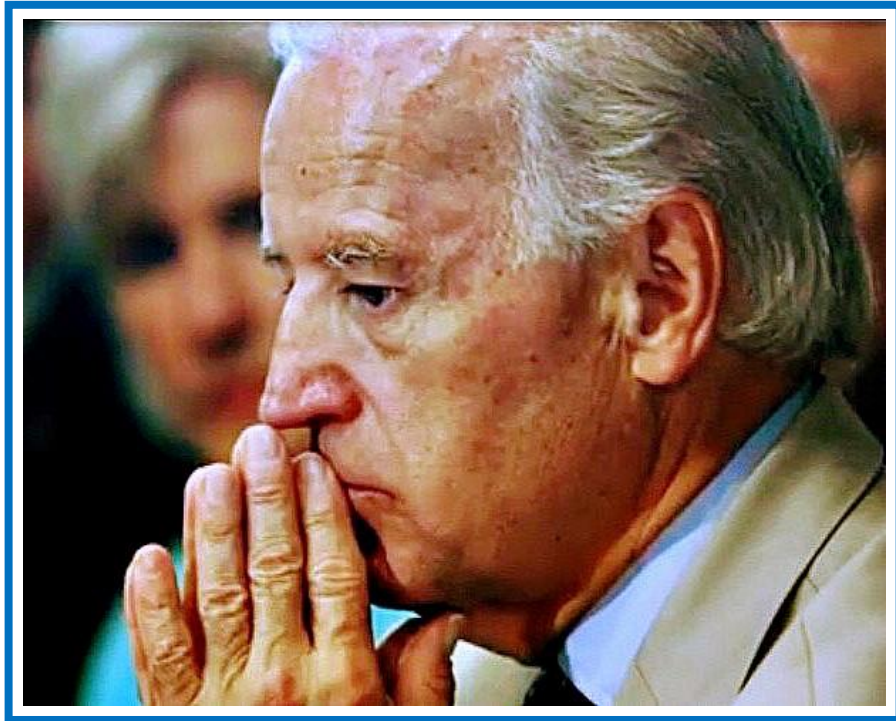


# THE CATHOLIC CASE for JOE BIDEN



*“My idea of self, of family, of  
community, of the wider world  
comes straight from my religion.”*

Patrick Whelan MD PhD

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# ***The Catholic Case for Joe Biden***

**Patrick Whelan MD PhD**

*Author of The Catholic Case for Obama*

*Founder of Catholic Democrats*

Owe nothing to anyone, except to love one another;  
for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.  
The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery;  
you shall not kill; you shall not steal; you shall not covet, "  
and whatever other commandment there may be,  
are summed up in this saying, namely,  
"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."  
Love does no evil to the neighbor;  
hence, love is the fulfillment of the law.

*Romans 13:8-10*



Dedicated to my son, Olivier,  
who inspires me every day,

and to all the Republicans who are setting aside party loyalty  
to support Joe Biden and Kamala Harris as a matter of  
devotion to the best interests of America and all Americans



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	7
Introduction	9
The Catholic Perspective	10
Joe Biden's Catholic Biography	12
A Catholic Faith Brought into the Public Arena	21
Catholics and the 2020 Democratic Convention	26
A Look Back at Barack Obama's Catholic Biography	34
Another Historic Vice Presidential Nominee	38
The Catholic Voice in the 2020 Election Season	39
The "American Carnage" of the Trump Presidency	41
The Moral Example of the Presidency	43
A Moral resurrection in the White House	44
The Embarrassing History of Republican Catholic Outreach	45
Tied in Knots: Catholic Apologists for Trump	48
Issues that Matter to Catholics	
• Health and the Covid-19 epidemic	52
• On the question of healthcare for all Americans	53
• Covid-19, schools, and the economic catastrophe of 2020	55
• Race and equality in our time	57
• "Cleaning the swamp": Trump and corruption	59
• Trump & Putin: "A useful idiot and a fellow traveler"	60
• Trump and the Supreme Court	61
• Abortion in American politics	63
• Reducing abortion now vs criminalizing it later	67
• Global warming and the future of our planet	69
• Welcoming the stranger vs. Catholic kids in cages	70
• Rebuilding the American economy	71
• On Trump's revival of the death penalty	71
• On the question of America's place in the world	72
On the art of compromise and humanizing others	73
The Catholic social tradition as a foundation for action in the world	74
References	75
About the author	80



# PREFACE

**J**oseph R. Biden Jr. was the first and only Roman Catholic vice president of the United States. He is only the fourth Catholic candidate to become the nominee of a major American political party for president. Four Democrats, no Republicans. This represents a historic bond between Catholics and the Democratic Party, which has long been a champion of immigrants from around



*Vice President Biden with his son, Beau, at the 2012 Democratic Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina*

the world – including Irish, Germans, Italians, Vietnamese, and Central and South Americans.

There was a movement after World War II to end legal discrimination based on race and ethnicity, beginning with President Truman's desegregation of the armed forces. Congress passed civil rights legislation in 1957 for the first time since Reconstruction, and amended it with the Civil Rights Act of 1960. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965

followed. Finally, the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 abolished the European-centric quotas dating to 1921 in order to reunite immigrant families and attract skilled labor to the United States. This was seen as an extension of the civil rights movement, striking at the vestiges of discrimination by national origin. The Democrats became truly a party of immigrants and workers, as American towns were enriched by the community spirit and talents of people from all over the world.

The Trump Presidency has, in contrast, made immigrants the enemy – a scapegoat for all of America's problems. "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best," Mr. Trump famously said when he announced his candidacy in 2015. "They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people." This set the tone for what became a policy of rejection – not just to undocumented immigrants, but to refugees and legal immigrants too. Coupled with a host of other issues that are of paramount importance to Catholics, the contrast between Mr. Biden and Mr. Trump could not be more stark.

My organization, *Catholic Democrats*, was founded in 2004 after another Catholic Democratic candidate found himself targeted by a campaign of what can only be called religious character assassination. It's shocking to think back and realize that Catholics helped carry President George W. Bush to victory that year over a fellow Catholic, after Mr. Bush invaded Iraq under the false pretense that Saddam Hussein was building nuclear weapons. No such weapons were ever found, but the destruction of Iraq brought the deaths of at least 288,000 people there (Count, 2020), revealed the administration's humiliating willingness to use torture, and unleashed forces that led to the Islamic State and destabilization across the Middle East. Despite this horror show in 2003, some Republican-leaning Catholic bishops decided to use the Holy Eucharist – the sacrament of peace – as a weapon against Senator John Kerry, threatening not only him but his

supporters with being denied Holy Communion. As we will discuss here, their simplistic crusade against Roe-vs-Wade led them to grave violations of Canon Law in attacking a fellow Catholic, and *Catholic Democrats* came into existence to oppose this kind of cruel and unwarranted defamation. Does anyone doubt that controlling Iraq's oil was the underlying motivation for the Iraq War? Despite what we now know about the destructive power of carbon emissions, you'll see here how the battle over Judge Amy Barrett's Supreme Court nomination – despite much discussion of abortion – is really about the drive by fossil fuel industries to protect themselves and their profits from regulators in the effort to address the global warming catastrophe.

In 2008, we published *The Catholic Case for Obama*, which told the story of Barack Obama's work as a community organizer in the 1980s for a group of nine Catholic parishes in Chicago, funded by the US Catholic Bishops. We organized a reunion of those priests and nuns, along with a food drive and welcome rally in South Bend, Indiana, when President Obama spoke at the Notre Dame Commencement in May 2009. I traveled with my son to Rome and was blogging from the Vatican when the Obama Family met Pope Benedict in the summer of 2009.

*Catholic Democrats* testified before the Obama/Biden administration's Abortion Reduction Task Force in September 2009. The following year, I published [a paper in the New England Journal of Medicine](#) showing that expansion of health insurance in Massachusetts led to dramatic decreases in unintended pregnancies and abortions – especially among teenagers – and we worked tirelessly to pass the *Affordable Care Act*. Our president, Steve Krueger, organized an event in Washington DC celebrating the Catholic contributions to the civil rights movement on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in August 2013 of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's *March on Washington*. We also worked to elect a woman of faith, Hillary Clinton, as president in 2016. She was a candidate who spoke frequently about her Methodist upbringing, and she brought a tremendous set of accomplishments to the table as the first woman candidate of a major party for president.

With the encouragement of Jerry Falwell, Jr. and other Evangelicals, however, conservative white Catholics broke for Donald Trump -- with his promise to appoint justices to the Supreme Court who would undermine legal abortion. As I will discuss below, the focus on overturning the Roe decision has obsessed conservatives, even as they ignore the fact that the Democrats passed substantial abortion reduction measures in 2010 as part of the *Affordable Care Act* – which also provided for wide availability of long-acting contraceptives that contributed to the most precipitous decline of abortions in history during the Obama/Biden administration.

Catholics in 2020, like most Americans, have a host of urgent priorities: rescuing the millions of small businesses and the education of millions of children that have been threatened by the mismanagement of the Covid-19 crisis; addressing the global warming catastrophe that is sending California up in flames and assaulting coastlines in Florida and the Gulf of Mexico with historic hurricanes; overcoming the racial fault lines in the wake of the deaths of George Floyd and so many other Black Americans; continuing the progress in decreasing unintended pregnancies that was a signal accomplishment of the Obama/Biden years; and making America a moral leader again in a world overwhelmed with refugees and conflict.

I decided to write this book because my Catholic sensibilities were assaulted every day the past four years by what I saw in the news: President Trump's relentless disregard for the truth in his utterances, his denigration of American allies and praise for leaders who undermine international peace and security, the way he has treated women in his life, and the racism that has been a bedrock principle in his business practices and now week-after-week courses through his public



remarks. As a physician caring for patients with Covid-19, I've watched the suffering night-after-night of people – both elderly and young – coming through our emergency rooms with Covid-19. It's clear that it didn't have to be this way, and that we have an exciting alternative choice now in Joe Biden, an effective leader and a public Catholic whom I have admired greatly for many years.

This book tells the story of Mr. Biden's Catholic upbringing, the effect his faith has had on his long career in public service, and it compares the contours of his public life with the Catholic Social Justice Tradition. It helps explain why Catholics are supporting Biden and Harris in 2020 the way they did Obama and Biden in 2008 and 2012 in pursuit of a better world.

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he president of the United States is more than just a chief executive for a \$4.8 trillion enterprise. More than just commander-in-chief and leader of a political party, he or she is a heroic exemplar for our children and for the life of the country. This book is about a candidate for president, former Vice President Joseph Biden, and his relationship to both his faith and to the larger American Roman Catholic community. Catholic support is critical to winning the presidency. With 70-million adherents, many concentrated in critical swing states, the “Catholic vote” is something that any candidate can ignore only at their peril.

Data generated by *Catholic Democrats* has shown that Catholics are significantly more likely to vote than the general population – even when adjusted for age. But Catholics are also an essential constituency in American life because of the values they bring to the public square. The Catholic Social Justice



*"It's very difficult to make the case that Joe Biden is anti-Catholic when he carries a Rosary," said Steven A. Krueger, president of Catholic Democrats*

Tradition, which emerged at the foundations of the American Labor movement in the 1890s, articulates a set of principles that provide a roadmap “for a more just, verdant, and peaceful world” (to paraphrase the MacArthur Foundation).

We explore here the cultural and faith perspective of Catholics in America on our political life, with voting as an act rooted for many of us in what it means to be an American Catholic today. I hope to shed some light on how American Catholics connect faith and politics. Reading this book may reassure some people that voting for former Vice President Biden and Senator Harris is the right thing to do.

I don't have any illusions that facts alone can persuade others in this day and age. In an era of “fake news” from social media and right-wing outlets like Fox and Breitbart, getting at the truth can be difficult. In a USA Today/Suffolk University poll in April, according to Aaron Blake writing

in the Washington Post, “of the 31% of Americans who believe Trump is honest and trustworthy, nearly 2/3 of them say Fox is their favorite news source. Among Fox-first viewers — who comprise about 25% of Americans in the survey — 78% say Trump is honest and trustworthy, while just 15% disagree.” He goes on to say, “Among the 3/4 of the population who don’t list Fox as their No. 1 news source, just 15% say Trump is honest and trustworthy, while nearly 80% say he is not.” (Blake, 2020)

“Gospel” means “good news,” and being a Catholic is all about finding “the way, the truth, and the life.” We think that this book will give you a more accurate picture of Joe Biden and his relationship to Catholicism. This discussion is about issues, like racism, peace and war, the environment, and life itself. It is also about recreating a sense of community in a time of division. As I wrote in 2008, “Eight years of war, and news stories about torture and soaring national debt, have served to put every American who travels abroad in the position of having to explain the unpopular actions of our government.” (Whelan, 2008)

Now the devastation has come home to the United States itself, with older Americans afraid to go out in public due to Covid-19, and 18 million Americans out of work. In many polls, Americans say they are tired of politicians pitting us against one another -- whether over race, household income, or religion. Former Vice President Biden and Senator Harris have prioritized bringing Americans together to solve the storm of crises afflicting us now. Their theme, “Restoring the Soul of our Nation,” takes the campaign to yet a higher level: restoring fundamental American and Catholic values of looking out for one another and also of restoring our moral leadership in the world. The cornerstones of Catholic Social Teaching are justice and reconciliation. The Catholic path takes us away from the divisions and hatreds of the present, and toward a more peaceful future.

## **THE CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE**

**C**atholics may not talk much about politics in the years between presidential elections. But every four years, many of us immerse ourselves in politics as one means of affirming who we are as a faith community, and what we believe in. We are the quintessential swing voters, concentrated in the ‘swing states’ and more likely to vote than other Americans.

In 2019 and 2020, the billion-dollar Trump reelection campaign committed itself to capitalizing on the ambivalence toward Secretary Clinton that led to the majority of white Catholics voting for Mr. Trump in 2016. The problem is that the Trump Campaign is now running up against the real deal: an authentic Catholic for whom faith is of tremendous personal importance.

In an opinion piece for the Religion News Service in December 2019, Joe Biden wrote, “Since I first declared my candidacy for president, I’ve said I’m running to restore the soul of our nation. I first learned those values growing up in a Catholic, middle class family in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and Claymont, Delaware. I learned them at my father’s dinner table, at Sunday Mass and at St. Paul’s and Holy Rosary Elementary. The nuns there taught us reading, writing, math and history — as well as core concepts of decency, fair play and virtue. They took as a starting point the teaching from the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’” (Biden J. , 2019)

Confronted with an authentic Catholic opponent, the Trump Catholic Outreach people are left trying to explain how someone who used military force on peaceful protestors to make way for his one trip to church this year is in any way an exemplar for Christian values.

This book is about deconstructing the myths that conservatives have worked for forty years to plant in the public imagination about Democrats – with insulting labels like “pro-abortion” or “self-serving do-gooders.” In particular, the battle over replacing Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the Supreme Court brings to the fore all the passions of the abortion debate.

With the feckless denials about the dangers of Covid-19, the collapse of the U.S. economy, the anti-intellectualism about global warming in the face of fires across the West and hurricanes battering the Southeast, and the indifference to the suffering of Black Americans brought to light by George Floyd’s death, Mr. Trump has begun to show his true colors – as someone of very limited capacity for empathy, unwillingness to defer to experts, and a lack of humility evident in declarations like “I and I alone can fix it.”

Many Catholics have begun to recognize how our religious language and symbols have been appropriated to win elections for people like Mr. Trump with a world view that significantly diverges from Catholic teaching and sensibilities. The Catholic perspective on American political life is very much shaped by 130 years of Catholic Social Teaching through church encyclicals, synods, and pastoral letters addressing the dignity of the individual and in particular the plight of the world’s poor. Former Vice President Biden has a world view that has been shaped by his exposure to Catholic thought. He attended Catholic elementary schools and high school, and has spoken often about his faith as a formative force in his life – through the good times and the bad times.

Our Church has suffered immensely the past twenty years, from the glaring missteps related to the abuse crisis, from the Covid-19 shutdown, and from the movement of young people away from religion generally. But the traditions and sacraments and the deep moral theology of the Church remain as a source of strength that binds together our worldwide community of believers. Above all, Biden Catholicism is a brand that believes and preaches a sense of responsibility for one another. It is through this lens, at the crossroads between the ancient and the modern, that we view the question of how a Catholic thinks about a presidential election.

For reasons explored here, the election of 2020 is among the most consequential of any in our lifetime. This book explores the life and work of former Vice President Joseph Biden and Senator Kamala Harris. It explains how their political adversaries are seeking to misrepresent their views in this election, especially with regard to those issues that matter uniquely to people of faith. Because Mr. Biden is a devoted Catholic, we explore his faith biography and the way that some conservatives are seeking to use his Catholicism against him in the election. Finally, the book presents, from a Catholic point of view, how the Biden/Harris ticket and their administration plan to tackle the most serious issues facing our country and the world in the wake of the dueling Trump/Covid nightmares.

## JOE BIDEN'S CATHOLIC BIOGRAPHY

**W**hen Candidate Obama chose Senator Joseph Biden as his vice presidential nominee, it made three bold statements about Mr. Obama himself: (1) He was not afraid to engage with someone who had been a rival, in the same way that Mr. Biden has now welcomed his old adversary, Senator Kamala Harris, as his vice presidential colleague, (2) he was looking for someone with the experience on Capitol Hill to get things done, and (3) he was comfortable with Mr. Biden's Catholic faith, and with the idea of welcoming the nation's first Catholic vice president.

As beautifully chronicled in Jules Witcover's biography, (Witcover, 2010) Joseph Robinette Biden Jr was born on November 20, 1942. His father was working out-of-town at the time, so a neighbor – Tom Phillips – drove Joey's mother to St. Mary's Hospital in Scranton Pennsylvania to deliver her first child. The hospital was built in 1915 -- the year that Joey's father, Joseph R. Biden Sr., was born – “of pressed brick, marble, and limestone, and run by the Sisters of St. Francis.” At its creation, it was described as “modern in every respect, and cost more than \$50,000.” (Staff R. , 1916) It had deeply religious origins: “One of the most beautiful chapels ever incorporated in a hospital has been perfected,” said an article about its dedication. “Mahogany seats and glazed windows add to the attractiveness of the place of worship. Above the altar is a handsome hand painting of Christ. The chapel is on the second floor adjoining the chaplain's room and the sacristy. At the head of the stairs on the second floor is a statue of Christ...”

Joseph Biden Sr. was the son of Joseph H. Biden, who had emigrated in his youth with a brother, Charles, from Liverpool to Baltimore and grew up working in the oil business. J.H. Biden's wife, Mary Elizabeth Robinette, hailed from Maryland as well. Joey Biden's father was 14-years-old when the Great Depression struck. Although he attended a Catholic high school in Scranton, St. Thomas Academy, he regretted not having had the chance to attend college. In *Promises to*

*Keep*, Joe Biden describes his father as a very elegant man – a talented singer and dancer, skilled on the clarinet and saxophone, a former polo player who could pilot a Piper Cub or sail a boat solo on the Chesapeake Bay.



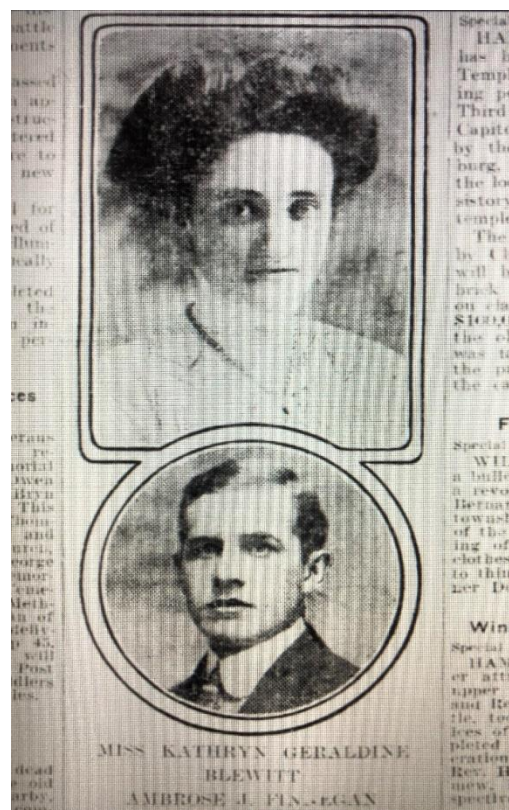
*The Santa Clara College Track team, spring 1902 commencement program/Kelci McDowell, SCU Archives*

Joey's mother had a father who was something of a local hero, and someone who was particularly close to the future presidential candidate. Ambrose Finnegan had grown up in Olyphant, Pennsylvania, northeast of Scranton. He was orphaned before age 16 when his parents died in California, and like his wife-to-be Kathryn Blewitt, he attended St.

Cecilia's Academy, a boarding school in Scranton. In 1901 he made his way to California, where he attended the Jesuit Santa Clara College. A graduation program from 1902 has a photo of the Track Team that appears to include Ambrose Finnegan (with bowtie in the middle). There was no picture of the football team. But Santa Clara had a new football program that had begun in



1896 and was coached at the turn of the Century by Gene Sheehy. Witcover's biography pegs Mr. Finnegan as their famous quarterback, but Chuck Hildebrand's book, "Bronco Sundays," paints a messier picture. It was a brutal game then. Wearing pink striped shirts and socks, the "Santa Clarans" beat St. Mary's College in the 1898 meeting, 54-0. Half-back Bob Coward wrote then, "The thought in those days was to advance that leather no matter how. Line smashing was in vogue. The backs were handed the oval and shoved through the barrier. When the line was too invincible, the ball totter was catapulted to the other side." (Hildebrand, 1998) Mr. Coward's parents had strictly forbade him to play, fearing the consequences of such a primitive game. In 1898 he suffered a spinal injury that left him a paraplegic for the rest of his life. During Mr. Finnegan's time, the "Elevens" (as they were known) played three to five games per year "against opponents like the Palo Alto Athletic Club, San Jose Business College, and Mission High School in San Francisco." (Hildebrand, 1998)



The team was undefeated in 1904, scoring 46 points vs. none for their opponents. But after the 1905 season, they dropped football entirely due to mounting casualties nationally and also the death that year of a Santa Clara Prep player in a high school game. "A 'funeral' was held, during which a football was buried beneath home plate at the school baseball diamond," (Hildebrand, 1998) and the school moved instead into rugby – taking on rivals like Stanford and USC. Santa Clara did become a football powerhouse after World War I, winning the Sugar Bowl against LSU in 1937 and again in 1938, and the Orange Bowl against Kentucky in 1950.

When Vice President Biden accepted the *Laetare* Medal at Notre Dame and spoke at their 2016 Commencement, he began his remarks by saying, "Fr. Jenkins, my grandfather, Ambrose Finnegan, who played for Santa Clara at the turn of the century and was a newspaperman at Scranton, always resented Notre Dame. Because Santa Clara had a football team, particularly in the teens and '20s and '30s, referred to as the Notre Dame of the West. He said, 'Hell, [ND is] the Santa Clara of the Midwest!' Grandpop, forgive me. I

played football at the University of Delaware and in high school, and I finally made it to the 50-yard line in Notre Dame Stadium. Man, this is worth the trip. You all think I'm kidding. I'm not!"

Mr. Finnegan worked in a real estate office after graduating, and was asleep on the night of April 17, 1906, when the great San Francisco earthquake struck. The new \$7,000,000 city hall was "crushed like an eggshell," and he later recounted how Evangelicals "paraded around with signs, 'Prepare to Meet Your God. This is the End of the World!'" (Staff, 2 Scrantonians Saw Earthquake of 1906 Ruin San Francisco, 1942)

Joey Biden's maternal grandmother, Kathryn, was the daughter of a state senator, Edward F. Blewitt. Fate was definitely at work for Ambrose and Kathryn. Their wedding announcement in the Philadelphia Inquirer stated, "Their attachment began while children and the marriage is the

culmination of their school day friendship.” They were married in St. Mary’s Church on May 30, 1909. (Staff I. , 1909)

Joe Biden’s Grandfather Ambrose was a surveyor for the Hudson Coal Company, then worked in construction. He became the advertising manager for the Elmira Telegram, and later for The Scrantonian and The Tribune. (Staff, Ambrose Finnegan Named Librarian for Newspapers, 1945)

Joey’s mother, Jean, was the only daughter, with four brothers – including Lt. Ambrose Finnegan Jr, who was killed in aerial combat in the South Pacific during World War II. Jean was a graduate of Marywood Seminary and was a member of the Catholic Junior League, working then at the Medical Arts Building in Scranton. Joe Sr. attended St. Thomas High School, becoming a salesman afterward for American Oil Company. Joe and Jean got married on May 31, 1941 at St. Paul’s Church. The bride wore pearls and carried white roses, gardenias, and baby’s breath. Joe and his bride moved in with the Finnegans in the Green Ridge neighborhood of Scranton. (Staff, Jean Finnegan, Joseph R. Biden Wed in St. Paul’s, 1941) Tragically, Joey’s father’s father, Joseph H. Biden, died suddenly in Baltimore just four months later – never to meet the famous grandson who was born just a year after. (Staff T. , 1941)

Joey Biden had a very Catholic stamp on his childhood. In his autobiography, *Promises to Keep*, he had this to say about attending Mass on Sundays:

“My attendance was not optional. The entire Finnegan clan rode over to St. Paul’s Catholic Church together and church always felt like an extension of home. I had worked my way through the questions of the Baltimore catechism: Who made us?...Who is God?...What is a Spirit?...What do we mean when we say that God is all good? ...I could practically recite the entire catechism. I’d memorized the Lord’s Prayer and the Apostles Creed. I’d been to my first confession. My Grandpop Finnegan had taught me to say the Rosary. And every night when I went in to kiss my grandpop good night, he’d remind me: ‘Three Hail Mary’s for purity, Joey.’ It was a long time before I understood he was talking about chastity. In the beginning I thought he meant nobility or purity of cause, ideas that tracked with the sermons we heard at St. Paul’s. It was more about doing good than being good.” (Biden J. R., 2007)

The family moved briefly to Boston, where Joey’s sister Valerie was born in 1944, but hard times financially compelled them to move back in with the Finnegans after the war. Joey started Catholic school in their neighborhood at St. Paul’s, where his parents had been married. He recounted a story from St. Paul’s where a nun named Sr. Michael Mary had stepped out of class one day, and returned to find one of the kids had hurled an eraser across the room. She demanded to know who it was, and said the whole class would have to stay after if the guilty party didn’t fess up. “So I raised my hand,” he wrote, “Sister, I did it.” At the end of the day, she sent all the other kids home, but apparently Joey wasn’t a very good liar. “You admitted to doing something you didn’t do,” she said. “It’s admirable, but you still have to pay for it. You still have to stay after school.” He said he never forgot that lesson, that when you’re party to a subterfuge, you have to be willing to suffer the consequences. (Biden J. R., 2007)

He spoke admiringly about another nun, Sr. Lawrence Joseph (why did all these women religious have to labor in life with clunky men’s names?!), who would play baseball with the kids – pulling up her habit and running the bases. He said that although he was one of the most diminutive kids, Sr. Lawrence Joseph never stopped encouraging him to stand up for himself. “They were always building me up,” both about his short stature and about his stuttering.

Ultimately when he was age ten, they fell on hard times financially and decided to move back where his father had grown up. The family moved 140 miles away to Wilmington, Delaware for good. (Witcover, 2010) In his autobiography, Mr. Biden recounted the excitement of moving into a house across the street from his future high school:



“The Patio at Archmere... was a magnificent Italianate marble pile on a property that sloped down to the Delaware River. Archmere — ‘arch by the sea’ — was named for the arch of elms that ran on that slope to the river. But after the working man's families, not to mention the noise and pollution from the mills, began to crowd the Patio, [John] Raskob cut his losses and sold the mansion to an order of Catholic priests. The Norbertines turned it into a private boys' school. Archmere Academy was just twenty years old when I moved in across the street.

“When I played CYO football that year, our coach was Dr. Anzelotti, a Ph.D. chemist at DuPont who had sons at the school. Archmere let Dr. Anzelotti run our practices on the grounds of the school. From the moment I got within the ten-foot-high wrought iron fence that surrounded the campus and drove up the road — they actually called it the yellow-brick road — I knew where I wanted to go to high school. I didn't ever think of Archmere as a path to greater glory. When I was ten, getting to Archmere seemed enough. I'd sit and stare out my bedroom window and dream of the day I would walk through the front doors and take my spot in that seat of learning. I'd dream of the day I would score the touchdown or hit the game-winning home run.

I entered third grade at Holy Rosary, a Catholic school half a mile down the Philadelphia Pike where the Sisters of Saint Joseph eased me into my new world. They were the link between Scranton and Claymont. Wherever there were nuns, there was home. I'm as much a cultural Catholic as I am a theological Catholic. My idea of self, of family, of community, of the wider world comes straight from my religion. It's not so much the Bible, the beatitudes, the Ten Commandments, the sacraments, or the prayers I learned. It's the culture. The nuns are one of the reasons I'm still a practicing Catholic.”

He related a story about visiting a group of nuns years later in Dubuque, Iowa, in the summer of 2006 – and how his mother had told him never to come empty-handed to visit nuns. So he took several gallons of ice cream, and found himself in the company of 40 women religious, former teachers, all asking questions about the history of the Middle East (the topic of the day), but also about women's issues, national security, and



education. "And as I was getting ready to leave, Teri asked if the sisters would, in the days ahead, pray for Joe Biden's success in his public journey. But they did more than that. The sisters formed a circle around me, raised their arms up over my head, and started singing the blessing they give to one of their own who is going off to do God's work in the next place:

'May God bless you and keep you.' The sisters were so sweet and so genuine that it made me feel the way I did when I was a kid, like I was in touch with something bigger than me. It wasn't any epiphany, wasn't any altar call. It was where I've always been. The Sisters of Saint Francis in Dubuque, Iowa, were taking me home."

Joey was also a member of the Boy Scouts as a kid, and Scouting has had a special relationship with the presidency since its founding in 1910. John F. Kennedy, one of Mr. Biden's great heroes, was the first president who had been a Scout himself. Gerald Ford was the first president who was himself an Eagle Scout, which he counted as one of his proudest accomplishments.



President Jimmy Carter served early in his life as a Scoutmaster, though he had no sons in Scouting himself. George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama were all members of the Cub Scouts as kids. President Trump was not a Scout, but famously spoke (about himself) at the 2017 National Jamboree in West Virginia. If elected, Mr. Biden will be only the third president to have been a Boy Scout himself.

In thousands of letters of congratulation to Eagle Scouts that Joe Biden sent as a senator and then vice pres-

ident, he said, "To an Eagle Scout, there is no limit to what can be achieved through earnest effort. I encourage you to always pursue 'honor, loyalty, courage, and service' throughout your life."

I can attest in my own life to the enduring values taught by Scouting, despite all the current problems in the Boy Scouts of America. As an assistant scoutmaster myself, and watching my own son rise through the ranks to Eagle Scout, I can endorse the investment of time that Scouts make in developing strong friendships, cultivating a love of nature and the outdoors, and internalizing essential qualities like truthfulness and selflessness. Perhaps



OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT  
WASHINGTON

March 25, 2016

Blake  
Wayne, New Jersey

Dear Blake:

Congratulations on receiving the rank of Eagle Scout. This honor is a testament to your hard work and dedication over several years, and you should be proud.

Becoming an Eagle Scout undoubtedly allowed you to learn many valuable life lessons, acquire numerous important skills, adopt guiding principles, and forge new and lasting friendships. I know this because I was once a Boy Scout. You should take great pride in the effort you put forth and the honor that this rank brings you.

To an Eagle Scout, there is no limit to what can be achieved through earnest effort. I encourage you to always pursue "honor, loyalty, courage, and service" throughout your life. I know that these values, along with the leadership skills you perfected while striving towards the rank of Eagle, will serve you well in all your future endeavors.

Congratulations,

Joseph R. Biden, Jr.



it is no coincidence that the “Scout Law,” a list of 11 desirable attributes in a Scout, ends with “Reverent” – virtues to which Scouts are urged to aspire throughout their lives.

Although he paid tribute to the values he learned in Scouting, Joey was a mischievous boy -- as well-documented in the Witcover biography. Yet he had a special reverence for the Church and for the teachers through his 12 years of Catholic education, and the values that they imbued. In his autobiography, Mr. Biden wrote:

The nuns were my first teachers. At Holy Rosary, like at Saint Paul's in Scranton, they taught reading and writing and math and geography and history, but embedded in the curriculum also were the concepts of decency, fair play, and virtue. They took as a starting point the Biblical exhortation that man has no greater love than to lay down his life for another man; in school we were about ten clicks back from that. You didn't give your life, but it was noble to help a lady across the street. It was noble to offer a hand up to somebody who had less. It was noble to step in when the bully was picking on somebody. It was noble to intervene.

His family moved again when he was 12, buying a house four miles west in the Mayfield section of Wilmington. He attended a third Catholic school for seventh grade, St. Helena's. In his autobiography, Mr. Biden related an oft-told story about being ridiculed one day by one of the nuns about his stuttering. With the name Biden, he always found himself sitting in the front of the classroom. He ran home that day, and his mother famously carted him back to school – where she sternly stood up to the teacher in a way that must have made an impression (or perhaps which might have gotten the whole family kicked out of the school).

He recounted another story about being appointed a lieutenant on safety patrol, “with a shiny blue badge.” One of his duties was to report bad behavior on the school bus. He recalled finding himself in a bind when his sister Valerie got in some kind of trouble on the way home from school one day. He was in a quandary about whether to report his own sister the next morning to the nuns who had entrusted him with this responsibility, knowing that the other kids knew about it. He asked his father for advice at the dinner table, and rather than tell him what to do his father urged him to think outside the box. “I knew what I had to do. The next day I turned in my badge.” (Biden J. R., 2007)

At age 14 he was accepted to Archmere Academy back in his old Claymont neighborhood on a work-study scholarship. He worked the summer before, and related the excitement of showing up the first day in his jacket and tie. “I think I gasped the first time I walked into the library. Like the other rooms, it was paneled with rich, dark wood, but it was lined floor to ceiling with books. I thought I'd died and gone to Yale.”

After his Grandfather Finnegan died in 1956, his mother's brother moved in with them – and stayed for 17 years. College-educated, “he'd make me read the New York Times editorial page, then sit and argue politics with me and my friends.” He remembered being driven with his sister down to Washington DC, where his uncle walked up to Senator Everett Dirksen and introduced the kids. His uncle's stuttering motivated him to work hard at getting rid of his own. He told a story about Demosthenes, the great Greek orator, who had overcome stuttering by putting pebbles in his mouth and practicing his speaking. He must have begun to master the medium, because his sophomore year he was a class representative, and then class president his junior and senior years. His senior year he was the leading scorer for their undefeated and untied football team. In 1961 he stood up on stage at his graduation and welcomed all the kids and

parents “without a single stammer,” relieved to finally be done with the childhood companion that had taught him such an enduring lesson about empathy and vulnerability.

As a high school student, he watched with admiration the rise of President Kennedy. “The thing that struck me about his inaugural address in January 1961 was not the newness of the ideas but how much those ideas rhymed with the lessons I’d learned at St. Paul’s and Holy Rosary and St. Helena’s and Archmere – and especially in my own home. We have to do good works on earth, Kennedy reminded us, because it is our duty.” He recalled the famous conclusion to that speech: “With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own.”

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“One of our neighbors...[had] little paths made of pebbles. So I grabbed about ten of these pebbles and...stuck them in my mouth, and tried to throw my voice off our brick wall. For the record, it doesn’t work. I nearly swallowed half the pebbles.”

*Joe Biden, Promises to Keep, p.22*

Mr. Biden’s autobiography related in great detail the lengths to which he went to court his future wife, Neilia Hunter; how supportive she was through all his college and law studies; and the personal sacrifices he made, supporting them financially while he devoted himself to advancing their life together. He started his career in a well-heeled law firm, but became disillusioned – particularly in the context of the National Guard occupying Wilmington for a year following the killing of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968. By the following year, Wilmington was the only city in the country where the Guard was still patrolling predominantly Black neighborhoods.

One summer when he was 19, he had worked as a lifeguard at an inner city neighborhood pool. “Every day, it seemed to me, Black people got subtle and not-so-subtle reminders that they didn’t quite belong in America. It was a dozen small cuts a day...so in 1968 when I heard the people from the inner city complain about the way they were being treated by Governor Terry and the National Guard, I knew what they were saying.”

He went to work as a public defender, and his wife got a job teaching at a local Catholic grade school. He recounted running for office in 1970, and winning a seat on the New Castle County Council in a Republican district with a campaign managed by his sister. He started his own law firm, and watched as his life seemed to be coming together perfectly. The story of his election to the U.S. Senate just two years later, at age 29, is nothing short of a miracle. He unseated a Republican incumbent who hadn’t lost a statewide race since 1946.

He and Neilia closed on a small colonial house near Chevy Chase Circle, “...and that Sunday night, with the children asleep over our heads, Neilia and I sat on our lone wing chair, in front of the warm glow of a fire, in our stone fireplace, in a moment of near perfect repose. The moment exceeded all my romantic youthful imaginings. I was a United States senator-elect at age thirty. Our family was together under one splendid roof. The doors were just beginning to swing open on the rest of our lives.” But then a week before Christmas in 1972, tragedy struck in Wilmington, while Mr. Biden himself was in Washington setting up his new office.

After the death of his wife and their 1-year-old daughter, Naomi, Mr. Biden was left to care for his two injured sons by himself. He made a point of commuting 90-minutes each way every day from Washington to Delaware. He wrote, "I'd take them up to their room and lie in bed with them, put my hands on them, talk to them. We'd say our prayers together including three Hail Mary's like Grandpop Finnegan always did."



In a 2018 interview for the PBS Newshour with Judy Woodruff, Mr. Biden mentioned a letter given to him by Mrs. Vicki Kennedy — written by Senator Ted Kennedy's father to a friend whose son had died in the 1950s. The senior Kennedy had wrestled with his grief over the death of his oldest son during World War II: "Why? Why me?" Maybe, he had advised his

friend, the purpose of his life going forward was to contemplate what his son would have been doing if still alive, and then to dedicate one's self to completing that work. Said Mr. Biden in the interview, "There is hope and purpose devoting yourself to something that really matters, that matters to you, mattered to the loved one you lost."

He also mentioned a favorite cartoon that he has framed on his desk: A reminder that everyone suffers, and who are we to seek to blame God for our woes? It is *Hägar The Horrible*, a comic strip by Dik Browne, featuring Hägar stranded on a rock as his ship is sinking, struck by lightning in the pouring rain. "Why me?!" he cries. To which God responds, "Why not?"



He concluded the interview by saying he has advised others grappling with grief that, “The day will come when the memory of the person you lost brings a smile to your lip before a tear to your eye.” (Newshour, 2018) Mr. Biden wrote a beautiful memoir, entitled *Promise Me, Dad* (2017), about the challenge of serving as vice president while his son Beau was suffering from glioblastoma multiforme, which took his life in May 2015.

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Joe Biden often said that Jill Jacobs gave him his life back. She was the oldest of five girls, non-political, younger, with her own career ambitions. In her own book, *Where the Light Enters* (2019), Jill related a story about meeting Neilia Biden on election night in 1972 at a celebration in Wilmington. “She had an easy natural beauty that made her look almost out of place in the frantic crowd. Even surrounded by strangers vying for attention, she seemed calm, with a warm, genuine smile. From across the room, you could see how happy she was – happy, and incredibly proud...On the spur of the moment, I decided to say hello. I walked up to her, held out my hand, and said, ‘Congratulations on your win.’ ...in that instant, I thought about how picturesque their family was – the handsome young senator, trying to better the world; his beautiful, loving wife, representing their family, always there to cheer him on; and three adorable kids.”

Two years after his wife’s death, Joe stumbled at age 31 on a photo of Jill and learned by chance that she was an acquaintance of his brother, Frank. Joe phoned her out of the blue that afternoon. They shook hands that night after their first date, and met again for dinner each of the next two nights. A year later, she began teaching ninth- and tenth-grade English at a Catholic high school, St. Mark’s, in Wilmington. Joe famously asked her five times to marry him over a two year period. He offered not to run for reelection in 1978 if that would make the difference to her, and ultimately she made the decision for him to run again. When she finally said yes to marriage, she wrote, “...he held my shoulders and looked me straight in the eye. ‘I promise you, your life will never change,’ he said.” Of course, she wrote, this would turn out to be wildly untrue.

They were married by a Catholic priest in June 1977 at the United Nations chapel in New York. She was wearing a “white eyelet dress.” His sons stood with them at the altar; “The way they thought of it, the four of us were getting married,” he wrote in *Promises to Keep*. Similarly, she wrote in her book that, “These precious little boys knew the obvious better than anyone else: that for richer or poorer, in sickness and health, it was us against the world.” (Biden J. , 2019)



Jill Biden studied for a bachelor’s and later a doctorate at the University of Delaware (completed when she was 55), taught high school English and reading for 13 years, and then community college from 1993 to the present. She had grown up in the Philadelphia area,

with agnostic parents, but pursued membership herself in a local Presbyterian church. She spoke several times at events for *Believers for Biden*, in very moving terms, about her own faith and how running for office had helped her deal with the existential questions raised by the death of their son, Beau, in 2015.

Ashley Blazer Biden was born in June 1981, named by her two brothers, “...and all four of us were instantly in love. I could tell from day one that Joe was going to spoil her, and boy, did he ever. And Beau and Hunt adored her. They cradled her with so much tenderness, in a way that

seemed unlikely from ten- and eleven-year-old boys. We brought her home together, and each of us knew our family was complete.” (Biden J. , 2019) For years the Bidens have attended church at St. Joseph on the Brandywine in Greenville, Delaware. Their pastor, Msgr. Joseph Rebman, told NCR, "They arrive a little late and leave a bit early, just like a lot of Catholics." (White, How Joe Biden's Catholic roots have shaped his public life, 2020)

Joe Biden had his own health scare, after spending 1987 running for president for the first time. In February 1988, he suffered a ruptured cerebral aneurysm. His family was told there was a 50:50 chance he wouldn't survive surgery that day at Walter Reed Medical Center. In the end he did remarkably well, running again for president twenty years later.



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“There have been many times when he was broken by life – too many. But he’s always found a way to put himself back together...I wanted a partner who could shoulder all of life’s disappointments, tragedies, and sorrows with me. But, my God, I never imagined what that would actually mean. I never thought that my life would plunge to such dark depths or reach such glorious heights.”

Jill Biden, *Where the Light Enters*

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## **A Catholic faith brought into the public arena**

**“My** views are totally consistent with Catholic social doctrine,” Mr. Biden has said. “There are elements within the church who say that if you are at odds with any of the teachings of the church, you are at odds with the church. I think the church is bigger than that.” (Chaddock, 2007)

In an interview with the National Catholic Reporter, John Carr, director of Georgetown University's Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, said, "For an Irish Catholic kid growing up at a time of Vatican II, civil rights and the Vietnam War, there were several paths forward. Some resisted change and clung to old ways, some abandoned roots to embrace change, and some found in faith and family the strength to work for greater justice. [Former] Vice President Biden is a unique combination of roots and change." (White, How Joe Biden's Catholic roots have shaped his public life, 2020)

"Biden actually sees his Catholic faith as a key for bringing the country back together and overcoming the divisions that divide us," said Stephen Schneck, director of the Franciscan Action Network. "He thinks there's something in Catholicism itself that provides a ground where both



sides can find common cause." (White, How Joe Biden's Catholic roots have shaped his public life, 2020)

In May 2016, Mr. Biden was the recipient along with former Speaker of the House John Boehner of the *Laetare* Medal at Notre Dame's commencement. The university's press announcement



stated, "In recognition of their leadership, civility and dedication to our nation, the University of Notre Dame presented two Catholic officials from opposing political parties — Vice President Joe Biden and former Speaker of the House John Boehner — with its 2016 *Laetare* Medal, the oldest and most prestigious honor accorded to American Catholics. The award was given under sunny skies at Notre Dame's 171st university commencement ceremony on Sunday, May 15, 2016. Rev. John I. Jenkins, C.S.C., president of Notre Dame, spoke to

the graduates and families about the unusual recognition, saying, "We live in a toxic political environment where poisonous invective and partisan gamesmanship pass for political leadership.

Public confidence in government is at historic lows, and cynicism is high. It is a good time to remind ourselves what lives dedicated to genuine public service in politics look like. We find it in the lives of Vice President Biden and Speaker Boehner.

"While both have been loyal and committed partisans, they were leaders who put the good of the nation ahead of partisan victory, seeking through respectful dialogue honorable compromise and progress. Speaker Boehner's resistance to a simple reductionism made him suspect in his own party; Vice President Biden reminded his fellow Democrats that those in the other party are 'our opponents, not our enemies.'"

The *Laetare* Medal (Latin for "rejoice!") bears the inscription, *Magna est veritas et prevalebit* ("Truth is mighty, and it shall prevail"). This distinction was established at Notre Dame in 1883, awarded annually to a Catholic "whose genius has ennobled the arts and sciences, illustrated the ideals of the Church and enriched the heritage of humanity."



The commencement invocation first saluted Representative Boehner, sitting tearfully nearby, and then turned to Vice President Biden. Mr. Richard Notebaert, chairman of the Notre Dame Board of Trustees, read the citation, stating, “Mr. Vice President, you likewise come from a blue collar upbringing, yours in northeast Pennsylvania. Your grace in the face of tragic personal losses — first of Neilia and Naomi and more recently of your beloved Beau — have stirred us, as has your decades-long commitment to family.



So it is neither to advance your favored causes nor to endorse your respective policies, but to celebrate two lives and careers inspired by the Catholic call to service and admirably dedicated to the alignment of our democratic institutions with the contours of the common good through honest engagement with contentious issues, vigorous debate and responsible compromise, that the University of Notre Dame confers upon you — individually and together — its highest honor, the *Laetare* Medal, on Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. and John Andrew Boehner.”

President Obama gave a very inspiring speech at the Notre Dame Commencement in 2009, four months into his presidency. I was in South Bend that day with my 9-year-old son, who had the privilege himself to attend Notre Dame years later. Vice President Biden’s speech seven years after President Obama was something of a bookend to the historic Obama/Biden years in the White House, and I felt it would be illuminating to reprint the entirety of Mr. Biden’s remarks — delivered on that Sunday, May 15, 2016:

Father, you said that politics is a full-contact sport. I agree. But Father, to the detriment of the nation in my view, and I think John would agree with me, it has recently become a blood sport full of invective and *ad hominem* arguments. I’ve been there a long time. John and I served together for over 25 years. I’ve been elected to the Senate seven times and vice president twice. I’ve not seen it like this in my career. You quoted the Holy Father, Father, when you said he addressed the joint session of Congress, he said, our responsibility was to the tireless demanding pursuit of the common good, the chief aim of politics.

Father, I’ve had the privilege of spending time, as John did, with the Holy Father. He not only consoled me and my family when I lost my Beau, but when I met him representing the United States at his inauguration, and I walked up with other heads of state to be formally introduced to him in the Basilica, a monsignor who I had just spent time with earlier because I had been meeting with Pope Benedict — I hope I wasn’t the reason he resigned (!) — turned to introduce me to the Holy Father. And before he could, the Holy Father put out his hand and said, “Mr. Vice President, you are always welcome here. You are always welcome here.” Think about him. That’s the message he has sent to the world. It’s the reason why he is the most respected man in the world as I speak here today. Not just among Catholics, but Muslims, Hindus, other Christians, the Jewish community. That’s not hyperbole, he literally is the most respected man in the world. You are always

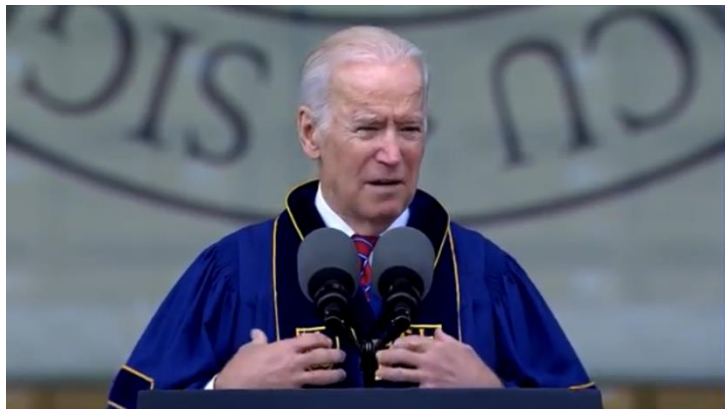
welcome here. And I believe the message he was urging the Congress was to extend to everyone, we who hold high public office, to extend our hand as Americans and say, "You are always welcome here."

I was raised by parents who are the embodiment of Catholic social doctrine. I was taught by the Sisters of Saint Joseph and the Norbertine priests in high school, "everyone is always welcome in my home." I was taught by my mother that no one was better than me but that everyone was my equal.

I was taught by my father — who struggled — that every man, every woman, he meant everyone regardless of their station of life, regardless of whether or not you agreed with them, was entitled to be treated with dignity and respect. My father used to say that the greatest sin of all was the abuse of power -- whether economic, political, psychological or physical. He's the reason that I wrote the Violence Against Women legislation. He abhorred the notion of the abuse of power, totally consistent with what his Holiness talks about now and what our Roman Catholic faith has taught us for over 2,000 years.

I was taught by my family and my faith that a good life at its core — and this is why I truly like John — is about being personal. It all gets down to being personal. Being engaged. I was taught by my family and my faith to look beyond the caricature of a person and to resist the temptation when you disagree to ascribe a negative motive. Because when you do that, number one, you don't truly know what that person's motive is, and number two, it makes it virtually impossible to reach common ground. I was taught by my family and my faith never to confuse academic credentials and social sophistication with gravitas and judgment. To have the heart to strive to distinguish between what is meaningful and what is ephemeral, the head to know the difference between knowledge and judgment.

But most importantly, my family and our faith warned me against the temptation of rationalizing in the pursuit of ambition. "I know it's her birthday, but she won't mind, this is an important business trip." "I know it's his last game, but I'd have to take the red-eye back to see it, he'll understand." "I know we've been planning this family vacation for a long, long time, but I have such an opportunity if I leave." It's not only wrong, but if you engage in this rationalization, which everyone does, never underestimate the ability of the human mind to rationalize.



But If you do, it will become very difficult to weather the storm when reality intrudes. And it will. Reality will intrude. In 1972 I was elected the second youngest man in the history of the United States of America. I was 29 years old; I wasn't old enough to be sworn in. I had to wait 13 days to be eligible. Forty-one days later, reality intruded. I was in Washington hiring my staff when I got a phone call. A tractor-trailer had broadsided my wife and my three children. Killed my wife and killed my daughter. And for my two boys — it was uncertain — who, thank God, later fully recovered. Being elected at 29 to the Senate is pretty heady stuff. It's the stuff of which ambition can get out of hand. Reality intruded. Forty-two years later, it happened again. Many of your parents and



people in the audience have gone through worse than I have. They know. Many of you know.

My soul, my son, my Beau, the attorney general in the state of Delaware, the most respected political figure in the state, having volunteered as a U.S. attorney to go to Kosovo to help them set up a criminal justice system during the war. And John, I just learned that the president of Kosovo is naming a street after my son, the Major Joseph R. Biden Boulevard. He then volunteered as attorney general — he had to get an exception, because you become federal



property when you're in the National Guard — to go to Iraq for a year. A year later, he came home a decorated soldier, awarded the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, the Delaware Conspicuous Service Cross, the best physical shape of his life. While running 10 miles, had to lay down. He was diagnosed with stage 4 glioblastoma in the brain. Two years later it took him, after a heroic struggle.

John talked about, my father talked about, you just gotta get up. My son's last words to me were, "Dad, I'm not afraid. Promise me you'll be alright." My dad had an expression. He'd say: "Never complain and never explain." Beau never, ever did. And I think back on it. What would happen if John and I only followed our ambition? Thank God I never missed Neilia's birthday, or an important thing. Thank God I never missed his game for an unimportant political event. I think Beau said it best, and I say it to all of you, when he was attorney general during a commencement speech he was giving — he went to Penn and he went to Syracuse Law School in 2011. Here's what he said. He said, "You'll find peace when there are certain rules that are not malleable. Your conscience, your conscience should not be malleable. Your values for another. These are the means along with the learning you now possess. They are the things that will guide you. They'll also be the things to save you."

Father, I've read some accounts how John and I are "old school." We used to treat each other with respect, hang out with each other. John and I aren't old school, we're the American school. We're what you have to restore. Where progress only comes when you deal with your opponent with respect, listening as well as talking.

Class of 2016, this is not hyperbole, you're the best educated, most tolerant generation in the history of the United States of America. So engage. Engage in the tireless pursuit of finding common ground because not only will you be happier, you will be incredibly more successful. That's where you'll find your reward and it'll make us all better for it. It's a true honor to be here with John. It's a great honor to receive this medal. May God bless you all. And may God protect our troops."

Mr. Biden represented Delaware in the Senate starting in 1972, when he was elected at the age of twenty-nine. He earned a reputation for working on a bipartisan basis to pass legislation that was deeply consonant with his commitment to Catholic Social Teaching, including the establishment of the United States Commission on Civil Rights Act of 1983; The Global Climate Change Act (1987); stopping genocide in Bosnia, Kosovo and Darfur; and the Kids 2000 Act, among many others during his 35 years of service as a U.S. senator. As chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Biden's top foreign policy priority was bringing home American troops without leaving chaos behind in Iraq. He played a leading role in Congressional efforts to end genocide in Darfur, Sudan. As a long-standing member and former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator Biden was a strong leader on crime and drug policy and was instrumental in crafting almost every major piece of crime legislation over two decades. One of Mr. Biden's longstanding priorities was making college more accessible and affordable for students and their families. He introduced the College Affordability and Creating Chances for Educational Success for Students (ACCESS) Act, which was dedicated to increasing tax incentives, expanding Pell grants, and beginning college planning as early as the eighth grade.

When he married Jill, he found a measure of stability and strength again in his life. She continued working while raising their three children and helping raise five grandchildren. Then-Senator Biden religiously commuted more than an hour from his home in Delaware to



Washington DC through his senate career. Senator Ted Kennedy spoke approvingly of Senator Biden at the time of his nomination as vice president: "Barack Obama said he wanted a strong independent leader and a strong advocate for average Americans, and he got one in Joe Biden."

In *Promises to Keep*, Mr. Biden wrote: "From the time I was little I had a picture in my head of the sort of man I wanted to become, a picture filled in by my mom and dad, by the teachings of the Catholic schools I attended, by stories I heard about our family hero, Uncle Bosie, a pilot who was shot down in World War II, and by a faith in the size of my own future. During my adolescent and college years, men and women were changing the country — Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy — and I was swept up in their eloquence, their conviction, the sheer size of their improbable dreams."

## **Catholics and the 2020 Democratic National Convention**

**T**he final day of the Convention, August 20, 2020, began with a Catholic Mass celebrated by Jesuit Fr. Thomas Reese. The liturgy was taken from the calendar readings for the Thursday of

the 20<sup>th</sup> Week in Ordinary Time, and took place in the Jesuit community chapel at Gonzaga High School in Washington, DC. Jesuit Fr. Phil Ganir sang beautifully the opening and liturgical music.

Rev. Reese began, "Today we gather to give praise and thanks to God, and to pray that the Holy Spirit might inspire us to build the kingdom of God, a kingdom of justice and peace.



As Christians and a country, we recognize that we are sinners, but we also trust in God's compassion and love. Lord have mercy.

We confess our racism and our hostility toward those with whom we do not share language, religion, nationality or gender. Christ have mercy.

We ask the Lord to send upon us his Spirit, a spirit of reconciliation and peace. Lord have mercy.

O God, you give wisdom to all who attend to your word. Keep us aware of our civic responsibility, that we may elect trustworthy and compassionate leaders who will pursue justice, seek peace, and work for the common good. We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever."

The first reading was taken from Ezekiel (36:23-28), and read by Ambassador Elizabeth Bagley.

Here follows Fr. Reese's sermon from that day, and his Prayers of the Faithful:

Ezekiel, like all the prophets, criticized Israel's political leaders for getting into wars and for exploiting the poor. Because of their sins, he foretold that they would be conquered by Babylon, the superpower of his time.

The passage we have today, however, is one of hope addressed to people who became refugees and exiles after Israel's defeat. God has not forgotten them. He will cleanse them of their sins and return them to their land as a Spirit-filled, warm-hearted people.

Every time I read this gospel (Matthew 22:1-14), I am reminded of two jilted brides, Yiru Sun and Dana Olsen, one a single mom from New York, the other from Seattle. In 2016, both had planned elaborate wedding receptions when their fiancés left them at the altar just before their weddings.

Rather than being destroyed by the experience, both women followed the example of the king in today's parable. They invited homeless moms and their children to their banquets. And, unlike the king, they did not care how they were dressed.



When Sun got the idea to invite the poor, she felt inspired by God. "I cannot be the princess of my wedding day," she said, "but I can give the kids a fairy tale." Or as Olsen put it, "I'm going to have a bad day. Other people might as well have a good night." Both women teach us a lesson about faith in adversity.

Pope Francis tells us that our faith does not allow us to bypass adversity, rather it teaches us how to pass through adversity.

Whether it is the loss of a family member, losing a job or some other disaster, a crisis either makes us better or worse as persons. If we respond like the two jilted brides, we become better persons.

This is especially true today with the coronavirus pandemic and the economic recession.

The danger, according to Pope Francis, is that we can be struck by an even worse virus, that of selfish indifference. This virus spreads by the thought that life is better if it is better for me, and that everything will be fine if it is fine for me." This leads to "discarding the poor, and sacrificing those left behind on the altar of progress."

On the other hand, the gospel tells us to invite everyone to our banquet, especially the poor and the marginalized. All are welcome. All must be fed and cared for.

Ezekiel tells us that the Lord is on our side and will help us. He will call us from exile, cleanse us of sin with living water and give us new hearts if we are open to his Spirit.

As we continue our Eucharist, we pray that we may be open to the Spirit so that as disciples of Christ we will have compassion for the poor and the courage and faith to work for his kingdom of justice and peace."

The prayers of the faithful that day were inspiring and dedicated to a shared sense of the common good:

"For our political leaders, liberals and conservatives, Democrats and Republicans, that they work together for the good of our nation and the world, we pray to the Lord..."



For those participating in the Democratic National Convention, especially Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, for their families, that Lord might protect them and inspire them in the service of our nation, we pray to the Lord....

For the American voters, that we may elect trustworthy and compassionate leaders who will pursue justice, seek peace, and work for the common good.

For an end to racism, sexism and prejudice of any kind in our church and our country, we pray to the Lord ....

For immigrants and refugees, especially our DACA brothers and sisters, that they might find welcome, freedom and opportunity, we pray to the Lord ....

For peace throughout the world, especially in the Middle East, that people might recognize one another as brothers and sisters, children of the same God, we pray to the Lord....

For the protection of our Common Home, the earth, that nations might unite to stop global warming before it is too late, we pray to the Lord ...

For the sick, especially those suffering from COVID-19, for their families and those who care for them, we pray to the Lord ....

For those who have died and for their families, that they might experience the compassion and love of God and the Christian community, we pray to the Lord

Loving God, you know what we need better than we do ourselves. Look with compassion on us, our church, our nation and the world. Hear our prayers that we make through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Faith was a keystone of the final night at the Democratic Convention. Sr. Simone Campbell, the creative force behind “Nuns on the Bus,” delivered a benediction:

*“Oh, Divine Spirit, during the weeks and months ahead, stir our hearts and minds that we might fight for a vision that is worthy of you and called to honor the dignity of all of your creation. A*

*vision of who we are as a people grounded in community and care for all, especially the most marginalized. A vision that cares for our earth and heals the planet. A vision that ends structural racism, bigotry, and sexism so rife now in our nation and in our history. A vision that ensures hungry people are fed, children are nourished, immigrants are welcomed. Oh, Spirit breathe in us and our leaders a new resolve that committed to this new American promise, we will work together to build a national community grounded in healing, fearlessly based on truth, and living out of a sense of shared responsibility. In the name of all that is holy, Oh Spirit, bring out of this time of global and national chaos, a new creation, a new community that can with your help realize this new promise that we affirmed tonight. And so with profound hope, let us, the people say, Amen.*

Senator Chris Coons (D-DE) began the fourth night with a reflection on Mr. Biden's personal faith and how it had impacted his public service. Senator Coons is a graduate of Yale Divinity School, performed relief work in Kenya, volunteered with the Coalition for the Homeless in NYC, and later a long-time colleague of Mr. Biden's. Senator Coons talked about the role religious people had played in the great social movements, from the abolition of slavery to women's suffrage, from the labor movement to civil rights in the 1960s. He drew a line



*Two from Delaware: Vice President Biden and Senator Chris Coons at the Capitol*

from those efforts to the candidacy of Mr. Biden as a continuation of a march toward justice. Citing the Catholic theme of “the dignity of all people,” he said that “Joe believes we were made in the image of God. Joe learned that from his parents and the nuns and priests right here in Delaware, who taught him and inspired in him a passion for justice.”

He insisted that Mr. Biden's faith is strong and personal, and has never been an instrument for personal political advancement. He said that Mr. Biden was a prayerful man who had turned to God in moments both of great personal joy and extreme personal loss. He said that his colleague had comforted him and many others in their own times of grief. “Time and again, I've seen him stop everything and listen, really listen to someone who needs a shoulder to cry on or partner in prayer.”

He spoke earnestly about Joe Biden as a man of faith and conscience who would be sensitive to the beliefs of all people, focused on the shared desire to decrease suffering and increase



justice in the world. Being better stewards of creation, welcoming the stranger, and confronting the echoes of slavery and racism would be his priorities. He insisted that Mr. Biden's concern about all these issues was rooted in his belief in God. He praised nurses and firefighters and teachers, and said they all deserve “a servant leader” who believes in the dignity of work and seeks to overcome differences between people of every faith.

On the subject of empathy, one of the most discussed speakers of that night at the convention was a 13-year-old boy from New England who met Mr. Biden in February 2020 at a campaign event in Gilford, New Hampshire. “He told me that we were members of the same club. We stutter! ...I'm just a regular kid, and in a short amount of time Joe Biden made me more confident about something that's bothered

me my whole life.” Afterward, former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords, who recovered from a life-threatening gunshot injury to the head, tweeted, “Speaking is hard for me too, Brayden. But as you know, practice and purpose help. Thank you for your courage and for the great speech!”

The order of the convention included a clip of a conversation between Mr. Biden and Rev Anthony Thompson – pastor of Holy Trinity Reformed Episcopal Church in Charleston SC. His wife and eight other people had been murdered during a Bible study she was leading at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. Thompson had written a book about the need to forgive those who hurt us, and he asked Mr. Biden, “What is your faith, and how would you use your faith in making decisions for our nation?” Mr. Biden responded:



“Reverend, I kind of know what it’s like to lose family, and my heart goes out to you. But you may remember, after Barack and Michelle and I were there, and my family, I came back on that Sunday to regular service, because I had just lost my son, and I wanted some hope because what you all did was astounding. I don’t know if you all know this (speaking to the audience there), all those who died were killed by this white supremacist. They forgave him, the ultimate act of Christian charity. They forgave him. And you know, Reverend, I’m not proselytizing. I happen to be a practicing Catholic, but I went back to the church because I found, particularly, the Black church, and I found that there’s that famous phrase from Kierkegaard, *faith sees best in the dark*. I find the one thing it gives me...I’m not trying to convince you...to share my religious views -- but for me, it’s important because it gives me some reason to have hope and purpose.”

The program then embarked on an extended tribute to recently deceased congressman and civil rights icon John Lewis, with remarks by Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms of Atlanta, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Congressman Elijah Cummings, Georgia legislator Stacey Abrams, and US Senate Candidate Raphael Warnock. Former UN Ambassador Andrew Young said, “Life was extremely dangerous when we were growing up. John Lewis had the respect of everybody because he was the one who demonstrated the most courage. He’d been beaten and knocked down, and he’d get up and go to fight another battle. John was focused on ending voter suppression, and it wasn’t that he was a great orator, it’s that he was a great spirit. The power of spirituality and humility and the willingness to suffer rather than to inflict suffering.”



Fr. Arthur Matott, John Lewis, Andrew Young, Sr. Mary Leoline, and other Catholic clergy crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Mar 25, 1965/Stephen F. Somerstein





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“Just remember, Joe Biden goes to church so regularly that he doesn’t even need tear gas and a bunch of federalized troops to help him get there.”

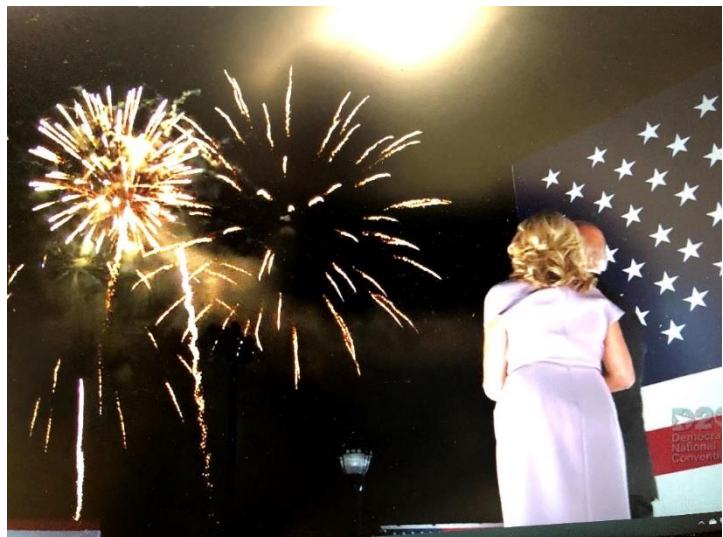
Julia Louis-Dreyfus, DNC, Aug 20, 2020

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**J**oe Biden accepted the Democratic nomination for president that night, and he talked about what it meant to “restore the soul of the nation.” He thanked President Barack Obama for having had the courage to persist in creating the Affordable Care Act as a protection for millions of people against the vicissitudes of ill health. He cited a litany of the suffering so many Americans are enduring: 5 million Americans infected by COVID-19 (now more than 7 million), more than 170,000 Americans dead (now more than 225,000) -- by far the worst performance of any nation on earth. More than 50 million people filing for unemployment this year, 10 million anticipated to lose their health insurance, and nearly one in six small businesses closing for good. With the GOP determined to undo the ACA, he cited the threat to remove the health insurance of another 20 million people, and to undermine the protections for another 100 million with preexisting conditions.

I understand how hard it is to have any hope right now. On this summer night let me take a moment to speak to those of you who have lost the most. I have some idea how it feels to lose someone you love. I know that deep black hole that opens up in the middle of your chest and you feel like you’re being sucked into it. I know how mean and cruel and unfair life can be sometimes, but I’ve learned two things. First, your loved one may have left this earth, but they’ll never leave your heart. They’ll always be with you, you’ll always hear them. And second, I found the best way through pain and loss and grief is to find purpose. As God’s children, each of us have a purpose in our lives. We have a great purpose as a nation to open the doors of opportunity to all Americans, to save our democracy, to be a light to the world once again, and finally to live up to and make real the words written in the sacred





documents that founded this nation: That all men and women are created equal, endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, among them, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

He paid tribute to his wife, Jill, and to his inspiring son, Beau. He talked about his running mate, Senator Kamala Harris, and her role as a powerful voice for the underserved of this country. He said she knows from personal experience about all the obstacles so often thrown in the way of people in our country, and in particular women, Black Americans, South Asian Americans, and immigrants of all kinds. He said no one had been tougher on powerful interests that had been a cause of much suffering in the United States, namely the financial industry, the gun lobbyists, and the Trump administration for its extremism, lawlessness, and mendacity.

He closed by saying:

This is our moment to make hope and history rhyme with passion and purpose. Let us begin, you and I together. One nation under God, united in our love for America, united in our love for each other, for love is more powerful than hate. Hope is more powerful than fear, and right is more powerful than dark. This is our moment. This is our mission. May history be able to say that the end of this chapter of American darkness began here tonight, as love and hope and light join in the battle for the soul of the nation. And this is a battle we will win, and we'll do it together. I promise you. Thank you. And may God bless you. And may God protect our troops.

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Jesuit Fr. Jim Martin offered one of the closing benedictions at the end of the Democratic Convention. Fr. Martin is the editor-at-large for *America Magazine*, and an author who has been harassed by many Catholic conservatives for his best-selling book, "Building a Bridge:



How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity." He prayed:

*Loving God, help us open our hearts to those most in need. The unemployed parent worried about feeding his or her children, the woman who's underpaid, harassed, or abused, the black man or woman who fears for their lives. The immigrant at the border longing for safety, the homeless person looking for a meal, the LGBT teen who's*

*bullied, the unborn child in the womb, the inmate on death row. Help us to be a nation where every life is sacred, all people are loved, and all are welcome. Amen.*

## **A look back at Barack Obama's Catholic biography**

**J**oe Biden's ascent to the Democratic nomination is inescapably a part of the legacy of President Obama's success and his own remarkable personal story. Their partnership was the subject of my 2008 book, *The Catholic Case for Obama*. Mr. Obama's Republican opponents liked to paint Mr. Obama as a radical who learned his trade in Chicago from Bill Ayers, an elementary education theorist who led opposition to the war in Vietnam during the 1960s. In fact, President Obama was hired with grant money from the US Catholic Conference, and most people don't know that he got his start in Chicago working for three years out of an office in a Catholic church rectory.

He was born in Hawaii where his mother was a college student and his father a newly-arrived graduate student from Kenya. His mother remarried when Barack was 4-years-old, and the family moved to Jakarta Indonesia when he was six. His first school was a Catholic academy, the St. Francis Assisi Foundation School. In his book *Dreams from my Father*, Mr. Obama described his experience in somewhat mischievous terms. "In Catholic school, when it came time to pray, I would pretend to close my eyes, then peek around the room." After attending high school in his native Hawaii and starting college at Occidental in Los Angeles, he transferred to Columbia University in New York and received his degree in political science. During a time of escalating nuclear tensions with the Soviet Union, he wrote his senior thesis on Soviet nuclear disarmament.

He found his way back into the Catholic world very much by chance. Mr. Obama wrote in his first book that he attempted to find work just out of college as a community organizer, motivated by an early allegiance to the idea of 'change.' He wrote, "I didn't know anyone making a living that way. When classmates in college asked me just what it was that a community organizer did, I couldn't answer them directly. Instead, I'd pronounce on the need for change. Change in the White House, where Reagan and his minions were carrying on their dirty deeds. Change in the Congress, compliant and corrupt. Change in the mood of the country, manic and self-absorbed. Change won't come from the top, I would say. Change will come from a mobilized grass roots...In the month leading up to graduation, I wrote to every civil rights organization I could think of, to any Black elected official in the country with a progressive agenda, to neighborhood councils and tenant rights groups. When no one wrote back, I wasn't discouraged. I decided to find more conventional work for a year, to pay off my student loans and maybe even save a little bit. I would need the money later, I told myself. Organizers didn't make any money; their poverty was proof of their integrity."

In his memoir, he spends 150 pages talking about his experience working on the South Side of Chicago as a community organizer, primarily within eight Catholic parishes that had witnessed stark economic misfortune during the 1970s and 80s. In the book, he was recruited by a character named Marty Kaufman, Barack's pseudonym for Gerald Kellman, a recent Catholic convert who had made a career as an organizer in Chicago. I had a chance to interview Mr. Kellman, who advertised widely in search of someone who could reach out to Black church leaders and their congregants.

There was a rich history of social justice organizing in Chicago, with its large theology community and people like Monsignor Jack Egan, who had inspired a generation of priests and lay people to work in the inner city. Msgr. Egan helped shape the role that the Archdiocese of Chicago long had as a leader in social justice advocacy. The Catholic Action Movement -- motivated by its motto, "See, Judge, Act" -- became deeply rooted in Chicago through the Christian Family

Movement. Fr. Ted Hesburgh, then president *emeritus* at the University of Notre Dame, told me in 2014 that he had “rescued” Msgr. Egan from the censure of the new Chicago archbishop, Cardinal John Cody, who was hostile to the progressive organizing Msgr. Egan had been doing there. Msgr. Egan had been close to Dr. Martin Luther King through the years of activism in the South. At Notre Dame he founded the Catholic Committee on Urban Ministry and continued his pioneering work on social justice there for 14 years. Fr. Hesburgh told me Msgr. Egan (who died in 2001) had been a great personal inspiration, and concluded our conversation by asking me to pray with him for the soul of Msgr. Egan and for the continuation of a Catholic commitment to social justice for the poor in society.

During the 1970s, Mr. Kellman had collaborated with a number of Jesuit scholastics from Chicago who had taken time off from their training to become community organizers in the Pilsen neighborhood of Chicago. At that time, the bi-state Calumet Region was going through a massive economic shock that resulted from the closings of steel mills, in an area that was home to the biggest steel production capacity in the world. These companies had been devastated by foreign competition from countries that had nationalized their steel industries, and by the fact that technology was changing. A chain reaction occurred with these plant closings that led to auto assembly plants closing, then public and private investment pulling out, then retail stores



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“This administration has shown it will tear our democracy  
down if that’s what it takes to win.”

President Barack Obama, speaking at the 2020 Democratic National Convention

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beginning to close. Mr. Kellman began talking to Catholic pastors, whose parishioners included a fairly large African-American population that was Roman Catholic.

Initially Jerry Kellman had trouble getting these pastors interested in collective action, until he met Fr. Leo Mahon. Like many other priests of his era, and with the encouragement of Chicago Cardinal Albert Meyer, Fr. Mahon had responded to the call of Pope John XXIII to minister to the needs of Latin America’s poor in the early 1960s. As recounted in his book, *Fire Under My Feet: A Memoir of God’s Power in Panama*, Fr. Mahon built a mission called San Miguelito outside Panama City, Panama. For 12 years he labored on behalf of hundreds of thousands of people, embarking on pioneering work in building Christianity and democracy, and establishing access to clean water and other basic human needs. Mr. Kellman joined with Fr. Mahon to recruit twenty suburban Catholic parishes to participate in a new effort at community organizing. In 1982, Cardinal Cody died and newly consecrated Archbishop Joseph Bernardin brought a new excitement to the Archdiocese. Mr. Kellman recounted that the new Cardinal “told any pastor that wouldn’t join this organization to go to confession. And so we had a very good response in the parishes.” The consortium of parishes paid about \$5000 apiece to hire some community organizers, including Mr. Kellman, to work in an area that was home to a mix of Blacks, whites and Latinos. Fr. Mahon (who died in 2013) and other missionaries sought to bring to bear their

experience in Panama on the similar struggles of people in Chicago. This focus on “listening” to the needs of people, rather than trying to organize around some particular issue in pursuit of grant funding, became a model for what Jerry Kellman was trying to do.

Mr. Kellman decided to move from the suburban parishes into the inner city, and to develop a separate board of directors to meet the poverty criteria for grant funding by the Catholic bishops’ Campaign for Human Development. So he and two friends created the Developing Communities Project (DCP), which was the organization that hired young Barack Obama. Msgr. Mahon, who had trained a whole generation of Chicago priests in the mission in Panama, told me that Mr. Kellman returned from New York very impressed with his new recruit. “Jerry told me then ‘Watch this guy. He’s going to be somebody great some day!’” Mr. Kellman knew a young priest named Fr. Bill Stenzel, the pastor at Holy Rosary Parish in the Roseland section on the south side of Chicago, and negotiated an arrangement for Mr. Obama’s office space in the rectory there to suit the new DCP enterprise.



*Fr. William Stenzel, former pastor of Chicago’s Holy Rosary Parish, in the Oval Office with his old smoking buddy in 2013*

The Roseland neighborhood, where Holy Rosary is located, has a quiet dignity that derives from its pivotal place in the

history of the labor movement—the place where President Grover Cleveland sent troops in 1894 to suppress the famous Pullman Strike. Reminiscing about his time working in this neighborhood, Mr. Obama said in an October 2008 interview with Catholic Digest, “I got my start as a community

organizer working with mostly Catholic parishes on the South Side of Chicago that were struggling because the steel plants had closed. The Campaign for Human Development helped fund the project, and so very early on, my career was intertwined with the belief in social justice that is so strong in the Church.”

When he arrived in Chicago, he found himself in the most modest possible circumstances in his new job. He set up shop in a windowless two-room office in the rectory at Holy Rosary on South Martin Luther King Drive. Of the six Holy Rosary parishes in Chicago, this one had been known as “Holy Rosary Irish” because of the traditionally heavy Irish immigrant presence there over its history. By the time Mr. Obama arrived, most of the Irish Catholics had fled the economic misfortune that had befallen this area.

The pastor of Holy Rosary, Fr. Stenzel, was a man with a booming voice who had a degree in business and economics from the Illinois Institute of Technology. Fr. Stenzel entered the priesthood as a second career, and Holy Rosary was his first opportunity to serve as a pastor. Fr. Michael Pflieger, pastor of St. Sabina’s Church nearby, told me, “Senator Obama certainly had a respect for the Catholic school system, particularly when it was the only alternative for education of the poor. He recognized that Catholic schools became a vehicle by which children could be prepared to compete in life.” Fr. Stenzel told me he was impressed with the young man who took up shop there, commenting, “Barack was doing what he was doing, and he wasn’t creating a resume. He had an unusual self-confidence and a kindness about him. When he first arrived, he asked me if it would be OK to come to Mass on Sunday.” The two subsequently became friends and Mr. Obama attended Mass at Holy Rosary many times that first year.

The assistant bishop who oversaw that cluster of parishes was a dynamic young African-American prelate named Wilton Gregory, a convert to Catholicism when he was a student at the nearby St. Carthage Catholic School to the north. Bishop Gregory had been ordained just prior to Mr. Obama’s arrival, as the nation’s youngest bishop, by Chicago’s Cardinal Bernardin. Bishop Gregory oversaw the needs of these struggling churches in Vicariate 6 of the Archdiocese of Chicago, where Mr. Obama was laboring. In later years Bishop Gregory went on to become the first Black president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and is currently the Archbishop of Washington DC.

Years later, once Mr. Obama became an Illinois state legislator, he became friendly with Cardinal Bernardin, who himself attained a towering status in American Catholicism as the author of the Bishops’ Peace Pastoral, as president of the US Bishops’ Conference, as creator of the “Common Ground Project,” and as a champion of the notion of “the consistent ethic of life.” In an October 2008 interview, Mr. Obama said, “I’ve tried to apply the precepts of compassion and care for the vulnerable that are so central to Catholic teachings to my work, [such as in] making health care a right for all Americans — I was the sponsor in the state legislature for the Bernardin Amendment, named after Cardinal Bernardin, a wonderful figure in Chicago I had the opportunity to work with who said that health care should be a right.”

Having worked for three years in a Catholic parish, helped formulate Black Catholic outreach efforts in the Archdiocese of Chicago, and gotten to know Archbishop Gregory and Cardinal Bernardin, Candidate Obama was very comfortable embracing his Catholic running mate Joe Biden in the summer of 2008 as they embarked on their historic run for the White House.



## Another Historic Vice Presidential Nominee

**S**enator Kamala Devi Harris was a long shot to be Joe Biden's running mate, despite her own remarkable life story. Her father, Donald Jasper Harris, was originally from Jamaica. He attended graduate school at UC Berkeley and went on to become the first Black tenured economics professor at Stanford University. His best-known book was a study on income inequality, titled, *Capital Accumulation and Income Distribution* (1978). Her mother, Dr. Shyamala Gopalan, was originally from Madras India, trained at UC Berkeley, and performed cancer and endocrinology-related basic science research through her career. Dr. Gopalan moved with her two daughters to Montreal when they were young, taking a faculty position at McGill University, Canada's oldest medical school. She died of cancer in 2009, at age 70.

Senator Harris attended Howard University in Washington DC, Hastings College of Law at the University of California in San Francisco, before launching her career in the Alameda County District Attorney's office, the San Francisco District Attorney's office, and eventually the office of the City Attorney of San Francisco. She was elected District Attorney of San Francisco herself in 2003 at age 39, Attorney General of California in 2010 and 2014, and then junior U.S. Senator in 2016. In 2013 TIME Magazine named her one of the "One Hundred Most Influential People in the World." She ran for president against Mr. Biden in 2019, and famously criticized him in a national primary debate over the issue of school busing.

She sang as a child in a children's choir at a Black church in Oakland, and she has been for years a member of the Third Baptist Church in San Francisco. She is "Momala" to the two daughters of her husband, Doug Emhoff, a Los Angeles attorney.

She has been criticized by Catholic conservatives as being "anti-Catholic" because of her questioning of Brian Buescher in 2018 when he was nominated by President Trump for the U.S. District Court in Nebraska. She asked him about his membership in the Knights of Columbus,



*Mr. Biden and Ms. Harris, in August 2020 after he nominated her for vice president/Tejas Joshi*

and whether he was aware of their funding of a campaign in favor of Proposition 8, a 2008 California ballot initiative that sought to prevent gay marriage. Wrote Fr. Tom Reese in a column for Religion News Service, "If Harris is anti-Catholic, so too is Trump, who attacked Pope Francis as 'disgraceful' for saying that 'A person who thinks only about building walls, wherever they may be, and not building bridges, is not Christian.'" (Reese, Is Kamala Harris anti-Catholic?, 2020) He noted that most anti-Catholic rhetoric in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century had been from Republicans and aimed at Democrats like 1928 Democratic presidential nominee Al

Smith. "Anti-Catholicism is an easy accusation to hurl at your political opponents. Catholics should not play this game nor listen to those who do," concluded Fr. Reese. It may be difficult to gain traction with an argument of Senator Harris being anti-Catholic, considering the nominee at the top of her ticket is himself Catholic.

# **The Catholic Voice in the 2020 Election Season: “How important it is to dream together...”**

## ENCYCLICAL LETTER **FRATELLI TUTTI** OF THE HOLY FATHER **FRANCIS** ON FRATERNITY AND SOCIAL FRIENDSHIP

[Fratelli Tutti](#), “Brethren All,” is Pope Francis’s third papal encyclical, issued on October 3, 2020. The pope visited that day the tomb of his namesake, St. Francis of Assisi, and the encyclical was made public the following day on the feast of St. Francis. It takes its title from The Admonitions, a collection of 28 short spiritual exhortations St. Francis gave to his brother friars. They represent passages of scripture and Francis’s own reflections on them. They were found in five 13th-century manuscripts that were collections of writing of and about St. Francis, and were referred to in one manuscript as the “Canticle of Minority.” Pope Francis’s last encyclical was also inspired by St. Francis: [Laudato Si’](#) dwelt on our duty to preserve God’s creation.

In *Fratelli Tutti*, the pope began by focusing on one theme of the Admonitions: “I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance, and declares blessed all those who love their brother ‘as much when he is far away from him as



when he is with him.’ In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives.”

He relates the story of St. Francis traveling during the Crusades to visit Sultan Malik al-Kamil in Egypt to “simply spread the love of God.” Eight

hundred years ago, despite his own poverty, lack of language facility, and the gulf between cultures, St Francis traveled that great distance to urge that all forms of hostility or conflict be avoided, and that humility should mark our encounters with other faiths and cultures. “As I was writing this letter, the Covid-19 pandemic unexpectedly erupted, exposing our false securities. Aside from the different ways that various countries responded to the crisis, their inability to work together became quite evident. For all our hyper-connectivity, we witnessed a fragmentation that made it more difficult to resolve problems that affect us all. Anyone who thinks that the only lesson

to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality.”

Pope Francis devoted the whole second chapter to the parable of the good Samaritan and defining who is our neighbor (“A Stranger on the Road”) and the fifth chapter to overcoming our differences (“A Better Kind of Politics”). He explained that markets cannot alone be expected to address the inequities of modern life, and that talk about freedom can constitute an “empty individualism” that undermines collective action. Rather, he spoke about valuing everyone – from babies in the womb to the disabled to the elderly. He spoke with yearning about the absence of healthy debate, of slick marketing having replaced the honest exchange of views.

He reserved a special contempt for efforts today to build new nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons – a strategic priority for the Trump administration despite the current explosion in the National Debt. “War is not a ghost from the past but a constant threat,” the pope said. He listed other principal threats to peace and security, for instance terrorism, proxy conflicts, cybersecurity, environmental devastation, and poverty, and belittled the idea that policies of nuclear deterrence were an effective response to any of them. Taking into account “the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental consequences” that would result from any use of nuclear weapons, with indiscriminate and uncontained effects, we need to ask ourselves “how sustainable is a stability based on fear, when it actually increases fear and undermines relationships of trust between peoples. International peace and stability cannot be based on a false sense of security, on the threat of mutual destruction or total annihilation, or on simply maintaining a balance of power.”



*Vice Pres Joe Biden meets Pope Francis at the 3rd International Conf on Regenerative Medicine in 2016, Vatican/MedCityNews.com*

The document had a lengthy section addressing the barbarity of capital punishment, recently revived by the Trump White House, with the resumption of executions after a seventeen year hold. “St John Paul II stated clearly and firmly that the death penalty is inadequate from a moral standpoint and no longer necessary from that of penal justice. There can be no stepping back from this position. Today we state clearly that “the death penalty is inadmissible” and the Church is firmly committed to calling for its abolition worldwide.”

Quoting the document, columnist E.J. Dionne intoned, “We are not accustomed to hearing from a pope, a month before Election Day, who criticizes ‘myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism,’ and castigates those who, through their actions, cast immigrants as ‘less worthy, less important, less human.’” (Dionne, 2020)



# THE “AMERICAN CARNAGE” OF THE TRUMP PRESIDENCY

**B**efore any Americans had died, President Trump and his advisors knew that the novel coronavirus was a grave threat to the country. “This is deadly stuff,” he told Bob Woodward on February 7. As pointed out in an editorial in the New York Times, (Board, 2020) over the ensuing month he held large outdoor rallies in five cities around the country with thousands of unmasked supporters – despite knowing how dangerous the coronavirus was.

He repeatedly promised the virus would “disappear” with warmer weather, and that the coronavirus was no worse than the seasonal flu. He told Woodward in mid-March, “I wanted to always play it down. I still like playing it down, because I don’t want to create a panic.” The guy who launched one crisis after another, news cycle by news cycle – about an “invasion” of the Southeastern U.S. by Central American immigrants, about radical leftist protestors taking over American cities, about the QAnon conspiracy – was concerned that telling the truth about the danger of Covid-19 would “create a panic.”

As a direct result, the U.S. surged to the top of the list of Covid-besundered nations. As Mr. Biden pointed out in the first debate, with only 4% of the world’s population we now have 22% of the world’s deaths. If the U.S. had the same coronavirus fatality rate as Canada, there might have



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“We all know he’s a cheater and I’m proud to be a nasty, nasty woman. When Donald Trump spoke at his inauguration about American carnage, I assumed that was something he was against, not a campaign promise. What we need now is great leadership. Someone experienced, hard working and intelligent. Someone who understands the soul of the American people.”

Julia Louis-Dreyfus, at the 2020 Democratic Convention

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been more than 109,000 fewer casualties. (Lopez, 2020) On October 7, 2020, the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* took the extraordinary step of condemning the handling of the pandemic by the Trump administration. Thirty-four editors signed an editorial, the first of its kind in their 208-year history, castigating the Trump response to Covid-19, saying he had, “taken a crisis and turned it into a tragedy.” (Kolata, 2020) The editors saved their harshest criticism for attempts to politicize and undermine the FDA, the NIH, and the CDC.

Invariably, the president makes the debate about him and his victimhood. In his debate with Mr. Biden, he again stated that the election was inevitably corrupt, and refused to commit himself to holding off on declaring victory until independent verification of the outcome of the election. In brief, if he wins then it’s a well-deserved victory; if he loses, then the process must be corrupt. Election officials fear that his encouragement of “poll watchers” will result in a flood of armed

Trump supporters surrounding polling stations around the country on election day – and potentially violence in the days thereafter.

All the while, “Mr. Trump has repeatedly blamed others for problems and self-inflicted wounds, something he hopes will appeal to a shared sense of grievance among his supporters,” wrote Maggie Haberman in the Times. “That instinct is now increasingly on display as he faces ominous polling showing him behind in his re-election campaign, a position that aides say is unfathomable for someone who has long staked his personal brand on ‘winning.’ Mr. Trump, some advisers inside and outside the White House say, has telegraphed to them that he is scared of losing – and in particular, scared of losing to Mr. Biden, whom he does not respect.” (Haberman, 2020)

Experts are ignored, everything becomes political. The administration’s Coronavirus Task Force revised testing guidelines for asymptomatic people while their leading infectious disease expert, Dr. Tony Fauci, was sidelined having surgery. Meanwhile, President Trump has fallen under the sway of Dr. Scott Atlas, a Stanford radiologist with no experience in infectious diseases, who aggressively recommended reopening schools and businesses. After Mr. Trump contracted the virus, Dr. Atlas issued a statement: “It is no surprise that people get the virus even with precautions. I anticipate a complete and full and rapid recovery back to normal after his necessary confinement period.” The problem of course is that Mr. Trump as a matter of pride flouted for months all the reasonable precautions. Is it any surprise that he himself came down with the virus he so minimized.

The effect on the economy has been profound. The October jobs report indicated that nearly 700,000 people left the labor force, against 661,000 new jobs in September. This was dramatically decreased from 4.8 million in June, and 1.5 million in August. (Statistics, 2020) On October 8, 2020, the Congressional Budget Office announced that the federal budget deficit was \$3.1 trillion for the 2020 fiscal year, a record for the United States. (Tankersley, 2020) In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, federal spending from April through September 2020 was \$4.2 trillion, double the spending in 2019, matched against a 17% fall in income tax receipts. Emergency spending related to the collapse in the economy compounded the increases in the deficit created by the 2017 Trump corporate tax cuts.

More than 215,000 Americans have already died, and many of the seven-million infected will have chronic health problems – possibly with permanent disability. Millions of small businesses have closed, 150 Catholic elementary schools have been shuttered for good, home foreclosures are imminent, and tens of millions of people have lost their jobs. One in 1000 Black Americans – 40,000 in all so far -- has died since February from Covid-19, compared to 1/2100 whites. (Scott, Covid-19's stunningly unequal death toll in America, in one chart) When President Trump spoke in his inaugural address about “American carnage,” his worst critics couldn’t have imagined he was speaking about the America that he was leaving behind at the end of his first term in office.

# The moral example of the presidency

*There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him:*

*Haughty eyes, a lying tongue,  
And hands that shed innocent blood,  
A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that run rapidly to evil,  
A false witness who utters lies,  
And one who spreads strife among the brethren.*

■ Proverbs 6:16-19

**P**resident Trump is a proud person who has often felt victimized by the judgments of his opponents and the press. He entered office in 2017 with a universe of possibilities for addressing the pressing issues of our time, but found himself beholden to constituencies that included white supremacists, fossil fuel executives, and anti-abortion activists. In the end, he had no one to blame but himself and his own family for so many of the shortcomings that set him up for failure.

Knowing now that he was infected with the coronavirus at the time of the first presidential debate in Cleveland on September 29, 2020, it's possible to believe that Mr. Trump's bluster and illogic were a result of a Covid encephalopathy. A front-page article in The Guardian began, "Cry, the beloved country. Donald Trump ensured Tuesday's first US presidential debate was the worst in American history, a national humiliation. The rest of the world – and future historians – will presumably look at it and weep...If Trump is re-elected...this dark, horrifying, unwatchable fever dream will surely be the first line of America's obituary." (Smith, 2020)

Apart from talking over his opponent and even the moderator, Mr. Trump distinguished himself by refusing to answer questions about paying pennies in income tax in 2016 and 2017, insisting that he had a very good plan to reform healthcare, blaming China for the coronavirus plague, and repeatedly raising the specter of socialism as a bogeyman to scare voters away from the Democrats. "He interrupted, ranted, raged, spewed lies and interrupted some more. Oh, and he passed on an opportunity to condemn white supremacists, instead telling them to 'stand back and stand by.'" (Smith, 2020)

Former Vice President Biden delivered a searing indictment of Mr. Trump's response to the pandemic, saying, "A lot of people have died" from the coronavirus, "and a lot more people are going to die unless he gets a lot smarter a lot quicker." Mr. Trump responded, "You graduated either the lowest or almost the lowest in your class. Don't ever use the word 'smart' with me. Don't ever use that word. Because you know what? There's nothing smart about you, Joe. Forty-seven years you've done nothing." Mr. Trump proceeded to belittle Mr. Biden for wearing "the largest mask I've ever seen," most likely knowing at the time that he was himself infected with the coronavirus just two days before he tested positive.

The moral example of the president is something that dominated Republican criticism of President Bill Clinton in his second term, and Mr. Trump famously seated women accusers of Mr. Clinton in the front of a debate against his wife, Secretary Hillary Clinton, in the fall of 2016. The world has since learned that Mr. Trump paid off a pornography actress, Stephanie Clifford, and that a Playboy model, Karen McDougal, had been paid off by the National Enquirer to keep them from

speaking out about affairs Mr. Trump had had with them while married. His attorney, Michael Cohen, went to prison “taking a bullet” for his client over this matter.

Twenty-one other women have accused Mr. Trump of assault or harassment. Accused of rape in a Manhattan Bergdorf Goodman department store by journalist Jean Carroll, Mr. Trump enlisted the Justice Department to defend him against her defamation lawsuit – though it was Ms. Carroll who suffered, receiving death threats and losing her job as a writer at *Elle Magazine*. As recently as September 2020, new allegations were arising – this time by a former model named Amy Dorris, who said he groped and kissed her at the U.S. Open tennis tournament in 1997. He has expressed no regrets or acknowledgment of any of these accusations, and has frequently responded by suggesting these women were not attractive enough for him to have wanted to assault them.

There has been bewilderment at the apparent devotion of Evangelical (and conservative Catholic) voters to Mr. Trump. Most of this is laid at the feet of his opposition to abortion and appointment of so many conservative judges. But he famously said twenty years ago in an interview with Tim Russert, “I am pro-choice in every respect, as far as it goes. I just hate it.” This stance is largely indistinguishable from virtually all Catholic Democratic candidates, who have believed abortion is a moral issue but are loath to insert themselves in such a personal decision of women.

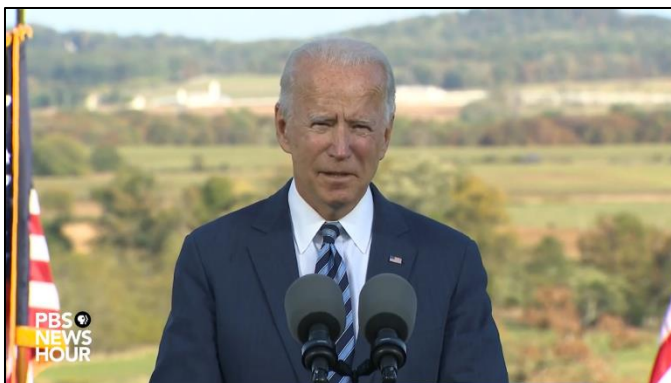
The American president is a moral exemplar – more than any sports figure or celebrity. President Obama and his family set a sterling example of personal probity. Furthermore, the Obama/Biden administration was a model of public spiritedness, with no accusations I can recall of financial impropriety after eight years in office. The list of financial scandals during the brief Trump years in contrast have been endless, not to mention the clear abuse of office for the personal enrichment of the Trump Family.

## **A moral resurrection in the White House**

*“You and I are part of a covenant, a common story of divisions overcome and hope renewed.”*

**O**n October 6, 2020, Mr. Biden gave a speech at Gettysburg, near where President Abraham Lincoln delivered his powerful, memorable address. I took my son to visit this place on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the battle there in early July 1863 – the place with the most casualties of the Civil War, and perhaps the turning point toward the Union victory. Seeing all the monuments there, and visiting nearby Antietam as well, we couldn’t help but feel a profound sense of loss and duty.

Speaking from a place near where we ourselves had stood, Mr. Biden said on a beautiful Tuesday afternoon, “Today once again, we are a house divided. But that, my friends, can no longer be...We have too bright a future to have it shipwrecked on the shoals of anger and hate and division.” He went on to talk about concern about a lack of trust for



Americans in one another, and a public sphere that is one that “too many Americans see our public life not as an arena for mediation of our differences but rather as an occasion for total, unrelenting partisan warfare.” He declared that he would work to lead all Americans, with “a duty to care for everyone.” He spoke about people working actively to deepen divisions in the current moment, advocating the building of bridges rather than walls. He cited his motivation for entering the presidential race, the white supremacist march on Charlottesville in 2017. He praised peaceful protest and well-intended law enforcement, and condemned violence and racism. “We have no need for armed militias roaming America’s streets. We have no tolerance for extremist white supremacy groups menacing our communities.” He mentioned meetings with the families of George Floyd and Jacob Blake, and called on all of us to open our eyes and face racial injustice in our society.

“What we need in America’s leadership is to seek to deescalate tensions, to open lines of communication, to bring us together, to heal, to hope. As president, that’s precisely what I will do. We’ve paid a high price for allowing the deep divisions in this country to impact how we deal with the coronavirus. 210,000 Americans dead and the numbers climbing. It’s estimated that nearly another 210,000 Americans could lose their lives by the end of the year. Enough. No more. Let’s set partisanship aside. Let’s end the politics and follow the science. Wearing a mask is not a political statement!”

He appealed to Americans to reckon with race and racial justice, to welcome refugees, to act proactively to protect people from the coronavirus, and to work for “an economic equation” that gives everyone a shot at prosperity. “The forces of darkness and forces of division, and the forces of yesterday are pulling us apart, holding us down and holding us back. We must free ourselves of all of them. As president, I will embrace hope, not fear; peace, not violence; generosity, not greed; and light, not darkness. I’ll be a president who appeals to the best of us, not the worst.”

“It won’t be easy. Our divisions today are longstanding. Economic and racial inequities have shaped us for generations. But I give you my word that if I’m elected president, I will marshal the ingenuity and good will of this nation to turn division into unity and to bring us together.” He finished by speaking of a “sacred effort,” in the words of Frederick Douglass to President Lincoln, and Mr. Biden quoted the second Lincoln inaugural address, “With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds.”

## **THE EMBARRASSING HISTORY OF REPUBLICAN CATHOLIC OUTREACH**

**M**odern Republican Catholic outreach owes a debt to Paul Weyrich, co-founder of the Heritage Foundation, and Michael Novak, a founder of *Crisis Magazine*. They responded with alarm to the US Bishops publishing letters condemning nuclear armaments in 1983 and their pastoral letter on inequality in the economy in 1984. A former Baptist minister and Catholic convert named Deal Hudson, who taught philosophy at Fordham University in New York, stepped in and took over *Crisis* in the 1990s – and then befriended Karl Rove at the dawn of the George W. Bush campaign



in 2000. Mr. Hudson coordinated Catholic outreach that year in the battle with Vice President Al Gore. He succeeded in raising the profile of Catholic outreach and engineering a powerful condemnation of the opposition when in 2004 the Democrats nominated a Roman Catholic candidate, Senator John Kerry. Mr. Hudson was constantly in the news, and told an interviewer for the *Washington Post* that Senator Kerry should be denounced from the pulpit "whenever and wherever he campaigns as a Catholic." In a fundraising letter, Mr. Hudson promised that *Crisis* would be taking "a close look at some of the bishops who are allowing their local politicians to get away with" the "deception" of calling themselves Catholic while failing to vote against abortion rights. "They [the bishops] are scared of him, afraid that he's going to attack them," said a Republican Catholic layman with close ties to the hierarchy who was quoted by NCR. (Feuerherd, 2004)

Mr. Hudson was forced to resign from the campaign after NCR made public an accusation about having a sexual affair with one of his freshman students. He had admitted his culpability and had paid a settlement in the subsequent lawsuit some years earlier.

With Mr. Hudson out, in stepped attorney Leonard Leo. Apart from Vladimir Putin, no one is more responsible for Donald Trump's election to the presidency in 2016 than Leonard Leo. He was a Cornell undergraduate and attended Cornell Law School. He has been working with or for the



*Sen. John Kerry at a Boston rally in the summer of 2004*

Federalist Society since 1989, his senior year in law school. During his time as a law clerk, he befriended Clarence Thomas – and has been involved in the confirmation process for every Republican nominee to the Supreme Court since then.

In 2004 he helped engineer an expansive Catholic outreach effort for Mr. Bush's reelection that focused on recruiting Catholic bishop surrogates and villainizing Senator Kerry. Mr. Leo sat for an interview in 2014 for the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University (Franklin, 2014), and described urging President Bush to pick up the language of Pope John Paul II and to talk about "the culture of life." But their focus was for the first time on dividing Catholics: "...it was kind of a waste to try to message to this whole Catholic population, because the Catholic population is just a mirror of the more general population. It has liberals, conservatives, Democrats, Republicans, independents, people who feel lots of different ways about lots of different issues. The Catholic community as a

whole is just like America. So the key was, well, where can we leverage the Catholic community? Well...it's going to be those people who believe in those ideals that the president embraces, and that's why he focused on, you know, the culture of life and education reform, and decline in values." (Franklin, 2014)

He pointed to an effort to shield Mr. Bush himself from criticizing Senator Kerry “for his lack of Catholicity” by enlisting other people to do it for him. He characterized the Kerry campaign’s approach as “the seamless garment [to paraphrase Cardinal Bernardin]. And that was the way the Kerry campaign tried to communicate his Catholicity. So, what we had to do on our side was find ways of debunking that theological approach.” They came up with the idea that some issues were more important than others – the so-called “five non-negotiable issues” that they attributed to the Church, but which were in fact a political construct. “It was incumbent upon the Catholic outreach effort to find third party surrogates, independent people, you know, who could go out there and project this message without it coming directly from us.”

So it was that Archbishop Raymond Burke came out at first, condemning Senator Kerry as being “pro-abortion” and stating publicly that his fellow Catholic was not welcome to take Holy Communion in the St. Louis Archdiocese. Bishop Michael Sheridan upped the ante, condemning any parishioner who would vote for Mr. Kerry as someone who should not take Communion “until they recant and repent in the confessional.” Then Bishop Charles Chaput of Denver, in an interview with the New York Times, spoke about voting for Senator Kerry as a form of “cooperating with evil.” Ray Burke was later named a cardinal by Pope Benedict, and has now cast himself as a champion for conservatives who are trying to undermine Pope Francis.

During President Bush’s first term in office, Catholic conservatives had held weekly conference calls with Karl Rove, discussing ways to further alienate Catholic Democrats and Independents from the Democratic Party. (Hudson, 2008) In 2004, the Bush Campaign invested tens of millions of dollars to pay organizers to register voters in front of Catholic churches, in violation of guidelines put out by the US Bishops that forbade such efforts by political parties. Thousands of volunteers were mobilized to put anti-abortion flyers on car windshields in Catholic church parking lots across the swing states on the Sunday before the election in 2004, contributing to the pro-Bush effort in an election in which the majority of non-Latino Catholics voted for the Republican candidate for the first time since 1988—ironically favoring him over a fellow Catholic.

“Game, set, match,” Mr. Leo concluded.

Closely tied to the Catholic outreach effort, however, is Mr. Leo’s work with the Federalist Society, which came up with the idea of giving a list of potential Supreme Court nominees to Candidate Trump to publicize in the 2016 campaign. In the end, this galvanized conservative Catholics and others to believe Mr. Trump himself had conservative values, despite all his liberal utterings in the past. At the time, with Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell refusing to hold hearings for almost a year on Judge Merrick Garland, President Obama’s nominee to the Court, conservatives were enamored of the idea that they could recapture Justice Scalia’s seat by rallying around a candidate about whom there had been so much doubt.

A report for the Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, authored by Senators Debbie Stabenow, Chuck Schumer, and Sheldon Whitehouse, on the role of Mr. Leo and the Federalist Society concluded:

Under the Trump Administration, the Mitch McConnell-led Senate has produced few significant legislative accomplishments. Instead, it has prioritized packing the judiciary with far-right extremists, who then enjoy life tenure as federal judges. Working hand-in-hand with the administration and anonymously funded outside groups, the Senate has confirmed 200 new life-tenured federal judges to aggressively remake the federal courts and rewrite the Constitution. Most of these judges were chosen not for their qualifications

or experience—which are often lacking—but for their demonstrated allegiance to Republican Party political goals. These judges have already begun rolling back the clock on civil rights, consumer protections, and the rights of ordinary Americans, reliably putting a thumb on the scale in favor of corporate and Republican political interests. From the Supreme Court on down, the special interests responsible for these judges' selection and confirmation are effectively capturing the judicial branch, packing our courts with politicians in robes. With a captured judiciary, the Republican Party can do its donors' dirty work through the courts without fear of electoral consequences. This is anti-democratic and fundamentally un-American. Indeed, it is nothing less than a crisis for American democracy, which depends on a fair and impartial judiciary. Behind this capture scheme lie hundreds of millions of dollars in anonymous spending, funneled through an elaborate web of front groups. It is impossible to understand this capture scheme without understanding who is spending so much money to capture America's courts—and how and why.

Paul Begala, a political advisor to President Clinton and now a CNN commentator, has written that just between 2014 and 2017, groups like Koch Industries and the Charles & David Koch foundations, the Scaife Foundation, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, and the US Chamber of Commerce donated \$250 million to this effort. "The Federalist Society is more than a group of right-wing lawyers sucking up for clerkships and judicial jobs (though it is that). It is also, [Senator] Whitehouse [alleges](#), a 'vehicle for powerful interests, which seek not to simply 'reorder' the judiciary, but to acquire control of the judiciary to benefit their interests.'"

## **TIED IN KNOTS: CATHOLIC APOLOGISTS FOR TRUMP**

**T**he Trump Campaign had no prominent Catholic supporters before he won the GOP nomination. The campaign subsequently set up a Catholic Advisory Group in 2016 that included two former Vatican ambassadors (James Nicholson and Francis Rooney) and former Governor Frank Keating of Oklahoma. Recorded remarks from 2005 emerged in October 2016 showing Mr. Trump using crude language to describe women, proudly elaborating how he pursued a married woman, and was quoted as saying, "And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything." Of the 34 Catholic Advisory Group members, none of them made any public criticism or resigned as a result of Mr. Trump's boasting about sexual assault.

*Catholic Democrats* offered a public condemnation. "As Catholics, we have a special obligation to make our voices heard when we see any individual use a position of power to sexually exploit another," said Steve Krueger, president of Catholic Democrats. "Catholics are all too keenly aware of both the damage of sexual abuse on victims - sometimes life-threatening - as well as the connection between it and the abuse of power. Governor Frank Keating was a co-chair of the National Review Board for the Protection of Children and Young People, a lay-led board appointed by the U.S. Bishops to address the clergy sexual abuse crisis. He knows better than most how sexual abuse can be the result of an abuse of power. We urge him - and all of the individuals on the board - to demonstrate their zero tolerance for sexual abuse and resign from their positions on Trump's Catholic Advisory Group."

In July 2016, when asked if he had ever sought God's forgiveness, Mr. Trump said, "I am not sure I have. I just go on and try to do a better job from there. I don't think so. I think if I do something wrong, I think, I just try and make it right. I don't bring God into that picture. I don't."

It has been a source of perplexity why Evangelicals and some conservative Catholics have been so fiercely supportive of a president whose personal behavior has been so egregious, and who himself has no clear interest in religious practice or religious people. There is a remarkable back story unfolding about the role that Jerry Falwell, Jr., played in Mr. Trump's emergence as the favored candidate of the Evangelical world in 2016, particularly now that he was forced out as president of Liberty University in Lynchburg VA as a result of imprudent behavior in his personal life. Mr. Trump had delivered a speech in 2012 and received an honorary degree then. The Falwells met Trump attorney Michael Cohen at that time, and found themselves in compromising circumstances that may have played a role in Mr. Falwell's surprising endorsement of Mr. Trump in 2016 rather than his Evangelical rival, Senator Ted Cruz. (Miller M. E., 2020)



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["I'm seeing more priests saying that voting for Joe Biden is a mortal sin. It is not. It is not a sin to vote for either Mr. Biden or Mr. Trump. Nor is it a sin to be Democrat or Republican."](#)

[Jesuit Fr. James Martin](#)

[Facebook post, Sept 3, 2020](#)

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A charter member of the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast's "Founders Circle," Austin Ruse of the Catholic Family & Human Rights Institute, made news in 2014 for saying that "the hard-left, human-hating people that run modern universities should be taken out and shot." (Ashtari, 2014) If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I should be pleased that Mr. Ruse has come out with a new book entitled, *The Catholic Case for Trump*, in which he calls Mr. Trump "the most pro-Catholic president in history." In line with the synergy between the Federalist Society and the Republican Catholic outreach efforts, he delves heavily into the appointment of conservative judges as a measure of Mr. Trump's desirability to Catholic voters. He conveniently divides Catholics into three pots: "faithful Catholics" (who support Republicans), "generic Catholics," and "dissenting Catholics" (who presumably support Democrats). He jumps on the conservative bandwagon of violating Canon 220 by calling Senator Kerry "an unfaithful Catholic...and we have the same situation here (presumably referring to Joe Biden)." He goes on to falsely accuse Mr. Biden of opposing Church teachings on "fundamental issues of human sexuality and human life. I think that faithful Catholics and generic Catholics are uncomfortable with the idea that a dissenting Catholic will be in the White House." (Foley, 2020) Having previously written a book that questions global warming, Mr. Ruse fails to mention any other salient issues that might distract from his argument: the racist instincts of his subject, the anti-immigrant fervor of his followers, the reinstatement of the federal death penalty, or the degradation of environmental regulations at every level to name a few.

Last October, a priest in South Carolina took it on himself to publicly deny Communion to Mr. Biden, and then did a press interview to explain his critical views of Mr. Biden's Catholicism. There have since been public statements by a priest in La Crosse Wisconsin who says that "those who vote for the Democrat face going to hell," comments that were praised by Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas. Showing that he must be about the least well-versed of all canon lawyers, Cardinal Burke couldn't resist the temptation to involve himself once more in going after a Catholic candidate. Himself the former bishop of La Crosse WI, he said in an interview August 31, 2020 that Mr. Biden "is not a Catholic in good standing and he should not approach to receive Holy Communion." (Staff C. , 2020) Again, these are severe violations of Canons 220 and 915.

I attended a meeting once at a Knights of Columbus Hall where the speaker was Brian Burch, head of the group CatholicVote, which is spending nearly \$10 million in ads demeaning Mr. Biden's Catholic faith. The sanctimony of that presentation to a mostly indifferent audience in Massachusetts, along with the unhinged emails he writes every week (for instance condemning Prof. Christine Blasey Ford when she testified against Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh) testify to a "win at any cost" strategy. In January 2020, news broke that CatholicVote was employing a data harvesting technique called "Geofencing" to gather cellphone data on Catholics attending Mass. (Schlumpf, 2020) In the end, Covid-19 largely put an end to that.

In April 2020, Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York lavished praise on President Trump in a conference call for 600 conservative church leaders along with Education Secretary Betsy DeVos and Housing Secretary Ben Carson. The call also included Cardinal Seán O'Malley of Boston and Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles, president of the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Mr. Trump praised himself for 15 minutes, criticizing both the Democrats and his old nemesis, Secretary Clinton. "I hope that everyone gets out and votes and does what they have to do," he said, and indicated that if the Democrats won, "You're going to have a very different Catholic Church." Cardinal Dolan continued his praise for Mr. Trump through online Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral that morning, and then on a virtual appearance on "Fox and Friends." (Roewe, 2020)

The response from other Catholic organizations was quick and highly critical. More than a thousand Catholics, including leaders of many Catholic social justice organizations, signed a letter expressing "outrage" at Cardinal Dolan's cloying support for Mr. Trump. "Your recent phone call with President Trump and appearance on Fox News sends a message that Catholic leaders have aligned themselves with a president who tears apart immigrant families, denies climate change, stokes racial division, and supports economic policies that hurt the poor," they wrote. "There is nothing 'pro-life' about Trump's agenda." (Remedios, 2020)

It's not just the candidates themselves in the crosshairs of the zealots. On websites like ChurchMilitant.com, they don't hesitate to go after priests and bishops (Christlieb, 2020) (Murano, 2020) who haven't fallen in line with their orthodoxy.

What all these efforts have in common – both the group of maverick bishops and other surrogates in 2004 and the scattered pro-Trump voices now – is that some conservative Catholics have no qualms about violating Canon Law (Canon 220) by abusing the right to privacy and the good name of Catholic candidates who happen to be Democrats – and using Holy Communion as a political weapon in violation of Canon 915 by setting themselves up as judge and jury of a fellow Catholic's fidelity to his faith. The bottom line seems to be the corporate agenda of the Federalist Society and many major polluters in the United States, who are also among the biggest donors to the Republican Party and the leading deniers of global warming.



Perhaps President Trump has been the worst. At a campaign rally in Fayetteville NC September 19, 2020, Mr. Trump said, “The sleepy campaign has joined forces with those trying to tear down America and our way of life. He comes out with a platform...There will be no oil. There will be no God. There will be no guns.” A month earlier, in Ohio, he said of Mr. Biden, “He’s following the radical left agenda, take away your guns, destroy your 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, no religion, no anything, hurt the Bible, hurt God. He’s against God. He’s against guns. He’s against energy, our kind of energy.” (Dorman, 2020)

For every conservative naysayer, however, there have been priests, nuns, and bishops of conscience not afraid to speak out in support of Catholics voting for whomever they feel best embodies the personal qualities a president should have – and who will do what’s best for the country in such a difficult time. Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, speaking September 15, 2020, during a webinar on Catholic voters in the 2020 election, said, “I think that a person in good conscience could vote for Mr. Biden. I, frankly, in my own way of thinking have a more difficult time with the other option.” (White, Cardinal Tobin: A 'person in good conscience' could vote for Biden, 2020)

In February, San Diego Bishop Robert McElroy spoke at the University of San Diego, outlining a whole collection of Catholic priorities, including global warming, protecting the unborn,



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“When religious leaders put access to power before principles, they risk losing the moral clarity needed to ensure politics is about the pursuit of the common good. I pray that you and other bishops will show the leadership our country needs at this difficult time.”

Letter to Cardinal Dolan, May 1, from 200 priests, nuns, and theologians

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immigrants, racism, workers’ rights, poverty, marriage and family, nuclear disarmament, and religious liberty. “The designation of either of these issues [global warming or abortion] as the preeminent question in Catholic social teaching at this time in the United States will inevitably be hijacked by partisan forces to propose that Catholics have an overriding duty to vote for candidates that espouse that position. Recent electoral history shows this to be a certainty.” (McElroy, 2020) To the conversation he also added the issues of competence and character. “It does little good to elect a saint who echoes Catholic social teaching on every issue if that candidate does not have the competence to carry out his duties effectively and thereby enhance the common good.” Character also matters, he said. “Today, leaders in government embrace corrosive tactics and language, fostering division rather than unity. The notion of truth itself has lost its footing in our public debate....For all these reasons, character is an even more essential element in effective faith-filled voting at the present moment, and another reason why faith-filled voting cannot be simply reduced to a series of competing social justice teachings.”

## Health and the COVID-19 Epidemic:

### **“It didn’t have to be this way”**

**A**s someone who is caring for Covid-19 patients myself, both children and adults, the devastating effects of the epidemic are something I witness and risk on a daily basis in my work.

In his new book, “Rage,” journalist Bob Woodward recounts a series of 18 interviews with Mr. Trump, (Gangel, 2020) including one in early February 2020 when Mr. Trump indicated he was well aware of the dangerousness of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19. Trump said then that he thought Covid-19 was perhaps five times “more deadly” than influenza. However in



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“Ms. Troye recounts hearing the president – who has spoken about his germophobia – say in a meeting that he was glad that the virus had arrived in the United States because it meant he would no longer have to shake hands with people he said he considered ‘disgusting.’”

NY Times article 9/18/20, quoting lifelong Republican Olivia Troye, former top homeland security aide to VP Pence, who endorsed Mr. Biden

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late-March, he told Woodward, “I wanted to always play it down...I still like playing it down, because I don’t want to create a panic.” Trump learned in January that there was evidence of widespread asymptomatic spread of the virus in China, and his national security advisor warned that Covid-19 would be the “biggest national security threat” of his presidency. Nonetheless, he devoted only two sentences to the virus in his State of the Union message February 4, stating, “We are coordinating with the Chinese government and working closely together on the coronavirus outbreak in China. My administration will take all necessary steps to safeguard our citizens from this threat.”

President Trump’s role in controlling the virus? He told Woodward in their last interview July 21, “The virus has nothing to do with me...It’s not my fault. It’s – China let the damn virus out.” But when the subject of masks came up during the debate on September 29, two days before he himself and his wife tested positive, he belittled Mr. Biden. “I don’t wear face masks like him,” Mr. Trump said. “Every time you see him he’s got a mask. He could be speaking 200 feet away ... and he shows up with the biggest mask I’ve ever seen.”

Healthcare in the U.S. was in trouble before the Covid-19 pandemic appeared in February 2020. In each year of the Trump administration, the share of children with health coverage fell in the United States according to new Census data in a report released October 9 by the Georgetown Center for Children and Families. (Goodnough, 2020) Despite continued economic growth in the U.S. throughout that period from 2017-2019, the ranks of uninsured children grew by 4.4 million – including 320,000 in 2019 alone, and particularly in Florida and Texas.



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“It’s so unworthy of a president. It’s beyond despicable. It’s soulless. Its almost unspeakable in the middle of a pandemic to try to divide the country on a political basis when Covid-19 is really bipartisan”

Tom Ridge, Republican former governor of PA and later secretary of homeland security under President Bush

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According to the report, falling enrollment in Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) were responsible for the declines -- programs for low and middle income children that cover nearly half of all children in the U.S. “Trump administration policies could be playing a role: The administration has encouraged states to check eligibility more often, which advocacy groups say has caused many families to lose coverage because of paperwork errors and missed deadlines.” (Goodnough, 2020) In particular, Latino – often Catholic – children saw a disproportionate drop in 2019, possibly because of the administration’s immigration policies penalizing families in their Green Card applications if they had taken any public assistance (the so-called Public Charge rule). Even though enforcement was uneven because of the pandemic this year, the report suggested many families were fearful of hurting their immigration chances.

More than half of uninsured children live in the South, where most states failed to expand Medicaid under the ACA, despite generous federal subsidization of that care. That rate of uninsured children was twice as much (8.1%) in states that failed to expand Medicaid compared to the states that had. (Goodnough, 2020) Moreover, new data indicates that pregnant women infected with the coronavirus and hospitalized often develop serious complications and may face a higher risk of premature delivery or still birth. (Rabin, 2020). Even before the pandemic, the number of uninsured Americans rose by 2.3 million between 2016 and 2019. (Gee, 2020) Lack of health insurance is one of the single greatest determinants of mortality in the U.S. (Wilper AP, 2009)

## On the question of health care for all Americans

**D**onald and Melania Trump tested positive for the coronavirus and put healthcare and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) back at the center of the debate over whether Judge Amy Barrett should be elevated to replace Justice Ruth Ginsberg on the Supreme Court. Hours before the news about his illness, President Trump told the annual fundraiser for the Catholic Charities of New York at the Al Smith Dinner on October 1, “We are on track to develop and distribute a vaccine before the end of the year, and maybe substantially before. And I just want to say that the end of the pandemic is in sight.” Then he added, “We will not stand for any attacks against Judge Barrett’s faith. Anti-Catholic bigotry has absolutely no place in the United States of America. It predominates in the Democrat party, and we must do something immediately about it, like a Republican win—and let’s make it a really big one.”

One week after the election, the Supreme Court is poised to debate the constitutionality of the ACA for the third time – at the behest of Mr. Trump and the attorneys general of eighteen Republican-led states. With more than 225,000 Americans dead and the presidential race upended by Mr. Trump’s own illness, people losing their healthcare just after the election has become an imminent threat to millions. A hundred million more could see steep increases in premiums when protections for preexisting conditions are overturned. A Court appointment that Mr. Trump hoped would mobilize conservative Catholics over the abortion issue has suddenly shifted to a debate about the morality of denying healthcare to a big chunk of mostly sicker or indigent Americans.

What is the Catholic view of healthcare? In 1891 Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Rerum Novarum, On Capital and Labor*, that dealt with the industrial revolution and the dignity of workers. As mentioned earlier, this document launched a movement collectively referred to as Catholic Social Thought, with a commitment to the dignity of the human person. The U.S. bishops first called for healthcare as a human right a hundred years ago, after World War I.

Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (“Peace on Earth”) made a first explicit reference to the provision of healthcare, and detailed the relationship between world peace and human rights. “Every person has the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life... Therefore, a human being has the right to security in case of sickness, inability to work, widowhood, old age, unemployment, or in any other case in which he is deprived of the means of subsistence through no fault of his own.”

In a 1992 letter to Congress, the American bishops called health care “a basic human right,” saying, “In our parishes and schools, our shelters and clinics, we see the consequences of failed and confused policy—the families without insurance, the sick without options, the children without care.... When the healthcare system leaves so many people uncared for, affecting human life itself—then this system is in need of serious and comprehensive reform.” In June 1993, they wrote, “Our nation’s health care system serves too few and costs too much,” and referred to expanding healthcare as “a moral imperative.”

When President Obama and Vice President Biden picked up the issue in 2008, the bishops lost their way and focused on abortion as a reason to oppose Democratic healthcare reform – despite the administration’s sincere efforts to address their concerns. If not for nuns like Sister Carol Keehan and the Catholic Health Association, Democrats in Congress wouldn’t have put the ACA

over the top. The CDC ultimately showed dramatic further declines in abortion throughout the Obama/Biden years (see below), undermining the premise of conservatives' opposition to the ACA in 2010. There is evidence now that abortions plummeted in part \*because\* of the ACA.

When the Republican-controlled Congress revoked the individual mandate in 2017 – the basis for the current lawsuit – it had virtually no effect on the stability of the ACA. 11.4-million people signed up in 2020 through the exchanges, and 12.7-million additional low-income adults gained coverage through Medicaid. Every American has been affected by the ban on discrimination against people with preexisting conditions.

Judge Barrett has publicly criticized the decision by Chief Justice John Roberts to uphold the ACA the last time, in 2012. Her indifference and that of the GOP to the implications of pulling the plug on health security has moved to the heart of the Supreme Court debate now – even as the Trumps are themselves looking to the healthcare system for their own survival.

## **Covid-19, schools, and the economic catastrophe of 2020**

[Dr. Jonas Salk once told me](#) that government had nothing to do with inventing the first vaccine for paralytic polio – the last great epidemic that kept children home out of fear of infection. An outpouring of financial support from the March of Dimes, inspired by the personal story of President Franklin Roosevelt, led to clinical trials that involved millions of children to prove that the Salk vaccine was safe and effective. In contrast, the government is pouring billions into vaccine research to prevent Covid-19, and Mr. Trump has often predicted that success is just around the corner. Indeed the pressure on “Operation Warp Speed” has led [most Americans to worry](#) that a vaccine will be rushed out without adequate testing for safety and effectiveness.



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“He just keeps promising his magic healthcare plan is right around the corner. The truth: he has no plan.”

Senator Charles Schumer, Senate Minority Leader, Sept 15, 2020, Tweeting in response to Mr Trump’s assertion at a town hall that “I have it all ready”

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In that captious first presidential debate on September 29, 2020, Mr. Trump stated, “We’re weeks away from a vaccine...we’re going to deliver it right away. We have the military all set up...they can do 200,000 a day.” Simultaneously, the administration has pushed to get children back in school this fall on the premise that kids are less susceptible to Covid-19 – indeed President Trump minimized their risk in the debate, stating that “Young children aren’t [very vulnerable], even younger people aren’t.” Because adults are less likely to return to work if their children are home from school, the recovery of the economy -- [for most people the top issue in the election](#) -- is dependent on getting students back in school as soon as possible.



Remarkably, there has been little discussion of the fact that [there are no vaccine trials yet to prevent Covid-19 in children](#); none are listed on ClinicalTrials.gov. Though there are at least 189 vaccines under development, [none of them are being tested for safety in children](#).

Do children need to be vaccinated? It's true that [most children infected with the virus do not appear sick, and most usually recover](#). But [new evidence](#) shows that infected children can shed large amounts of virus without many symptoms, [potentially spreading the infection to parents and elderly relatives with dire consequences](#). Children receive the fall influenza vaccine less to protect themselves than to guard against spreading flu to susceptible infants and elderly in their families.

[New studies now show](#) that elderly people often mount very strong antibody responses, and still succumb to the virus. Treatment with convalescent plasma [has not yet been proven to be effective](#). It's possible that high titers of antibodies may actually make this disease worse.

Routine childhood vaccines are among the most rigorously tested and monitored medications in the world, but Americans are right to worry about the potential dangers of this vaccine – particularly if pressure grows to administer it to children without clinical trials.



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“The phase 3 trials of vaccines do not include children until you get a certain degree of safety, which will be known reasonably soon. At that point, a phase 1 trial in children would start, without too much of a delay.”

Dr. Anthony Fauci, address to the American Academy of Pediatrics, Oct 3, 2020

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Pediatric rheumatologists like me have been reporting cases since May of the [multi-system inflammatory syndrome \(MIS-C\) in hundreds of children](#) that causes catastrophic failure of the heart despite an absence of underlying predisposing conditions. The children for whom I care in the pediatric intensive care unit required ventilator support and medications to treat a septic shock-like condition different from fulminant Covid-19 in adults. When these children present in the ER, virtually none are still actively infected with the virus.

In other words, their immune system mounts a catastrophic response weeks after they have cleared the virus. Without performing adequate safety trials in children, we have no way to know if large numbers of kids might develop disease like MIS-C simply from vaccination itself.

Dr. Salk was hard at work on an AIDS vaccine in 1995 when he died. Because antibodies are not protective against HIV, a successful vaccine remains elusive. We've had to find other ways to cope with HIV. Barring better treatments, children won't be safely back in school until we've completed pediatric trials -- none of which has yet begun. So unfortunately we're not remotely "weeks away from a vaccine." For now, a return to normal life will largely depend on the effective interventions we already have -- like masks and distancing and well-washed hands.

# Race and Equality in our time

**C**atholics are unequivocally opposed to racism. The U.S. Bishops published a document in 2018 called, “Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love - A Pastoral Letter Against Racism.” It was developed by the Committee on Cultural Diversity in the Church and approved by the full body of bishops as a formal statement at their November 2018 General Meeting. The statement begins by quoting Pope Francis in his encyclical, [\*Evangelii Gaudium\*](#) (“The Joy of the Gospel,” no. 113), where he points out, “The salvation which God has wrought, and the Church joyfully proclaims, is for everyone. God has found a way to unite himself to every human being in every age.” They conclude, “As bishops, we unequivocally state that racism is a life issue. Accordingly, we will not cease to speak forcefully against and work toward ending racism. Racism directly places brother and sister against each other, violating the dignity inherent in each person.” (USCCB, 2018)

In his new book, “Rage,” Bob Woodward interviewed President Trump in mid-June, after protests erupted across the country following the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minneapolis. As recounted by CNN:

Woodward: “But let me ask you this. I mean, we share one thing in common. We’re White, privileged...Do you have any sense that that privilege has isolated and put you in a cave to a certain extent, as it put me, and I think lots of White, privileged people in a cave. And that we have to work our way out of it to understand the anger and the pain, particularly Black people feel in this country?”

Trump: “No. You really drank the Kool-Aid, didn’t you? Just listen to you. Wow. No, I don’t feel that at all.”

Christopher A. Wray, director of the FBI under the Trump administration, testified to a House Committee on Sept 17, 2020, that “racially-motivated violent extremism,” primarily from white supremacist groups, constitutes the majority of domestic terrorism threats. “Mr. Wray’s descriptions of Russian interference and white supremacist efforts echoed a draft of a homeland security threat assessment that a whistle blower said department leaders had blocked,” said a report in the New York Times. (Kanno-Youngs, 2020) The intelligence consensus, said Mr. Wray, was that Russia was targeting Mr. Biden.

Even within the Church there are important differences with regard to concerns about racism. In June 2020, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano – a former Vatican nuncio to the U.S. and frequent Italian critic of Pope Francis – wrote an open letter to President Trump making common cause against critics of the president and protestors across the U.S. He referred insensitively to Black Lives Matter protestors as “children of darkness,” and spoke in defense of “the children of light” as victims of discrimination. He also alluded to the Covid-19 pandemic being a plot by self-serving elites, “arrogating to themselves the right to act against the will of citizens and their representatives in the governments of nations.” His prediction four months ago that the virus would fade away seems to have been starkly premature. He then attacked Archbishop Wilton Gregory for his comments critical of President Trump after the photo-ops on consecutive days at St. John’s Episcopal Church and the St. John Paul II Shrine; he lumped Archbishop Gregory in with “the Invisible Enemy of all humanity.” (Vigano, 2020)

What Archbishop Vigano failed to mention was that Mr. Trump utilized mounted police firing tear gas at peaceful protestors to clear a path so he could walk from the White House across Lafayette

Park to the Episcopal Church that had been frequented by Presidents George H.W. Bush and Franklin Roosevelt – but never before by Mr. Trump. The Trumps also traveled at the invitation of Carl Anderson and the Knights of Columbus for the photo-op at the JPPII Shrine, without informing the bishop of the city. “I find it baffling and reprehensible,” said Archbishop Gregory, “that any Catholic facility would allow itself to be so egregiously misused and manipulated in a fashion that violates our religious principles, which call us to defend the rights of all people -- even those with whom we disagree.” (Boorstein, 2020)

Archbishop Vigano's breathless praise of Mr. Trump and condemnation of his constituents hearkened a long way back – using language of the Manichaeans that paints the world as divided simplistically into good vs evil. Like Austin Ruse's labels, the Manichaeans viewed themselves as *veri Christiani* (true Christians), while the mainstream believers were “semi-Christians.” But Manichaean dualism was widely viewed as a heresy within Christianity and died out by the time Muhammad appeared in the Seventh Century.

Archbishop Viagno is not alone in the Church in viewing Black people as the enemy. Fr. Theodore Rothrock, pastor of a church in the Lafayette Diocese in Indiana, referred in his parish bulletin to Black Lives Matter protestors as “wolves in wolves' clothing, masked thieves and bandits, seeking only to devour the life of the poor and profit from the fear of others. They are maggots and parasites at best, feeding off the isolation of addiction and broken families, and offering to replace any current frustration and anxiety with more misery and greater resentment.” (Salvadore, 2020) The local bishop suspended Fr. Rothrock, anxious not to make new enemies for the Church.

Pope Francis spoke out in June 2020 about social unrest in the U.S. “We cannot turn a blind eye to racism and exclusion in any form and yet claim to defend the sacredness of every human life.” (O'Connell, 2020)

On the subject of race and inequality in health care, the Democratic Platform makes a commitment to overcome the enduring disparities:

The national statistics on American health care mask profound disparities in insurance rates, access to primary and specialized care, and disparate health outcomes, which are a symptom of those disparities in access. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the uninsured rate was nearly three times higher for Latinos and nearly twice as high for Black Americans as it was for whites. Some segments of the Asian American and Pacific Islander population faced uninsured rates rivaling those of Black Americans and Latinos, and more than one in five Native Americans and Alaska Natives was uninsured. Black children are far more likely than white children to suffer from asthma. Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and Black Americans are diagnosed with diabetes at higher rates than whites. And average life expectancy is more than two years lower for rural Americans compared to those who live in metropolitan areas.

We recognize it is not enough to have a commitment to eliminating health disparities: we must have a plan. That is why Democrats will launch a sustained, government-wide effort, with leadership at the highest levels, to eliminate racial, ethnic, gender, and geographic gaps in insurance rates, access to quality care, and health outcomes. That includes tackling the social, economic, and environmental inequities—the social determinants of health like poor housing, hunger, inadequate transportation, mass incarceration, air and water pollution, and gun violence—that contribute to worse health outcomes for low-income Americans and people of color.

## **“Cleaning the swamp”: Trump and corruption**

**C**atholicism holds precious the honesty and fidelity to truth of its members, not to mention the Jesuit ideal of “being men and women for others.” The Trump administration has stood in stark violation of both these principles throughout its four years.

President Trump promised during the 2016 campaign to release his federal income taxes “as soon as the IRS finishes auditing them.” It is clear now, however, through years of legal fighting all the way to the Supreme Court, that he never had any intention of releasing his tax returns. On September 27, 2020, the New York Times published an investigation showing that Mr. Trump had paid only \$750 in federal taxes during the year he won the election, and again in the first year of his presidency. During 10 of the previous 15 years, he paid no federal taxes at all – including the four years immediately preceding his run for president. “Ultimately,” the Times wrote, “Mr. Trump has been more successful playing a business mogul than being one in real life.”

The Times obtained records showing that Mr. Trump has more than \$400 million dollars in debt coming due in the next four years that he has personally guaranteed. An ongoing dispute with the IRS has the potential to cost him more than another \$100 million. “The records show that he depends more and more on making money from businesses that put him in potential and often direct conflict of interest with his job as president.” (Buettner, 2020) His affiliation with *The Apprentice* brought him a total of \$427.4 million, and he was paid millions more from the 2013 Miss Universe pageant in Moscow.

The article deals extensively with his ongoing conflicts of interest. In his first two years as president, he had \$73 million in revenue from abroad, including millions from countries like Turkey, the Philippines, and India. Previous documents had shown that between 1985 and 1994, Mr. Trump lost more money than nearly any other individual American taxpayer. His personal attorney, Michael Cohen, testified before Congress in February 2019 and recounted how Mr. Trump had once shown him a tax refund check for \$72.9 million that resulted from declaring \$1.4 billion in core business losses for 2008 and 2009. “He could not believe how stupid the government was for giving someone like him that much money back.”

The wider pool of scandal continues to unfold day after day. Steve Bannon, the engineer of the successful presidential campaign in 2016, was arrested in August 2020 just before the Republican Convention. He was on a yacht in Long Island Sound at the time and charged with defrauding hundreds of thousands of Mr. Trump’s supporters who were solicited for contributions to *We Build the Wall* – a supposed non-profit funding construction of a wall along the Mexican border. (Zolan Kanno-Youngs, 2020) There’s a long list of other intimates who resigned in disgrace: EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, HHS Secretary Tom Price, National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, Campaign Manager Paul Manafort and deputy Rick Gates, adviser Roger Stone, and Attorney Michael Cohen, among others.

## **Trump & Putin: “A useful idiot and a fellow traveler”**

**I**nternational peace and security are very much at the top of Catholics’ concerns. The Woodward book recounts an interview with Dan Coats, former Director of National Intelligence, who was convinced “that Putin had something on Trump.” He had no better explanation for Trump’s groveling behavior toward Putin. In an interview for *The Atlantic*, Lt. Col Alexander Vindman recounted his experience working for the Trump administration on the National Security Council. “President Trump should be considered to be a useful idiot and a fellow traveler, which makes him an unwitting agent of Putin,” said Lt. Col. Vindman. “In the Army we call this ‘free chicken,’ something you don’t have to work for – it just comes to you. This is what the Russians have in Trump: free chicken.” Now studying for his doctorate at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins (SAIS), Lt. Col. Vindman came forward before the election because, “I think it’s important for me to tell people that I think the president has made this country weaker. We’re mocked by our adversaries and by our allies, and we’re heading for more disaster.” (Goldberg, 2020)

Although the New York Times investigation of Mr. Trump’s taxes did not identify any specific ongoing Russian financial interests, his parallel attacks on the reliability of the presidential election seem geared toward undermining the results. The Times reported September 27 that, with only 37 days before the election, federal investigators were seeing a dramatic increase in ransomware attacks on state and local governments. (Sanger N. P., 2020) “Over the past 18 months, cybercriminals – primarily based in Russia and Eastern Europe – have hit the American public sector with more ransomware attacks than in any other period on record...A record 966 ransomware attacks hit the American public sector last year – two-thirds of them targeting state and local governments.” The article went on to list some particular targets: a Texas county that voted for Mrs. Clinton in 2016, in addition to counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Florida, and Georgia that helped determine the outcome of her contest with Mr. Trump. (Sanger N. P., 2020)

Part of the plan is the sabotaging of the U.S. Post Office. Through the pandemic, the Postal Service became more important than ever as a means of providing goods to people when most retail was shut down. Despite the obvious need, the Trump administration refused to provide any financial assistance. In fact, Mr. Trump appointed a large financial supporter, Louis DeJoy, as Postmaster General despite his having a large personal financial stake in the Postal Service. Mr. DeJoy began implementing measures that slowed significantly the delivery of the mail across the country, including mothballing mailboxes and postal sorting machines. The goal appears to be interfering with the ability of the Postal Service to deliver mail-in ballots in a timely way.

Moreover, the corruption extends to a global stage, as so well-chronicled by the Impeachment proceedings last winter. Mr. Trump’s overture to the Ukrainian president to “do us a favor” by investigating Mr. Biden was only the tip of the iceberg. A new opinion piece authored by Lt. Col. Vindman and national security expert John Gans details Mr. Trump’s appeals to President Xi Jinping of China to help his reelection by buying American farm goods, the inscrutable boosterism for Russia’s Vladimir Putin, his undermining economic détente between Kosovo and Serbia, and the hastily negotiated photo-ops related to Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

They concluded, “No one, not even Mr. Trump, can say with confidence what American foreign policy is on any given issue these days. Such uncertainty is a source of stress and friction, leaving American military personnel, diplomats, and intelligence officers not only out of the loop but also



out of step with each other and with allies. After almost four years of this uncertainty, foreign government representatives simply shortcut the system and look for a White House back channel to figure out if the United States will zig when it's supposed to zag." (Gans, 2020)

The degree to which Mr. Trump is beholden to Vladimir Putin is unparalleled. Asked by *Fox News's* Jeannine Piro in January 2019 if he had ever worked for the Russians, Mr. Trump never answered the question 'yes' or 'no,' but rather, "I think it's the most insulting thing I've ever been asked. I think it's [the most insulting article](#) I've ever had written and if you read the article, you'd see that they found absolutely nothing, but the headline of that article, it's called the failing 'New York Times' for a reason."

It's clear that he has gone to extraordinary lengths to conceal details of his face-to-face meetings with Mr. Putin even from senior administration officials. In Hamburg in 2017, he took the extraordinary step of confiscating the translator's notes and instructing her not to discuss with other officials what had transpired. "As a result, U.S. officials said there is no detailed record, even in classified files, of Trump's face-to-face interactions with the Russian leader at five locations over the past two years. ... Because of the absence of any reliable record of Trump's conversations with Putin, officials at times have had to rely on reports by U.S. intelligence agencies tracking the reaction in the Kremlin." (Miller G. , 2019)

## Trump and the Supreme Court

**A**ssociate Justice Ginsburg died of metastatic pancreatic cancer at age 87 on Friday, September 18, 2020. She was the first Jewish woman appointed to the Supreme Court, and was a singular hero of the movement for the equality of women over her 60-year career. Her adult granddaughter, Clara Spera, told an interviewer for the *BBC Newshour* three days after Justice Ginsburg's death that she had asked her grandmother if there was anything she wanted to say to all the people who would be mourning her death. Justice Ginsburg said yes, there was. "I pulled out my computer and she dictated the following sentence to me. She said: 'My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed.'" Ms. Spera said that she had read it back to her grandmother, and that "she was very happy with that."

About 60% of the American public agrees with that sentiment in several polls, and oppose the appointment of a Supreme Court Justice only weeks before the presidential election. Although the appointment appears within the letter of the law, it is clearly not within the spirit of our democracy. This was underscored by the extraordinary hypocrisy of U.S. Senate Republicans, who dishonored their oath of office when they denied President Obama's nominee, Judge Garland, so much as a hearing through the ten months that separated Justice Antonin Scalia's death from the 2016 presidential election. Trump himself said on *Good Morning America* in March 2016, "I think they should wait until the next president and let the next president pick." He wasn't the only one -- a list of statements by Republican senators compiled by the Los Angeles Times:

2016, Sen. **Ted Cruz** (R-Texas): "It has been 80 years since a Supreme Court vacancy was nominated and confirmed in an election year. There is a long tradition that you don't do this in an election year."

2018, Sen. **Lindsey Graham** (R-S.C.): "If an opening comes in the last year of President Trump's term, and the primary process has started, we'll wait to the next election."

2016, Sen. **Marco Rubio** (R-Fla.): “I don’t think we should be moving on a nominee in the last year of this president’s term - I would say that if it was a Republican president.”

2016, Sen. **David Perdue** (R-Ga.): “The very balance of our nation’s highest court is in serious jeopardy. As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, I will do everything in my power to encourage the president and Senate leadership not to start this process until we hear from the American people.”

2016, Sen. **Chuck Grassley** (R-Iowa): “A lifetime appointment that could dramatically impact individual freedoms and change the direction of the court for at least a generation is too important to get bogged down in politics. The American people shouldn’t be denied a voice.”

2016, Sen. **Thom Tillis** (R-N.C.): “The campaign is already under way. It is essential to the institution of the Senate and to the very health of our republic to not launch our nation into a partisan, divisive confirmation battle during the very same time the American people are casting their ballots to elect our next president.”

2016, Sen. **Richard Burr** (R-N.C.): “In this election year, the American people will have an opportunity to have their say in the future direction of our country. For this reason, I believe the vacancy left open by Justice Antonin Scalia should not be filled until there is a new president.”

2016, Sen. **Roy Blunt** (R-Mo.): “The Senate should not confirm a new Supreme Court justice until we have a new president.”

2016, Sen. **Cory Gardner** (R-Col.): “I think we’re too close to the election. The president who is elected in November should be the one who makes this decision.”

2016, Sen. **Rob Portman** (R-Ohio): “I believe the best thing for the country is to trust the American people to weigh in on who should make a lifetime appointment that could reshape the Supreme Court for generations. This wouldn’t be unusual. It is common practice for the Senate to stop acting on lifetime appointments during the last year of a presidential term, and it’s been nearly 80 years since any president was permitted to immediately fill a vacancy that arose in a presidential election year.”

2016, Sen. **Ron Johnson** (R-Wisc.): “I strongly agree that the American people should decide the future direction of the Supreme Court by their votes for president and the majority party in the U.S. Senate.”

“The American people should have a voice in the selection of their next Supreme Court Justice. Therefore, this vacancy should not be filled until we have a new president.” Senate Majority Leader **Mitch McConnell**, March 2016

As Catholic Christians, our faith life is defined as a search for the truth – both as a personal virtue and as a striving to understand life’s ultimate realities. The Trump presidency has been a remorseless assault day-after-day on the whole idea of truthfulness. Now comes a Republican president and majority in the Senate doing exactly the opposite of a standard they so righteously demanded of others only four years ago. The overwhelming hypocrisy of their actions now are an affront to any standard of decency in our civic life.

Mr. Trump took things a step further in his public comments. After announcing the nominee, Judge Barrett, in the Rose Garden, Mr. Trump appeared at an event in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and continued a campaign of trying to discredit the outcome of the upcoming election – indicating that having Judge Barrett on the court would lend an “advantage” to his campaign for reelection. “I don’t want to end up in the Supreme Court, and I don’t want to go back to Congress, even though we have an advantage if we go back to Congress. Does everyone understand that? I think it’s 26 to 22 or something. It’s counted one code per state. So we actually have an advantage. Oh, they’re going to be thrilled to hear that. I’m sure they’re trying to figure out, ‘How can we break that one?’”

A “contingent election,” according to the New York Times account of the speech, occurs when neither candidate attains an absolute majority in the Electoral College. Each state’s House delegation is given one vote, with 26 required to win. Mr. Trump has repeatedly cast doubt on the integrity of the election, and particularly the use of mail-in ballots. As noted above, his political appointees to the Postal Service have been working for months to undermine mail delivery efficiency, apparently in an effort to further cloud the impact of vote-by-mail ballots.

Regarding his court pick, he ridiculed Mr. Biden for not releasing (as Mr. Trump has the last two elections) a list of potential nominees, because his “names will be handpicked by socialists.” But he didn’t stop there. When he mentioned his former rival, Secretary of State Clinton, the crowd began chanting “Lock her up!” Mr. Trump’s response: “I agree.” (Crowley, 2020)

Democrats responded to Judge Barrett’s nomination respectfully, but with firm opposition. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, “For four years, President Trump has tried to crush the Affordable Care Act in the Congress and the courts. This nomination threatens the destruction of lifesaving protections for 135 million Americans with pre-existing conditions together with every other benefit and protection of the Affordable Care Act.” (Glueck, 2020)

At her Rose Garden nomination ceremony, Judge Barrett, a protégé of Justice Scalia, said that he had had an “incalculable influence on her life” and that “his judicial philosophy is [hers].” Justice Scalia’s judicial philosophy led him to vote against the Affordable Care Act in 2012 and to say that the Voting Rights Act was “a racial entitlement.” If confirmed, her judicial philosophy will be on display as soon as the November 10<sup>th</sup> hearing on the ACA -- the weakest of the three cases challenging the Constitutionality of the ACA. In 2012, Judge Barrett criticized conservative Chief Justice John Roberts for not overturning the ACA saying, “Chief Justice Roberts pushed the Affordable Care Act beyond its plausible meaning to save the statute.” Cases related to the probity of the presidential election may very well come before that.

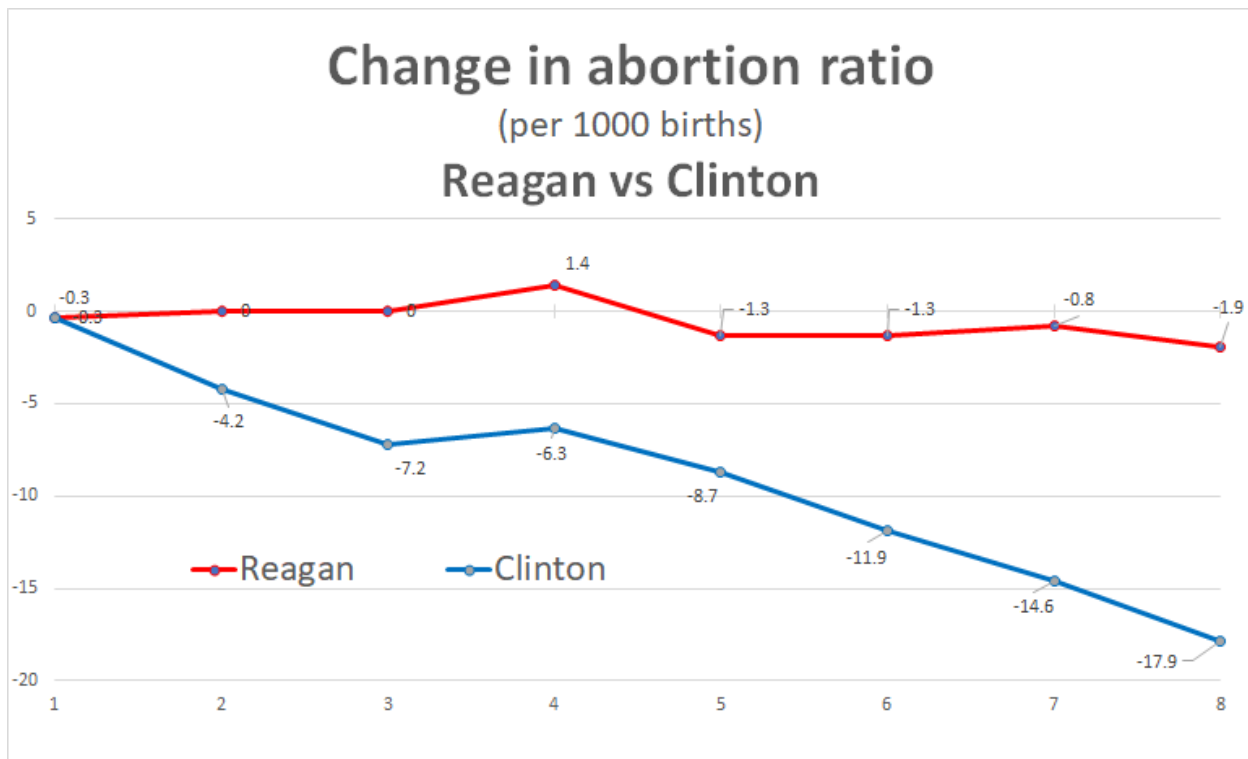
Judge Barrett was evasive during her confirmation hearings on most questions of substance. The daughter of a top-tier lobbyist for the American Petroleum Institute, she responded to questions about global warming by saying, “I’m certainly not a scientist,” and said she had no “firm views on it.” This put her dramatically out of step with most Americans, who say that global warming is happening and that it is caused by humans.” (Tabuchi, 2020)

## **Abortion in American Politics**

**T**he abortion issue has become a significant focus of attention for Roman Catholics over the past six U.S. presidential elections. Beginning in 2000, the Republican National Committee embarked on an aggressive, expensive effort to recruit Catholics away from their traditional home in the Democratic Party. Prior to that, the two political parties were less polarized on the issue. Republican President Gerald Ford was opposed to the criminalization of abortion. Ronald Reagan signed one of the most permissive abortion laws in the country when he was governor of California after a very public and extensive consultation with clergymen, physicians, and psychiatrists. George H.W. Bush had long indicated he was “pro-choice” before he ran for president in 1988.

At the time of the 1992 presidential election, it was not acknowledged that abortion rates had already begun a downward trend. The Clinton administration began to draw connections between the risk of HIV infection and unprotected sex, at a time when there was no treatment for AIDS. As a result of a public education campaign that coincided with the Clinton years, sexual practices of young people in the United States changed dramatically. Within ten years the abortion rates for white women had fallen by half (from 22 to 11 per thousand reproductive-age women per year). President Clinton talked about making abortion “safe, legal and rare,” and he had a record of effectiveness on the issue.

As evidenced below, there was a much more significant decline in the abortion ratio (abortions per 1000 live births) during the eight years of the Clinton administration than during the preceding Reagan administration. Naysayers about this kind of analysis often argue that one can’t attribute changes like these strictly to the president and his actions. **The key point is that the null hypothesis holds at the very least: electing Democrats does not result in increases in abortions like the conservatives always suggest.**



*CDC data analysis comparing the 8 yrs of abortion ratios under the Reagan and Clinton administrations*

Although George W. Bush had had a similar history of ambivalent statements about abortion during his gubernatorial campaigns, the issue seemed to acquire a new conservative caché in his frequent nuanced references to abortion during his presidential campaign in 2000. In videotaped remarks to the Christian Coalition that year, he said, “I know good people disagree on this issue, but surely we can agree on ways to value life by promoting adoption and parental notification.” Although he often said that “every child, born and unborn, ought to be protected in law and welcomed into life,” (Presidential debate vs Al Gore, Boston MA, Oct 3, 2000) he was often ambiguous when questioned about whether he thought abortion should be illegal. He was asked

directly in a Presidential Debate on Oct 13, 2004 in Arizona if he would like to overturn Roe vs. Wade. He declined to answer the question, saying only that he would not use a litmus test in selecting judges. In that debate he went on to mirror what came to be President Obama's position on abortion, saying "Surely there are ways we can work together to reduce the number of abortions: continue to promote adoption laws - that's a great alternative to abortion. Continue to fund and promote maternity group homes. I will continue to promote abstinence programs." Then he concluded, "All of us ought to be involved with programs that provide a viable alternative to abortion." (Third Bush-Kerry debate).

In terms of legislation, Republicans in Congress pushed through four "anti-abortion" bills during the first Bush term that were explicitly designed to label Democrats as the "pro-abortion party." These bills included a law restricting the transport by a non-parent of minors across state lines for an abortion, the Partial Birth Abortion ban (2003) and the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (2004). There is no data to suggest that any of these laws had any measurable effect on the number of abortions in any state, and supporters of these laws didn't pretend that they would actually affect abortion rates. It is telling that no federal legislation restricting abortion was debated in Congress during the second Bush term, once reelection was no longer on the line. Many of Karl Rove's critics suggested that Republicans have little incentive to outlaw abortion, since doing so would remove a major stimulus for political donations and volunteers. Indeed, despite having a plank in their platform every four years since the 1970s supporting a Constitutional ban on abortions, the Republicans have not introduced such legislation in the past 37 years (the 1983 bill was co-sponsored by a Democrat).

After President Bush took office, the Centers for Disease Control moved the publication date for their abortion data to the (post-election) Friday after Thanksgiving, the slowest news day of the year. Consequently, there are rarely any news stories chronicling the slowing in the progress against abortion.

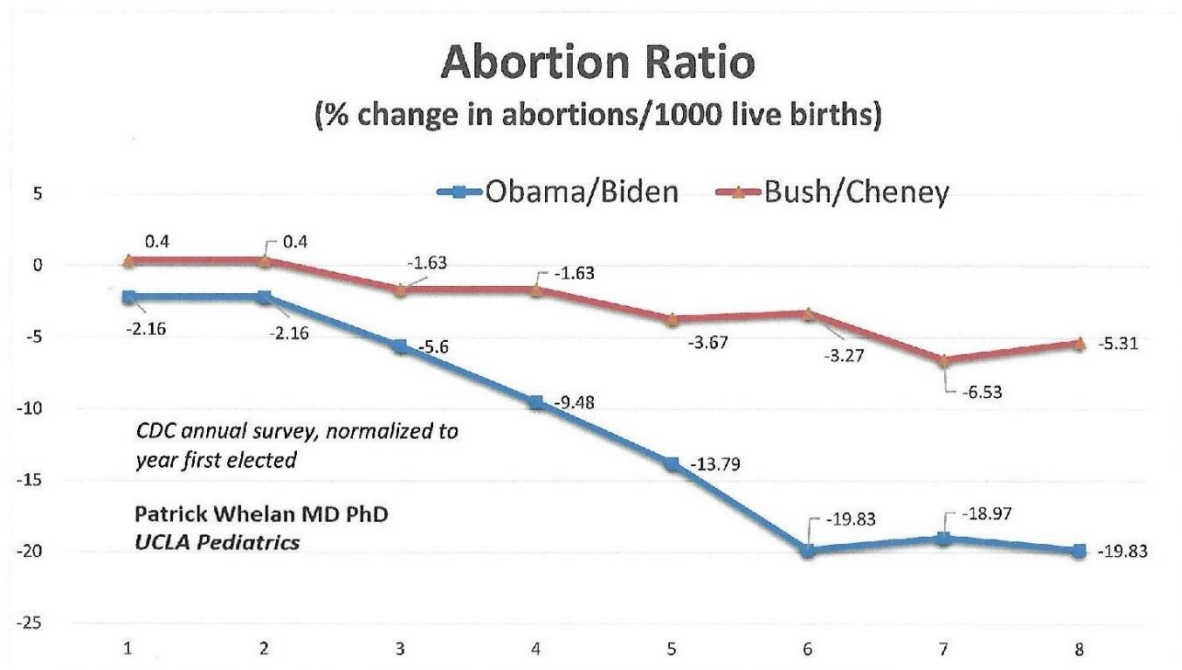
In the summer of 2004 a seminary ethics professor, Dr. Glen Stassen, assembled the limited available public data on abortion rates from the first term of the Bush Administration. He published several articles suggesting that President Bush had overseen a reversal in the progress against abortion attained during the Clinton Administration. (Staff, Author admits flaws in abortion rate study, but challenges critics, 2005) Anti-abortion groups might have been expected to express concern and to seek greater openness from the Bush administration about the unavailable national abortion data at the time. Instead, the National Right to Life Committee mounted a concerted effort to attack Dr. Stassen personally, calling him a stand-in for the Democrats, and belittling the entire thesis. (O'Bannon, 2004) Dr. Stassen pointed out poignantly that such an attack in response to his findings about abortion rates "separates those who want to reduce abortions from people who want to defend this Republican administration."

Following the polarizing 2004 election, the Democratic leadership in Congress took a more activist stance in addressing the abortion problem. Representatives Tim Ryan (D-OH) and Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) fashioned legislation intended to lower abortion rates by addressing the health and economic needs of women and their children. Although the Bush administration substantially increased funding for "abstinence-only sex education" and a variety of church-sponsored crisis pregnancy centers, in October 2007 President Bush vetoed Democratic prevention legislation that would have explicitly worked through economic measures to decrease abortions.



Democrats have consistently opposed the criminalization of abortion. Mr. Biden has simultaneously spoken with conviction about the moral seriousness of the issue and the need to work constructively to address it. Both Mr. Biden and Mr. Obama made clear that they had no intention to “expand abortion rights” under the Affordable Care Act when debate began in 2009. Ultimately, President Obama issued an executive order stating that no funds from the ACA would be used to pay for abortions. This provided reassurance to Congressman Bart Stupak from Michigan and the caucus of Catholic Democrats that he led, ultimately voting to put the ACA over the top.

The US bishops complained bitterly that they didn’t trust the Obama administration not to go back on its word, but at the same time the USCCB chose not to join conservative efforts to overturn the law. Ultimately, as demonstrated below, abortions tumbled almost 20% during the 8 years of the Obama/Biden administration – the most dramatic decline since 1973. Furthermore, even before they entered office, **the abortion rate was lower than at the time of the Roe vs. Wade decision itself.** (Jones R.K., 2008)



*CDC annual state reporting on abortions year-by-year of the GW Bush and Obama/Biden administrations*

Repeated attempts by Catholic conservatives to blame all the abortions since 1973 on the Democrats look increasingly ridiculous, when one considers (1) the majority of the justices in 1973 had been appointed by Republicans, (2) the majority of the justices who upheld the decision in *Casey v. Planned Parenthood* in 1992 were Republican-appointed, (3) the abortion rate is now lower than it was at the time before Roe v. Wade when abortion was still widely illegal, and (4) abortion rates decline at least as much (and evidently much more) under Democratic administrations as they do under Republican administrations.

We should do everything we can to reduce unintended pregnancies and support women who choose to have a child, focusing as the ACA does on pre- and postnatal care, and making adoption less complicated. While reinforcing its commitment to maintaining the legality of abortion across the country, the 2020 Democratic Platform incorporated language that represented the concerns of Mr. Biden and people of faith:

We strongly and unequivocally support the decision to have a child, including by ensuring a safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth, and by providing services during pregnancy and after the birth of a child, including adoption and social support services, as well as protections against pregnancy discrimination. We are committed to creating a society where children are safe and can thrive physically, emotionally, educationally, and spiritually.

Much discussion has occurred regarding the opposition of all the Democratic candidates to the language of the **Hyde amendment**, a rider attached annually to the federal budget that restricts the use of federal funds to pay for Medicaid abortions. There is an inherent tension for Democrats in addressing the issue of funding for abortion. On the one hand, if abortion is legal, it seems unreasonable that only women who are well-off or have private insurance should have access to one. On the other hand, if abortion was cheaper or more widely covered, there is the concern that lower individual costs would lead to more abortions.

Mr. Biden, like most Democratic senators, had long subscribed to the idea that abortion rights should be protected but that the federal government should not pay for them. He abruptly withdrew his support last year for the Hyde amendment when it became clear that many in the party were using this as a litmus test of support for abortion rights in the face of highly restrictive abortion legislation that was being passed in state legislatures across the South.

**Support or opposition to the Hyde amendment actually matters much less than one might think.** There is so much entrenched opposition to federal funding for abortion – both among the public and in the legislature – that no budget could pass without it. Even if the Hyde Amendment were to be eliminated, it would likely make no difference to the number of abortions performed nationally. “Blue states” would continue to provide publicly funded abortions (currently paid for with state money), and “red states” would continue to oppose the use of public funds for abortion – even if the federal government were suddenly willing to pay for them. So the net effect would be no change in abortions from a cost/reimbursement standpoint.

## **Reducing Abortion Now vs. Criminalizing It Later**

**I**n an interview with the National Catholic Reporter, Daughter of Charity Sr. Carol Keehan, who was the head of the Catholic Health Association through the whole debate over the Affordable Care Act (from 2005 to 2019), recalled first meeting Mr. Biden at a Washington press conference about health reform in 2009. She said they became “fast friends” and had bonded over a shared view that conservative Catholics were “being used to create dissent that ACA would be the cause of the largest expansion of abortion in the history of our country.” She also felt they shared a conviction that the ACA was a direct response to the church’s social teaching on caring for the most vulnerable. “What it really actually did was give people the money to afford their pregnancy and afford the child that would be the fruit of their pregnancy. It was the strongest pro-life thing

we could do." She recalled conversations she had with Mr. Biden frequently about "what it really meant to be pro-life." (White, How Joe Biden's Catholic roots have shaped his public life, 2020)

The abortion question elicits strong feelings from people on both sides of the issue. Many conservatives contend that somehow reversing that Supreme Court decision will eliminate all abortions, despite the fact that the abortion rate is lower now than it was in 1973. No rationale has ever been offered for this conclusion, and several critical facts are often neglected:

1. Some people have suggested that even if President Trump were not very effective in decreasing abortions (unclear at this point), his use of the bully pulpit to condemn abortion is valuable as a means of changing attitudes about abortion. However, ABC News/Washington Post and Gallup polling on attitudes about abortion showed no change in public attitudes about abortion between 1996 and 2008 following two terms of a Republican administration (Post, 2008)
2. A significant majority of Americans tell pollsters (66% to 29%) that they support the Roe-vs-Wade decision and do not wish to see it overturned – a higher percentage now than before the Obama/Biden administration took office in 2009. (News, 2020)
3. The argument is often made that the law has a teaching function, and that making abortion illegal will lead people to think it is immoral. But the data convincingly indicate that abortion rates are paradoxically higher in countries where abortion is illegal. (Sedgh, 2007)
4. Reversing Roe v Wade will merely return the regulation of abortion to the states, and would likely result in abortions being pushed back later in pregnancy due to the burden of travel for women seeking them – potentially leading to more complications and maternal deaths, and the deaths of later-term fetuses. The risk of maternal death related to abortion has been estimated to increase 76-fold when delayed until the second half of pregnancy. (Bartlett, 2004)
5. Conservatives often argue that abortions declined during the Clinton and Obama/Biden administrations because of restrictive measures imposed by Republican legislatures. If that were the case, one would expect births to go up while abortions are going down. This is not what the data show, and furthermore declines in abortion do not occur more greatly among women who live in states with more restrictive abortion laws. (Dreweke, 2019)

In summary, like most Americans and most Catholics, Joe Biden believes that constructive measures in support of women are the most moral and effective way to address the abortion problem. He embraced such measures in the Affordable Care Act, and has spoken frequently about expanding the reach and protections of the ACA in a new administration. In contrast, for Mr. Trump it's all about punishing someone. In a famous interview with Chris Matthews in 2016, Mr. Trump was asked whether women should be punished for having abortions, to which he responded, "there has to be some form of punishment." And should the man be punished? "No" Trump simply responded. It's increasingly clear that the debate over abortion for most Republicans revolves around punishing someone for abortion – even if it has no effect on whether abortions actually take place or not. (Borchers, 2016)

**Despite the conventional wisdom, the Democratic approach to abortion has to be broadly considered to be more respectful of women's moral agency and more compatible with a culture of life than the alternative obsession with the drive for criminalization.**

## **Global warming and the future of our planet**

**A**t this writing, there are record-setting wildfires burning across the Western United States. California alone at one point was battling more than 900 fires and ultimately surpassed 4-million acres for the first time – at the beginning of a “fire season” that is marked by Diablo winds in Northern California and Santa Ana winds in Southern California. (Staff B. , 2020) In one day, Pacific Gas & Electric cut power to 540,000 customers in 22 counties preemptively to avoid starting fires like the Camp Fire of 2018 that destroyed the entire town of Paradise and killed 85 mostly elderly residents. Hundreds of thousands of acres were also burning in Eastern Washington State and across the West. The fires were fueled in part by record temperatures, with the thermometer hitting 121 degrees in Los Angeles County (and 111 degrees in Downtown Los Angeles) over the 2020 Labor Day Weekend. (Bermel, 2020). Tweeted California Governor Gavin Newsom, “If you don’t believe in climate change, come to California.”

In spite of the Covid-19 economic collapse, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> has continued to climb in the atmosphere according to scientists at UCSD and at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). They each found a year-to-year increase of about 2.5 parts per million that continues a steady rise the past ten years. It served to emphasize that drastically greater reductions in carbon emissions will be essential for the world to make real progress against global warming. (Fountain, 2020)

The Democratic Platform emphasizes environmental policies that not only will begin to address global warming, but also the racial and socioeconomic inequities that force certain Americans to suffer more than others from climate degradation:

Democrats will support the most historically far reaching public investments and private sector incentives for research, development, demonstration, and deployment of next-generation technologies, once again making the United States the world’s leader in innovation. We will challenge the best and brightest scientists, innovators, and entrepreneurs in the world to pursue breakthrough opportunities in energy storage, heavy-duty trucking and freight solutions, sustainable aviation fuels, and direct air capture and net-negative emissions technologies. We will advance innovative technologies that create cost-effective pathways for industries to decarbonize, including carbon capture and sequestration that permanently stores greenhouse gases and advanced nuclear that eliminates waste associated with conventional nuclear technology, while ensuring environmental justice and other overburdened communities are protected from increases in cumulative pollution. All of these investments will create jobs for blue collar workers, including in fenceline communities, help decarbonize American industries, and create valuable new exports to help mitigate climate change around the world.

## Welcoming the stranger vs. Catholic kids in cages

In May 2018, Attorney General Jeff Sessions told US Attorneys on the Southern border, “We need to take away children,” and made it clear that families should be separated regardless of the ages of the children. As a result, thousands of refugee families escaping violence in Central America and presenting themselves for asylum instead had their mostly Catholic children stripped away from them. Some children were separated from their parents for months, often because record keeping was so bad that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement were unable to identify



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“In our effort to seek the Lord’s face, we can recognize him in the face of the poor, the sick, the abandoned, and the foreigners whom God places in our way. This encounter becomes also for us a time of grace and salvation, and summons us to the same mission entrusted to the Apostles.”

Pope Francis, sermon commemorating his first trip abroad as pope, to visit refugees from Syria on the Italian island of Lampedusa, July 2020

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or locate the parents later. A new Inspector General’s report makes clear that Mr. Sessions was a “driving force” behind the policy, despite the fact that he refused himself to be interviewed for the investigation. (Shear, 2020).

Stephen Miller was the architect of the policy, which was overturned after worldwide outrage over its inhumanity. The report revealed that Mr. Miller blamed President Trump for the policy – citing a meeting with Mr. Sessions, DHS Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, and others “in which the president ‘ranted’ and was on ‘a tirade,’ demanding as many prosecutions as possible.” (Shear, 2020)

The report revealed instances of babies being removed from breastfeeding mothers in 2017, inattention to sex offenders and felony cases because Border Patrol officers were stretched so thin, and massive overcrowding due to lack of communication and with the U.S. Marshals’ Service. Said Assistant Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, “The AG’s goal was to create a more effective deterrent so that everybody would believe that they had a risk of being prosecuted,” after the department expanded the program from Texas to the entire Southern border. (Shear, 2020)

The Gospels clearly describe Jesus and his parents as refugees who sought safety in Egypt after Herod sent soldiers for them (Matthew 2:13-23). He indicted those who were without empathy for the immigrant: “Depart from me, you accursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was...a stranger and you gave me no welcome, naked and you gave me no clothing, ill and in prison, and you did not care for me...’ Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of the these least ones, you did not do for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:41-46).



## **Rebuilding the American Economy**

**A**s Economist Paul Krugman has pointed out, the popular idea that Republicans know what they're doing when it comes to the economy is not based in fact. (Krugman, 2020) The economic expansion during the 1990s under President Bill Clinton was both longer and larger than the Reagan expansion ten years earlier. Both Bushes presided over economies that performed poorly. President Trump's four years were marked by an economic expansion that was a continuation of the preceding Obama boom, and added fewer jobs despite being fueled by a world-class tax giveaway to foreign investors and the wealthiest Americans. Republican attempts to repeal the ACA were in part based on the argument that it would be a job-killer. "Yet in the six years after January 2014, when the act went into full effect, the economy added almost 15 million jobs." (Krugman, 2020)

By following through on promises to fund education, build infrastructure, and support state and local governments on the front line of the pandemic, the Biden/Harris plans are likely to "build back better," as their campaign slogan says. The Platform has a lengthy section on the economy, but in brief:

Democrats commit to forging a new social and economic contract with the American people—a contract that invests in the people and promotes shared prosperity, not one that benefits only big corporations and the wealthiest few. One that affirms housing is a right and not a privilege, and which makes a commitment that no one will be homeless or go hungry in the richest country on earth. A new economic contract that raises wages and restores workers' rights to organize, join a union, and collectively bargain. One that at last supports working families and the middle class by securing equal pay for women and paid family leave for all. A new economic contract that provides access for all to reliable and affordable banking and financial services. A new social and economic contract that at last grapples honestly with America's long and ongoing history of racism and disenfranchisement, of segregation and discrimination, and invests instead in building equity and mobility for the people of color who have been left out and left behind for generations.

Democrats stand ready to take immediate, decisive action to pull the economy out of President Trump's recession by investing in infrastructure, care work, clean energy, and small businesses to put Americans to work in good-paying jobs; shoring up state and local budgets to save jobs and protect public health in the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic; and enacting fundamental reforms to address structural and systemic racism and entrenched income and wealth inequality in our economy and our banking system.

## **On Trump's revival of the death penalty**

**C**elebrating a death penalty moratorium that followed the exonerations of 13 convicts by the Innocence Project, Cardinal Francis George, Archbishop of Chicago and then-president of the US Bishops' Conference, wrote, "Pope John Paul II has pointed out that civilized societies have ways of protecting themselves against criminals short of killing them. ...We are called in Illinois,

with God's grace, to move beyond vengeance and to end the cycle of violence." Nevertheless, the Trump administration has taken on itself the onerous distinction of having revived the federal death penalty by killing seven inmates in a two-month span after 17-years under both Republican and Democratic administrations when there were no executions. In a sign of the corruption of the Catholic conservatives who organize the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast, they chose to bestow a medal on Attorney General William Barr in October 2020. Started as a conservative Catholic event by central casting of the Bush Catholic Outreach Working Group in 2004, they chose a particularly inauspicious moment to honor Mr. Barr, after he restarted executions on July 14, 2020.

"I raise my voice in fervent opposition to the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast's scandalous offer of an award to Attorney General Barr on his 'exemplary Christlike' behavior," said Sr. Helen Prejean, author of *Dead Man Walking* and the preeminent opponent in America of the death penalty. The Franciscan Action Network and Faith Action Network published an open letter to Mr. Barr signed by 200 Catholic clergy, nuns, theologians, and lay leaders declaring, "As you well know, our Catholic faith teaches that executions are an attack on human dignity that perpetuate a culture of violence. Recognizing the immorality of the death penalty, our Catechism states that it is 'inadmissible' for faithful Catholics to condone or to participate in executions." (Reese, National Catholic Prayer Breakfast award for Barr divides Catholics, 2020)

Proceeding with these executions received far from unanimous support from the Supreme Court. Wesley Purkey was killed in July in Terre Haute, Indiana, despite assertions that he was not mentally competent. The Court split 5-4, with the majority arguing that he had missed a particular deadline to appeal the competence of his counsel. The Trump Solicitor General was determined to rush ahead with these executions before the election, filing rapid appeals of the lower court rulings in several cases. (Fuchs, 2020) All of the Supreme Court justices who voted to kill him were either Catholic or raised Catholic.

Now the administration has announced its plan to execute a mentally ill 48-year-old woman. She committed a horrendous murder in 2008 in Missouri, but had herself been sex-trafficked as a child and gang-raped by adult men. Her execution by federal authorities would be the first of a woman in nearly 70 years and the ninth this year on Mr. Trump's watch. (Fazio, 2020) Why does anyone think that there's any logic to killing someone as a way to teach that killing is wrong?

## **On the question of America's place in the world**

**L**t. General H.R. McMaster told an interviewer at MSNBC on October 1, 2020, that, "[President Trump] is aiding and abetting Putin's efforts by not being direct about this – this sustained campaign of disruption, disinformation, and denial is aided by any leader who doesn't acknowledge it." The former Trump national security advisor is now a fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution. In a new book, Lt. Gen. McMaster had declined to criticize his old boss. Others haven't held their fire. In widely-reported remarks, former Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, speaking after troops were deployed to control protestors in the wake of George Floyd's death, said, "Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people – does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide."

Even as events unfolded in the U.S. election, the Trump administration was missing in action on many fronts. In early October, Armenia and Azerbaijan began firing missiles at one another's front lines at the border established following hostilities in the 1990s. This conflict has risked direct hostility between their respective regional power allies, Russia and Turkey. In January Turkey found itself fighting against Syrian and Russian forces in northwestern Syria to fend off a take-over of the bordering stronghold of the Syrian resistance. Russia and Turkey have also clashed in Libya, holding in check Mr. Putin's efforts to overthrow the current Libyan government.

Fifty of the country's most senior Republican national security officials warned in 2016 that Mr. Trump was unfit to hold office, and in August 2020 they issued a new letter basically saying, "I



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"We really don't think this administration is going to become substantially more normal; less dysfunctional, less unpredictable, less faction-riven, less diplomatically clumsy and inept."

Lord Kim Darroch

Former British ambassador to the U.S. before his cables were stolen in 2019

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told you so." (Sanger D. E., 2020) Many of the original signatories said they had not been prepared to vote for Secretary Clinton, but the whole group vowed to vote for Mr. Biden this time around. Most notably, the group included former Secretary of State Colin Powell, former CIA and NSA Director Gen. Michael Hayden, and former Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte. They pledged to spend \$20 million opposing Mr. Trump's reelection.

## **On the art of compromise and humanizing others**

Finally, a story. Patrick Ross, an award-winning journalist who served as Chief Communications Officer in the Commerce Department during the Obama/Biden administration told me about a conference committee he was covering regarding negotiations over a bill called The PROTECT Act of 2003 – targeting the trafficking of children. Sen. Orrin Hatch (R-UT) was the author and chairman of the Judiciary Committee. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT) was the ranking member, and Joe Biden as a former chairman was part of the Senate delegation. The House and Senate members haggled over what would be included in the bill, and at one point Senators Hatch and Leahy went at it head-to-head. The two usually got along pretty well, but things became very tense and voices were raised. At that point Sen. Biden stood up and walked over so he stood behind the two warring senators, a hand on each one's shoulder. Mr. Biden leaned forward so his face was between theirs and he told "some goofy story" about his father and a lesson he had learned – causing both Hatch and Leahy to laugh. "You could almost feel the tension leave the room. Biden returned to his seat, and moments later Hatch and Leahy resolved their differences." The conference concluded soon after that, and both houses passed the bill into law.

Said Mr. Ross, “I covered Biden for years as a reporter...When I joined the Obama Administration I continued to find myself crossing paths with Biden and his team as I and my agency did our part to help his Moonshot initiative on cancer research. I don't know him personally, although we did have a few conversations when I was a reporter. That moment in the Capitol basement summed up everything I saw about him as a Senator and Vice President. A lot of people go to Washington to cause conflict. Biden has always focused on defusing conflict. We need more people like that in Washington and in our Executive Branch.”

## **THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION AS A FOUNDATION FOR ACTION IN THE WORLD**

**A**s I've noted, the Catholic Social Tradition derives from 130 years of papal encyclicals and other expressions of Catholic thought, and has played a central role in helping shape deeply American values like liberty and equality. The tradition has grown beyond a discussion of the dignity of work to represent the very practical ways that our Catholic faith compels us to work for the common good. “Donald Trump is someone who needs religion to work for him in order to be politically successful,” said Michael Wear, a Catholic outreach director for the Obama Campaign in 2012. “The contrast Joe Biden has to offer is that he isn't looking to see what faith can do for him. His life has been looking to see how he can serve out of, in part, a motivation of faith.” (Greenberg, 2020) Far from “hating God” as President Trump has suggested, Mr. Biden has been immersed in a culture of faith his whole life. Mr. Trump told Geraldo Rivera in August, “I'm in favor of the Bible, I'm in favor of the Second Amendment, right? Biden's against all these things. He's against oil and gas, he's against the Bible – essentially against religion, but against the Bible – and he's against the Second Amendment.” (Nwanevu, 2020) Beyond drawing a bizarre equivalence between fossil fuel use, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment, and the Bible, Mr. Trump's disparagement of Mr. Biden's faith is alone a testament to his own insensitivity to religion.

Joe Biden's world is one of principles: belief in the dignity of work, freedom from discrimination, an end to the crony capitalism of the Trump era, a forceful leadership role in world affairs, decisive action to address climate change, and a restoration of respect for one another – in other words, being the president for *\*all\** Americans, not just some Americans.

The second area of Catholic Social Teaching concerns issues related to the pursuit of the Common Good, through a spirit of solidarity among all people but respecting the “subsidiarity” of immediate responsibility to those who most depend on us. In other words, people have an immediate duty to care for their own families, and local governments to look after the needs of their own citizens. In turn, each of those citizens has a responsibility to participate in civic life. The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church says that we are bound as Catholics “to engage in a series of activities by which the citizen...contributes to the cultural, economic, political and social life of the civil community to which he belongs. Participation is a duty to be fulfilled consciously by all, with responsibility and with a view to the common good.” (Peace, 2004) An essential part of pursuing the common good is a recognition that “much is required from those to whom much is given,” (Lk 12:48) and the related idea of “the preferential option for the poor.” The needs of the poor are a drumbeat of concern for all the prophets and woven through the Gospels.

The third area is the call to good stewardship of the environment. In the era of severe concern about the impact of global warming, particularly on the world's poorest people, the related issues of energy production and consumption have achieved a paramount significance. The Church has committed the Vatican to helping implement the goals and objectives of the 2007 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Bali. In remarks to the U.N. in February 2008, Archbishop Celestino Migliore, the papal nuncio, spoke about the "personal commitment and numerous public appeals of Pope Benedict XVI, (who has called for) a renewed sense of respect for and the need to safeguard God's creation." Pope Francis took this one giant step forward with the publication of [\*Laudato Si'\*](#), his 2015 encyclical on the environment that makes clear the responsibility that every individual and government has for the future of the planet.

Finally, the Catholic Social Tradition is deeply invested in the responsibility of all Catholics to foster peace at all levels of our lives. It reaches beyond the public and into the private, urging people to be gracious to one another in all their relationships, and particularly in the lives of their families. Joe Biden is a Catholic who embodies these qualities – a man of great personal kindness and empathy, who grew up immersed in our Catholic faith, and who will bring the values of the Catholic Social Justice tradition to bear every day on the work of governing our diverse country.

It wasn't so long ago when every Catholic household proudly put up pictures of the pope and President Kennedy. And as Democratic Party Chairman Tom Perez suggested recently, perhaps there will be an honored place on the walls of our Catholic families soon for our newest and greatest Catholic president – Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr.

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