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Catholic Bishops Out of Touch with Many Americans

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The November 7th brief statement by the collective Catholic bishops on our 2020 presidential election demonstrates how out of touch these top church leaders are with many of their faithful, and an appreciation for the socio-cultural and political state of America. This group proclaimed Joe Biden president and Kamala Harris vice president, given they “received enough votes to be elected,” more than a month before the Electoral College was to meet to select an official winner, and while the election was contested on several fronts.

After four years of silence on the stream of verbal attacks and personal smears on those living and working at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue that culminated in months of people taking rage and hate to the streets of our cities, these men tell Catholics to be the peacemakers, promote fraternity and mutual trust, conduct themselves with virtue and self-discipline, and treat one another with charity and civility. The statement, following their annual conference in Washington D.C., asks Catholics to rejoice that they have their second president who “professes the Catholic faith,” the first being John F. Kennedy, who was beloved by many Catholics.

Given these bishops believe that Joe Biden and Kamala Harris will institute policies that help Catholics build “His kingdom on earth,” that is evidence they somehow missed the 24/7 news reports that clearly bring into question that the two

give witness to Church teachings or promote public policies that comport with the Catholic faith. Similarly, their alluding to these newly elected as exemplars of Catholic life is peculiar.

The bishops seemingly overlooked the classic biblical warning against demagoguery by Jesus of Nazareth [Mark 12:17]: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” This theological condemnation warns of excess admixture of Church and State to satisfy personal agendas, albeit violated regularly during the past two millennia.

Jesus did encourage summoning religious motives to animate secular pursuits pursuant to the Judeo-Christian Ethic but, in doing so, there was to be no encroachment upon the choices of those who credibly invoke faith in the Church to advance their ideals. This is codified in the Constitution’s First Amendment “establishment vs. exercise” dynamic validating the discipline religious leaders must honor before dipping their toes into politics, particularly choosing to opine on divisive issues.

In modern US history, these heads of the church have taken a pick and choose approach for when to advocate to policymakers or encourage the faithful to get involved in the public sphere to advance a common good.

Adding irony to the directives in their widely distributed statement is that the head of the Conference, Archbishop José H. Gomez, has shown little outrage over the rampant incivility, looting, destroying and burning of public and private property, and assault and battery of police and others in Los Angeles—a hurting city in his diocese. Similarly, no group of bishops spoke outrage when St. John’s Episcopal Church, the church of presidents, was firebombed in early June, just across the street from the White House. Nor have American bishops been outspoken about the cavalier attitude governors have taken in shuttering churches across what we have taken for granted to be the land of the free.

It is understandable that many Catholics have little faith in Church leaders’ judgment on how to behave in the secular sphere when for decades these men failed to report to public authorities that priests under their watch were sexually abusing young boys and sometimes fraternizing with girls. How much “self-discipline,” for which they now ask of their flock, is needed to pick up the phone and report a crime? They failed a basic duty to protect the most vulnerable of their sheep.

“Compromise for the common good” is a reasonable ask by this conclave. This existed since the Founders constructed a remarkable document to establish the grand experiment we call America. However, to ask Catholic Americans to be dismissive of reality in the public sphere to support their opinion on secular issues is disingenuous.**About the Author**

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