



Catholic Social Thought and Politics

In the eyes of our faith, politics is about love writ large. Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* quoted from Pope Benedict: “We need to be convinced that charity ‘is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members, or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic, and political ones).”¹ For Pope Francis, “An authentic faith...always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave the earth somehow better than we found it.”²

responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”⁵ This obligation flows from our duty to promote the common good and “is inherent in the dignity of the human person.”⁶ It may vary in part from country to country, culture to culture; but the Church praises those nations which “allow the largest possible number of citizens to participate in public affairs with genuine freedom.”⁷

reminds us, “Politics, though often denigrated, remains a lofty vocation and one of the highest forms of charity, inasmuch as it seeks the common good. ... I beg the Lord to grant us more politicians who are genuinely disturbed by the state of society, the people, the lives of the poor!”¹⁰ In addition to actually running for office, the U.S. Bishops urge the following: working within political parties; communicating directly with officials; joining Church advocacy networks; participating in community organizations; and other efforts “to apply authentic moral teaching in the public square.”¹¹ Then, the bishops add, “Even those who cannot vote have the right to have their voices heard on issues that affect their lives and the common good.”¹²

In Catholic teaching, politics also is seen as the proper, but not exclusive, domain of the laity. In the words of the Second Vatican Council: “Laymen should also know that it is generally the function of their well-formed Christian conscience to see that the divine law is inscribed in the life of the early city. ... Since they have

an active role to play in the whole life of the Church, laymen are not only bound to penetrate the world with a Christian spirit. They are also called to be witnesses to Christ in all things in the midst of human society.”⁸

The role of the bishops, assisted by priests and deacons, religious and lay leaders, is to “teach fundamental moral principles that help Catholics form their consciences correctly, to provide guidance on the moral dimensions of public decisions, and to encourage the faithful to carry out their responsibilities in political life.”⁹

What political activities are urged upon us by the Church? First, Pope Francis

In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.

Politics is one essential way in which we exercise our responsibility for co-creating the world entrusted to us by God and through which we express the communitarian nature of the human person. “Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics.”³ Political participation also enhances human freedom because, “Freedom acquires new strength ... when a man consents to the unavoidable requirements of social life, takes on the manifold demands of human partnership, and commits himself to the service of the human community.”⁴

As the U.S. Bishops have put it recently, “In the Catholic Tradition,

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 24, 2013, no. 205, quoting Pope Benedict, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, no. 2.
- ² *Ibid.*, no. 183.
- ³ Pope Benedict, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, no. 28.
- ⁴ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, no. 31.
- ⁵ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 2015, no. 13.
- ⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1913.
- ⁷ *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 31.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 43.
- ⁹ *Forming Consciences*, no. 15.
- ¹⁰ *Evangelium Gaudium*, no. 205.
- ¹¹ *Forming Consciences*, no. 16.
- ¹² *Ibid.*