the present, surfaced the problem of the contradictory roles played by church leadership concerning matters of governance in society. The present literature sharply criticizes

Twaddle, eds., *Religion and Politics in East Africa: The Period since Independence* (London: James Currey, 1995). The following articles are useful for understanding the African church's role in the public sphere: Laurenti Magesa, “Has the Church a Role in Politics?” in Leonard Namwera et al., *Towards African Christian Liberation* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1990) 69–85; Magesa, “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: The Church's Answer to Current Economic Situations,” in *ibid.* 208–17; Joseph Kariuki, “*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*: The Answer of the Church to Economic Situations,” in *ibid.* 219–44.

⁴ For a collection of these letters see Rodrigo Mejia, ed., *The Conscience of Society: The Social Teaching of the Catholic Bishops of Kenya, 1960–1995* (Nairobi: Paulines, 1995). See also A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2000) 88–95.

⁵ David Throup offers an insightful and detailed historical account of the political roles of Protestant and Catholic churches under Moi's regime in “Render unto Caesar the Things that are Caesar's: The Politics of Church–State Conflict in Kenya 1978–1990,” in Hansen and Twaddle, *Religion and Politics in East Africa* 143–46.

⁶ Sabar, *Church, State and Society in Kenya* 6.

⁷ A good example of such publications is Bishop David Gitari, *In Season and Out of Season: Sermons to a Nation* (Carlisle, UK: Regnum, 1996). The limit of this approach is twofold. First, the ethnic and tribal nature of Kenyan politics renders ecclesial leaders suspect of partisanship. Second, an epistolary intervention is undermined by widespread illiteracy bedeviling Kenya's demographic configuration. In recent years a shift has occurred in favor of a systematic church-sponsored education in civic rights and duties of citizens. See M. Louise Pirouet, “The Churches and Human Rights in Kenya and Uganda since Independence,” *Religion and Politics in East Africa* 247–59.

the church as part of the problem, rather than as a repository of ethical principles for sociopolitical transformation. This negative perception relates directly to the postelection crisis in Kenya.

In December 2007, the bitterly disputed presidential elections provoked nationwide violence and resurrected atavistic ethnic animosity and unresolved historical injustice. The conflict also posed a serious challenge to Catholic ethics because of the dichotomy established by the warring parties between *peaceful* resolution and *just* resolution of the impasse. To plead for peace meant support for the status quo; to call for justice was perceived as supporting the opposition.⁸ “Peace” and “Justice” represent central themes of Catholic social teaching; the opposition between them mired church leadership in a political quandary.

Although a substantial monograph assessing the role of the church in Kenya during the postelection crisis has yet to appear, initial indications limn a specter of a divided church with a severely eroded moral capacity “to challenge society and uphold principles of right and wrong, truth and falsity.”⁹ The church’s role in the disputed elections has reinforced a perception of the “coalescence of interests” between church and state, which muffles the church’s prophetic voice and provides cover for the state’s unethical machinations.¹⁰

What can be concluded from the foregoing? The political space where the African church engages the state and civil society in view of defining principles and policies for broader action frustrates Catholic ethics in two ways. Besides the amorphous and fragile notion of “state” in Africa, certain elements of African political culture adapt poorly to the principles of Catholic ethics, such as the common good, solidarity, social justice, and a sense of common citizenship.¹¹

⁸ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “A Tale of Two Elephants: Overcoming the postelection crisis in Kenya,” *America* 198.8 (March 10, 2008) 14–16.

⁹ “Church on the Cross,” *Standard* [Kenya], July 8, 2008. This front-page article was one of many scathing attacks on the church in the secular press in the wake of the postelection crisis.

¹⁰ See Simeon O. Ilesanmi, “Religion and Public Life in Africa: A Comparative Perspective on the Ethics of Responsibility,” in *Taking Responsibility: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Winston Davis (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2001) 259–62; Henry Makori, “The Church Can Help Kenya Heal by Speaking the Truth,” Catholic Information Service Africa (CISA), <http://www.cisanewsafrika.org> (accessed August 29, 2008).

¹¹ See editorial, “Africa Awaits a New Dawn,” *Tablet* (June 28, 2008) 2. For a critical study of failed mechanisms of state in Africa, see Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); Jean-François Bayart, Stephen Ellis, and Béatrice Hibou, *The Criminalization of the State in Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

Kenya's postelection crisis also raised the thorny question of identity that continues to strain traditional Catholic social ethics. In Africa one acquires identity by affiliation with an ethnic group, which guarantees cultural security and facilitates access to public resources. The assumption that "Christian" or "religious" values (e.g., solidarity) can forge a common identity remains unproven. If being Kenyan did not protect many during the postelection crisis, being Christian appears a weaker substitute for a deeply ingrained belief in the protective identity conferred by an exclusionary primary reference group.

In sum: to speculate further on church, state, and Catholic ethics in Kenya would be ineffectual until more studies emerge.¹² Some recent significant publications draw on principles of Catholic ethics to delineate the parameters of governance, political transformation, and socioeconomic reconstruction while emphasizing justice, human rights, peace building, and democracy.¹³ Yet the responses to the range of questions pertaining to church, state, and Catholic ethics in Africa seem a fraction of what is needed. Positioned halfway between its past role as conscience of society and bulwark against dictatorial regimes and the present perception of its partisanship and lack of credibility, the Kenyan church lacks the ethical credentials of the former and the methodological capacity to shed the latter impression. The debate on church, state, and Catholic ethics in Africa remains a central issue that calls for further research.

¹² An excellent collection of short essays dealing with church, state, and Catholic ethics is the recently published *JCTR Reader: Church and Politics* (Lusaka: Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 2008). Although the articles address the topic from the perspective of the political situation in Zambia, the collection offers interesting parallels with other African countries on a number of issues, including good governance, national identity, social justice, human rights, civic duties, and Catholic social teaching and politics.

¹³ Aquiline Tarimo and Paulin Manwelo, *African Peacemaking and Governance* (Nairobi: Acton, 2007); Aquiline Tarimo, *Applied Ethics and Africa's Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005); Elias O. Opongo and Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *Faith Doing Justice: A Manual for Social Analysis, Catholic Social Teachings, and Social Justice* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2007); Elias Omondi Opongo, ed., *Peace Weavers: Methodologies of Peace Building in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines, 2008).

RELIGION AND POLITICS: U.S.A.

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THE 2008 ELECTION SEASON was tumultuous, divisive, exhilarating, and historically unique. It yielded the first black president, Democratic candidate Barack Hussein Obama,¹ with the first Catholic vice president, Joseph Biden. Republican counterparts were John McCain, a decorated war hero; and Sarah Palin, governor of Alaska, potentially the first woman vice president.

Obama's campaign to empower his message at the "grassroots" was massively effective. It registered new African-American, Hispanic, and young voters, all of whom strongly favored Obama. Using frequent email appeals, Obama raised over \$600 million from over three million donors—a virtual plebiscite on his popularity. Obama won 53% of the vote, compared to McCain's 46%. Catholics favored him 54% to 45%. Yet (non-Hispanic) whites overall favored McCain 55% to 43%, with a narrower gap among white Catholics—52% to 47%. This means that Latinos—66% pro-Obama—gained him the Catholic vote. Still, Obama did better with white Catholics than the two previous Democrats (Gore 2000, Kerry 2004).²

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¹ Although Obama is frequently characterized as African-American, that term is typically reserved for descendents of slaves, not recent immigrants or their children. Obama's father was Kenyan, his mother white. He was raised by his mother and grandparents after his parents divorced. No perspective is context-free; I served on the Catholic Advisory Committee of Barack Obama. Thanks to Thomas J. Reese, S.J., for many constructive suggestions on this essay. All Web sites referred to in this Note were accessed November 23, 2008.

² See the Pew Forum survey, "How the Faithful Voted," <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=367>. See also Mark Silk and Andrew Walsh, "A Past without a Future? Parsing the U.S. Catholic Vote," *America* 199.14 (November 3, 2008), http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11181; and Peter Steinfels, "Catholics and Choice (In the Voting Booth)," *New York Times* (November 8, 2008), http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/08/us/politics/08beliefs.html?_r=3&oref=slogin&pagewanted=print&oref=slogin.

Though U.S. political and legal traditions separate church and state (government cannot establish a religion, nor directly fund religious activities), America is a religious country. Only 6.3% of Americans self-identify as “secular” and “unaffiliated” with any religion.³ Religious leaders and groups are politically active and influential. The religious beliefs of candidates (all Protestant except Biden) were scrutinized. Catholics, a quarter of the electorate, were courted by both parties. Catholics are integrated into the American mainstream, yet Catholic identity is still stamped by 19th- and early-20th-century immigrant experiences.⁴ Some recall or imagine a “vibrant culture of the Catholic ghetto” existing pre-Vatican II.⁵ They resent lingering anti-Catholic sentiment that immigrant forebears evoked. Yet Catholic ethnic enclaves could be tainted by defensiveness and racism. Catholic calls for justice were not always inclusive.⁶ Prioritizing issues like economic equity, education, employment, and health care, Obama summoned all to the common good. McCain promised to win the war and identified himself as “pro-life” (yet supports embryonic stem cell research). Defense of life is central to Catholic moral tradition; it especially appeals to Catholics for whom “pro-life” serves as an identity marker amid cultural pluralism.⁷

Since 1975, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued political advisories. In November 2007, it overwhelmingly approved *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* to guide but not to “tell Catholics for whom or against whom to vote” (nos. 7, 58). Taking innocent life is not “just one issue among many” (no. 28), yet “other serious threats” including racism, the death penalty, unjust war, hunger, health care, and immigration “are not optional concerns” (no. 29). Abortion is an “intrinsic evil,” but “racism” falls in the same category (no. 34), along with genocide, torture, and targeting noncombatants (no. 23). *Faithful Citizenship* calls for prudential discernment and “the art of the possible” (John Paul II, *Evangelium vitae* no. 73). Catholics must neither advocate intrinsic evil,

³ Pew Forum, “U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,” <http://religions.pewforum.org/>.

⁴ See James M. O’Toole, *The Faithful: A History of Catholics in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 2008).

⁵ Michael Sean Winters, *Left at the Altar: How the Democrats Lost the Catholics and How the Catholics Can Save the Democrats* (New York: Basic, 2008) 70. Winters rails against John F. Kennedy’s relegation of religion to the private sphere, and finds hope in the influx of Latino Catholics.

⁶ E. J. Dionne Jr., “There Is No Catholic Vote—And It’s Important,” in *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, ed. Margaret O’Brien Steinfelds (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004) 258–59.

⁷ On countercultural pro-life commitment see Jennifer Fulweiler, “A Sexual Revolution,” *America* 199.1 (July 7, 2008) 11–13, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=10904.

nor be single-issue voters (no. 34). As the election neared, some bishops reclaimed abortion to define Catholic politics, equated opposition to abortion with commitment to make it illegal, and excluded the possibility of Catholics supporting Obama.⁸ But judging the morality of abortion is logically and ethically distinct from choosing political strategies to combat it; and distinct from judging morally or religiously those who choose differently.

A novel U.S. development is a bipartisan and ecumenical “progressive” coalition combining social justice and ecology with traditional “pro-life” causes. This movement connects through internet media, public events, and religious activism.⁹ A surge of Catholic publications and organizations advances a similar “common good” agenda. Leading activists encouraged voters, “There has scarcely been a better opportunity for members of our church who are passionate about the common good to embrace their identity as Catholic Americans, and to help bring the light of our faith’s message of justice and dignity to the farthest reaches of our nation and our world.”¹⁰

Though most Americans and a majority of Catholics support legal abortion,¹¹ most (81%) want abortion reduction.¹² Prudence and realism question single-minded determination to reverse the 1973 Supreme Court

⁸ For example, Cardinal Justin Rigali and Bishop William Murphy, “Joint Statement,” October 21, 2008, <http://www.usccb.org/prolife/Rigali-Murphy-Joint-Statement.pdf>; Michael Sean Winters, “Why They Didn’t Listen,” *Tablet* (15 November 2008), <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/1227>.

⁹ See Jim Wallis, *God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); E. J. Dionne Jr., *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics after the Religious Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2008); Amy Sullivan, *The Party Faithful: How and Why the Democrats Are Closing the God Gap* (New York: Scribner, 2008); Sojourners Christians for Peace and Justice Web site (<http://www.sojo.net/>); Matthew 25 Network Web site (<http://www.matthew25.org/>); and evangelical pastor Rick Warren’s Web site (<http://www.rickwarren.com/>).

¹⁰ Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) 123. Korzen and Kelley founded Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good (<http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/>) and Catholics United (<http://www.catholics-united.org/>), respectively. Another Web-based organization is Catholic Democrats (<http://www.catholicdemocrats.org/>). See also Clarke E. Cochran and David Carroll Cochran, *The Catholic Vote: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2008); and Gerald J. Beyer, “Yes You Can: Why Catholics Don’t Have to Vote Republican,” *Commonweal* 135.12 (June 20, 2008) 15–18.

¹¹ See *The Faith and American Politics Survey: The Young and the Faithful*, at Faith in Public Life Web site, <http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/content/faps>.

¹² See “Religion in the 2008 Election: Post-Election Survey,” by Catholics in Alliance, Faith in Public Life, and Sojourners, <http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/content/post-electionpoll/>.

decision *Roe v. Wade*, making abortion legal. Even with pro-life appointments by a Republican president, the court would maintain its bias toward established law (*stare decisis*). Overturning *Roe v. Wade* would return the matter to the states, and most would allow abortion. Furthermore, data shows that abortion rates decline as social programs rise. Latin American countries banning abortion still have high rates due to poverty and women's low status. Northern European countries with permissive abortion law and expansive programs of health care and family support have much lower rates than the U.S.¹³ A bipartisan effort in Congress, The Pregnant Woman Support Act (H.R. 3192 and S. 2407), proposes to reduce abortions by promoting pregnancy assistance, adoption, and education and support for new mothers. The 2008 Democratic Party platform on abortion was expanded for the first time to include similar benefits.

Catholics prioritizing poverty, war, health care, immigration, or the environment; or limiting their abortion advocacy to socioeconomic measures, met swift and firm repudiation from some bishops who branded Obama unacceptable.¹⁴ Douglas Kmiec, a Catholic Republican law professor, declared support for Obama,¹⁵ was denied communion, then was denounced by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver. Chaput insists faith is relevant to politics, attacks anti-Catholicism, and warns against diluting Catholic identity.¹⁶ Garnering less media attention were bishops insisting on symmetry of issues or stressing "intrinsic evils" like racism.¹⁷

In his U.S. visit, Pope Benedict XVI called for action on war, poverty, and the environment. Days before the election, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, papal nuncio to the UN, called for protection of the global climate, food security, human rights, a moratorium on the death penalty, basic health care, education, economic development, and all other "necessary efforts . . . to create a society in which life is respected at all stages of

¹³ See Joseph Wright and Michael Bailey, *Reducing Abortion in America: The Effect of Social and Economic Supports*, sponsored by Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, 2008, http://www.catholicsinalliance.org/files/CACG_Final.pdf.

¹⁴ See Steinfelds, "Catholics and Choice"; and Winters, "Why They Didn't Listen."

¹⁵ Douglas W. Kmiec, *Can a Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question about Barack Obama* (Woodstock, N.Y.: Overlook, 2008).

¹⁶ Charles J. Chaput, *Render unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

¹⁷ See Archbishop John C. Favalora (Miami), "Why We Don't Take Sides on Candidates," pastoral letter of September 12, 2008, <http://www.miamiarchdiocese.org/Statement.asp?op=Column080912&lg=E>; and Bishop Blase Cupich (Rapid City, S.D.), "Racism and the Election," *America* 119.13 (October 27, 2008) 5, http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=11161.

development.”¹⁸ Yet Americans subordinated global concerns to domestic ones, especially the economy, the war in Iraq, universal health care, and energy policy.¹⁹

What are ramifications for Catholic ethics? First, *social ethics*. Does the election of Obama signal a new politics of social justice? Catholics by 71% support policies that “protect the interests of all and promote the common good,” compared to 13% who focus on abortion and same-sex marriage.²⁰ Yet Catholic voters did not obviously favor “solidarity” and the preferential option for the poor over their families’ welfare, especially economic security and health care. Political participation is crucial to healthy democracy and justice; the election enfranchised oppressed and disillusioned populations. Yet the gospel mandate to love one’s neighbor as oneself remains a challenge in view of competition for economic resources, overt racism, negative stereotyping of Muslims, and constricted interest in foreign policy obligations.

Second, *moral theology’s tools and methods*. Moral theology cannot set high stakes on individual decisions alone. The relation between acts and contexts has been a vexed topic since the proportionalist debates of the 1970s and 1980s. Faithful Citizenship’s paired condemnations of abortion and social sins remind us that all agency is socially embedded, that individuals are responsible for social evil, and that acts are not more “directly” or “intrinsically” evil than practices and institutions. Cathleen Kaveny shows that “intrinsic evils” are not all equally grave.²¹ Amelia Uelmen shows why they require prudential political analysis. She sees “intrinsic evil” as a “guardrail”; one could infer that “intrinsic evil” now functions more as a “prophetic” than a “casuistic” category,²² especially as redeployed against social practices.

Third, *ecclesiology, ethics, and politics*. In the run-up to the election, some bishops disparaged Democrats, warned Catholics away from Obama, and advised dissenters to refrain from communion. A few demurred, and many were silent. But bishops were not the sole shapers of Catholic

¹⁸ Catholic News Service, “Nuncio Talks to UN on Global Climate, Human Rights,” October 29, 2008, <http://www.uscatholic.org/news/2008/10/nuncios-talks-un-global-climate-human-rights>.

¹⁹ Jackie Calmes and Megan Thee, “Voter Polls Show Obama Built a Broad Coalition,” *New York Times*, November 5, 2008. On Catholics, see Patricia Zapor, “Catholic voters mirror general electorate in support for Obama,” Catholic News Service, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0805649.htm>.

²⁰ “Religion in the 2008 Election.”

²¹ M. Cathleen Kaveny, “Political Responsibility: Is the Concept of Intrinsic Evil Helpful to the Catholic Voter?” *America* 119.13 (October 27, 2008) 15–19.

²² Amelia J. Uelmen, “‘It’s Hard Work’: Reflections on Conscience and Citizenship in the Catholic Tradition,” *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* 47 (2008) 338–39.

politics. Catholics of every stripe were remarkably active, going beyond academic publications, mainstream media, and Catholic magazines, to produce parish and campus panels, local action committees, and Web sites and blogs reaching a huge new audience. This too is a healthy development, despite frequently divisive rhetoric.

Benedict XVI sent Obama a congratulatory message, identifying “peace, solidarity and justice” as the “special issues” on which his administration should make progress.²³ The laity has shown that it is ready and able to join political discourse and action on “Catholic” terms. Targets include health care, economic recovery, poverty, energy, trade policy, immigration, Iraq and Afghanistan, nuclear reduction, and abortion reduction via programs that empower women and support families. Much can be accomplished through synergy among lay spokespersons and agencies, Catholics in public office, offices of the USCCB, local dioceses and parishes, Catholic-sponsored education, Catholic political groups, and fellow citizens of every tradition and faith.

Obama promises a bipartisan administration. U.S. Catholics deserve a bipartisan Church—for Democrats and Republicans, traditionalists and progressives, and older and younger Catholics uninterested in reliving or reinventing the liberal-conservative hostilities of an earlier era. Obama’s campaign speech on race was hailed for its honesty, its empathy with fears and grievances of blacks *and* whites, and its call for forgiveness.²⁴ Catholic ethics and politics too should resist the “culture wars,” forging a dynamic vision from constructive debate, respectful criticism, practical commitment, and a hermeneutic of generosity toward others’ value priorities.

²³ Cindy Wooden, “Pope Sends Congratulatory Message to Obama,” Catholic News Service, <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0805616.htm>.

²⁴ Barack Obama, “A More Perfect Union,” Philadelphia, March 18, 2008, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=88478467>.

POLITICS AND CHURCH IN VENEZUELA: PERSPECTIVES AND HORIZONS

RAFAEL LUCIANI

RECENT DOCUMENTS FROM church conferences, councils, and institutions throughout Venezuela¹ have regularly employed and suggested two basic moral criteria for interpreting the nation's changing political situation: (1) the practice of exercising political power (*ethical* legitimacy of organizational and operational mediation); and (2) the horizon of any political system (*structural* criticism and legitimacy of purposes related to the new emerging model).

This new political system, known since 2005 as "21st-Century Socialism," is supported by President Hugo Chávez, even though it appears to be neither mandated by nor aligned with the articles of the 1999 National Constitution. The Venezuelan Episcopal Conference insisted on the need to clarify the orientation of this emerging model because "its ideological foundations and the models proposed as a reference . . . can indeed be an attempt to impose a single way of thinking. Faced with this, it is absolutely necessary that the Government and the official political sector clarify with no ambiguities or delays their reiterated proposal for this '21st-Century Socialism.'"² The bishops' exhortation carried two particular critiques:

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¹ This Note is concerned chiefly with documents of the Conferencia Episcopal Venezolana (CEV), Universidad Católica Andrés Bello (UCAB), Asociación Venezolana de Educación Católica (AVEC), Consejo Nacional de Laicos (CNL), *Revista SIC* from the Jesuits' sociopolitical center Centro Gumilla (SIC) and Conferencia Venezolana de Religiosas y Religiosos (CONVER).

² CEV, Exhortación Colectiva del Episcopado Venezolano en ocasión de su LXXXVI Asamblea Plenaria Ordinaria "Pensamientos de paz y no de aflicción (Jer 29:11)" (July 12, 2006). See http://www.cev.org.ve/noticias_det.php?id=329. All Web site addresses referred to in this Note have been accessed on November 30, 2008.

(1) expressions such as “revolution,” “Bolivarian Revolution,” and “21st-Century Socialism” indicate a radical reorientation not only of the political *praxis* but also of the legitimate *political system*, and these reorientations seem alien to the language of the constitution. (2) The political means to bring about a “21st-Century Socialism” continue to acquire an increasingly authoritarian and centralist character. As a case in point, the center and directing force of this “revolution” is Hugo Chávez in his capacity as president of the Republic, commander in chief of the armed forces, and president of the Government Party. This sets the question of *ethical legitimacy* of the current political *praxis*.

In the words of liberation theologian Pedro Trigo, S.J., the president “democratically exercises (because he can win elections) the dictatorship of the proletariat,” not as a member of the proletariat itself, but rather as its commander (*comandante*).³ Below, I attempt to outline this new modality of totalitarianism, this new “Democratic Caesarism.”⁴

UNDERSTANDING VENEZUELA’S CURRENT POLITICAL PRAXIS

The Venezuelan Episcopal Conference has reiterated that the “open clash between brothers should not continue nor should the government’s open, exclusive preference for those who support its current practice and structure. Nobody should be shut out or remain irrelevant on account of differing ideologies. All stand in need of each other, and all can contribute.”⁵ Unfortunately, despite the episcopal urgings, in 2006 political exclusion and discrimination, for the first time in Venezuelan history, became “policy of State.”⁶ This new policy has determined the current governmental practice of imposing the so-called “21st-Century Socialism” under “the dialectics of victors and victims” and “the included or the excluded.”

The situation in Venezuela is obviously more complex than space permits me to explain, but seven of the practical and theoretical elements of the neototalitarian environment in Venezuelan political praxis and horizon are these:

³ See Pedro Trigo, “Situación de Venezuela,” http://gumilla.org.ve/analisis/analisis_documentos.php.

⁴ José Virtuoso, “Balance y perspectivas,” *Revista SIC* 691 (January–February, 2007) 5.

⁵ CEV, Exhortación del Episcopado Venezolano “Ser luz del mundo y sal de la tierra en la Venezuela de hoy” (January 11, 2006), http://www.cev.org.ve/noticias_det.php?id=101.

⁶ See PROVEA’s annual report from 2006, http://www.derechos.org.ve/publicaciones/infannual/2005_06/index.html. Provea is a nonprofit human rights organization.

- (1) Marxist-Leninist orientation of this new political stage of the country, as evidenced by public statements from Chávez, important government spokesmen, and ideologists of the Bolivarian Revolution.⁷
- (2) Nationalization (on ideological grounds) of companies in strategic sectors, among them telecommunications, oil, food, and electricity.
- (3) The creation of a new popular power based on the new popular political spaces of the “communal state” with a marked trend toward weakening the institutional autonomy of municipalities.
- (4) Changing the current political system—as set forth in the 1999 National Constitution—by means of an Enabling Law that grants the President sweeping powers without oversight or consultation by the autonomous National Assembly. In 2008 alone Chávez wrote and gained approval for 26 such laws.
- (5) Political power is chiefly hegemonic. Hegemonic control is established by “popular electoral support,” that is, after an election, the party takes the victory as a mandate and legal ground for its proposed political structure and practice. Those citizens or political leaders not supporting the Government’s (i.e., the President’s) new direction become traitors to that Government. The result is a potentially permanent, oppressive autocracy devoid of oversight.
- (6) Ideology threatens to prevail over the spirit of community proper to all political practices. A social and political view of participation is emerging that neglects the will of all in favor of the will of “many” or in some cases “the few.” The political relevance of the human person takes center stage while the value of the person as free, moral subject is left in the wings.
- (7) Public education becomes politicized indoctrination intended to form students into the “new socialist man.” With other ecclesiastical offices, the bishops have warned that “the intention of government officials to politicize education and turn teachers into agents of indoctrination for a specific political model is unconstitutional and violates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Hence, it is unacceptable.”⁸

⁷ Heinz Dieterich, one of the main ideologists of the Bolivarian Revolution, in a speech during the 16th World Youth Festival (August 5–13, 2005), recognized that there is no incompatibility between Marx and Engels’s vision of socialism and the vision espoused by Hugo Chávez (Caracas: August 13, 2005). See “La revolución bolivariana y el socialismo del siglo XXI,” <http://www.aporrea.org/ideologia/a16108.html>.

⁸ CEV, LXXXVI Asamblea Plenaria Ordinaria “Pensamientos de paz y no de aflicción (Jer 29:11),” http://www.cev.org.ve/doc_detalle.php?id=29. The same viewpoint is shared by the Asociación Venezolana de Educación Católica (AVEC) and the Consejo Nacional de Laicos (CNL), among others.

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

Since the start of these “revolutionary” political changes, the Catholic Church has understood that it is missioned to be a bearer of reconciliation, offering “words of Christian brotherhood, mutual respect and hope” and inviting all to share “the great challenge of remaking the country based on a real democracy that will enable a life of peace, freedom, pluralism, and participation, so that we can reduce poverty and achieve governance for shared development and well being.”⁹

Currently, three lines of action frame the Church’s prophetic discourse: “strengthening the democratic system, sustainable national development, and education centered on the entire human person [rather than on the person as mere political unit].”¹⁰ With these three lines of action, the Church has in a sense made itself a prominent voice, even a mediator, in Venezuelan society, proclaiming “the centrality of the human person, human rights, political pluralism vis-à-vis ideological exclusion; a pluralistic education open to transcendence and religion; the struggle against poverty and unemployment, legal and social insecurity, and violence; freedom of expression and the right to be informed; a positive response to the subhuman living condition of our brothers and sisters deprived of freedom, and those who feel persecuted.”¹¹

The greatest challenge, though, that persists in the prophetic witness of the Church is to express the voice of all who still clamor for social justice and sustainable well-being. Thus the bishops state: “The attitude indispensable in the progressive search for and attainment of democratic solutions for our country is a clear opening to a true dialogue.”¹² The uniquely Christian option ought to be always for reconciliation. This necessarily demands the absence of absolutism in political and ideological options. To this end, it is necessary to acknowledge that society cannot be built on a single totalitarian project that disallows dissidence and pluralism of thought. Such a project is immoral personally, socially, and politically. It only reveals the fragile experience that guarantees defeat and collapse, sinking society into collective poverty.

⁹ CEV, Declaración de la Conferencia Episcopal Venezolana ante las elecciones del año 2000, “Unidos en la verdad, la esperanza y el compromiso” (May 8, 2000). See <http://www.analitica.com/va/politica/opinion/3813565.asp>.

¹⁰ See CEV, Exhortación del Episcopado Venezolano “Tiempo de diálogo para construir juntos” (December 13, 2007), <http://www.cev.org.ve/doc/final.pdf>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² CEV, Exhortación colectiva del Episcopado en ocasión de la LXXVII Asamblea Plenaria Ordinaria, “El Diálogo: camino hacia la paz” (January 11, 2002), published by the CEV in the Archivos de la Conferencia Episcopal, Caracas, 2002.