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# Political Responsibility: Choices for the 1980s

A Statement of the  
Administrative Board  
United States Catholic Conference

Revised Edition  
March 22, 1984



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Administrative Board  
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Revised Edition  
March 22, 1984

In its planning document, as approved by the general membership of the United States Catholic Conference in November 1983, the Department of Social Development and World Peace was authorized to update the USCC *Statement on Political Responsibility*. This statement was approved by the USCC Administrative Board in March 1984 and is authorized for publication by the undersigned.

April 30, 1984

Monsignor Daniel F. Hoye  
General Secretary  
NCCB/USCC

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The hallmark of a democratic nation is its ability to engage the voice of its people in a broad range of public decisions. It is important on the occasion of this election year to emphasize the importance of responsible political participation. In 1976 and in 1979 we issued statements calling for "a committed, informed citizenry to revitalize our political life."<sup>1</sup> We now reiterate that call and ask all citizens to ensure that our elections become the vital and popular forum they can and must be if our nation is to address democratically the crucial issues that face us in the years ahead.

We are encouraged by the improvement in voter participation rates that was demonstrated in the 1982 Congressional elections. Yet the level of participation in the political process by American voters is still a matter of serious concern. Voter participation rates in the United States continue to be among the lowest in industrialized democracies in the world. Almost half of all eligible voters did not participate in the most recent presidential election.<sup>2</sup> Clearly there is need for ongoing improvement in this most essential element of our democratic life.

Of special concern is the fact that some segments of the population, such as racial minorities, low-income people, youth, and women, have traditionally had inadequate access to the political process. Among the poor only about one of every four eligible voters went to the polls in the last national election. Likewise the voting participation rates for minorities and youth are far below the national average. While the par-

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<sup>1</sup>*Political Responsibility: Reflections on an Election Year*, February 12, 1976; *Political Responsibility: Choices for the 1980s*, October 26, 1979.

<sup>2</sup>In the 1982 Congressional elections 41 percent of those eligible to vote actually did so. In the 1980 Presidential elections 54 percent of eligible voters turned out.

ticipation rates for women are near the national average, women still lag far behind in terms of holding elective office.

In each of these cases some progress has been made in recent years. Civil rights organizations, human service and religious groups, and other voluntary organizations have initiated aggressive voter registration campaigns in order to promote full participation in the electoral and political processes. We commend these efforts and hope that they will be extended in the future.

It is important for all Americans to realize the extent to which we are all interdependent members of a national community. Increasingly, our problems are social in nature, demanding solutions that are likewise social. To fashion these solutions in a just and humane way requires the active and creative participation of all. It requires a renewed faith in the ability of the human community to cooperate in governmental structures that work for the common good. It requires, above all, a willingness to attack the root causes of the powerlessness and alienation that threaten our democracy.

If as a nation we are to address effectively the complex social and economic issues that confront us, then we must have broad democratic participation in the political process from all segments of society. We cannot afford to abandon citizenship ourselves, nor can we permit major segments of society to be shut out from the mainstream of American political life. Rather, we must breathe new life into the practice of citizenship and we must dedicate ourselves to strengthening the great democratic experiment that we proudly call the United States of America.

All Christians have a call to citizenship and political life. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "An important challenge for the Christian is that of political life. In the state citizens have a right and duty to share in the political life. For a nation can ensure the common good of all and the dreams and aspirations of its different members only to the extent that all citizens in full liberty and with complete responsibility make their contributions willingly and selflessly for the good of



all.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, we urge all citizens to use their franchise by registering to vote and going to the polls. Demand information from the campaigns themselves and from the media coverage of those campaigns. Make candidates declare their values, so you can compare those values with your own. Take stands on the candidates and the issues. If the campaign year is to engage the values of the American people, the campaigners and voters alike must share the responsibility for making it happen. Become involved in the campaign or party of your choice. Finally, use the coming months to better understand the issues and inform your conscience.

## II. THE CHURCH AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

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

The Church, the People of God, is itself an expression of this love, and is required by the Gospel and its long tradition to promote and de-

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<sup>3</sup>Papal Address in Nairobi, Kenya, May 7, 1980. *Origins*, Vol. 10, No. 2.

fend human rights and human dignity.<sup>4</sup> In his encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II declares that the Church “must be aware of the threats to [humanity] and of all that seems to oppose the endeavor ‘to make human life ever more human’ and make every element of life correspond to humanity’s true dignity — in a word, [the Church] must be aware of all that is opposed to that process.”<sup>5</sup> This view of the Church’s ministry and mission requires it to relate positively to the political order, since social injustice and the denial of human rights can often be remedied only through governmental action. In today’s world concern for social justice and human development necessarily requires persons and organizations to participate in the political process in accordance with their own responsibilities and roles.

Christian responsibility in the area of human rights includes two complementary pastoral actions: the affirmation and promotion of human rights and the denunciation and condemnation of violations of these rights. In addition, it is the Church’s role as a community of faith to call attention to the moral and religious dimension of secular issues, to keep alive the values of the Gospel as a norm for social and political life, and to point out the demands of the Christian faith for a just transformation of society. Such a ministry on the part of every individual as well as the organizational Church inevitably involves political consequences and touches upon public affairs.

### **The Responsibility of All Members of the Church**

The Church’s responsibility in this area falls on all its members. As citizens we are all called to become informed, active and responsible participants in the political process. It is the laity who are primarily responsible for activity in political affairs, for it is they who have the major responsibility for renewal of the temporal

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<sup>4</sup>*Human Rights and Reconciliation*, Synod of Bishops, 1974.

<sup>5</sup>*Redemptor Hominis*, Pope John Paul II, 14, 1979.

order. In the words of the Second Vatican Council:

The laity, by their special vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. Today they are called by God, that by exercising their proper function, and led by the spirit of the Gospel, they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven.<sup>6</sup>

The hierarchy also has a distinct and weighty responsibility in this area. As teachers and pastors, they must provide norms for the formation of conscience of the faithful, support efforts to gain greater peace and justice and provide guidance and even leadership on occasions when human rights are in jeopardy. Drawing on their own experience and exercising their distinctive roles within the Christian community, bishops, clergy, religious and laity should join together in common witness and effective action to bring about Pope John Paul II's vision of a well-ordered society based on truth, justice, charity and freedom.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Distinct Role of the Church**

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

- education regarding the teachings of the Church and the responsibilities of the faithful;
- analysis of issues for their social and moral dimensions;
- measuring public policy against Gospel values;
- participating with other concerned parties in debate over public policy; and

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<sup>6</sup>*Lumen Gentium*, 31.

<sup>7</sup>Pope John Paul, Papal Address. *Origins*, Vol. 11, No. 29, 1982.

—speaking out with courage, skill and concern on public issues involving human rights, social justice and the life of the Church in society.

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

By preaching the truth of the Gospel and shedding light on all areas of human activity through her teaching and the example of the faithful, she [the Church] shows respect for the political freedom and responsibility of citizens and fosters these values. She also has the right to pass moral judgments, even on matters touching the political order, whenever basic personal rights or the salvation of souls makes such judgments necessary.<sup>8</sup>

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

It is the role of Christian communities to analyze the situation in their own country, to reflect upon the meaning of the Gospel, and to draw norms of judgment and plans of action from the teaching of the Church and their own experience.<sup>9</sup> In carrying out this pastoral activity in the social arena we are confronted with complexity. As the 1971 Synod of Bishops pointed out: "It does not belong to the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world"<sup>10</sup> At the same time it is essential to recall the words of Pope John XXIII:

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<sup>8</sup>*The Church in the Modern World*, 76.

<sup>9</sup>*A Call to Action*, 4.

<sup>10</sup>*Justice in the World*, 37.

It must not be forgotten that the Church has the right and duty not only to safeguard the principles of ethics and religion, but also to intervene authoritatively with her children in the temporal sphere when there is a question of judging the application of these principles to concrete cases.<sup>11</sup>

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

We specifically do not seek the formation of a religious voting bloc; nor do we wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing candidates. We urge citizens to avoid choosing candidates simply on the basis of personal self-interest. Rather, we hope that voters will examine the positions of candidates on the full range of issues as well as their integrity, philosophy and performance. We seek to promote a greater understanding of the important link between faith and politics and to express our belief that our nation is enriched when its citizens and social groups approach public affairs from positions grounded in moral conviction and religious belief. Our view is expressed very well by Pope John Paul II when he said:

Christians know from the Church's luminous teachings that without any need to follow a one-sided or partisan political formula, they ought to contribute to forming a more worthy society, one more respectful of the rights of man, based on the principles of justice and peace.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>*Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXIII, 160, 1963

<sup>12</sup>Pope John XXIII, Papal Address in Spain. Cf. *Origins*, Vol. 11, No. 29, p. 389ff.

As religious leaders and pastors, our intention is to reflect our concern that politics receive its rightful importance and attention and that it become an effective forum for the achievement of the common good. For, in the words of John Paul II, “[Humanity’s] situation in the modern world seems indeed to be far removed from the objective demands of the moral order, from the requirements of justice, and even more of social love. . . . We have before us here a great drama that can leave nobody indifferent.”<sup>13</sup>

### III. ISSUES

Without reference to political candidates, parties or platforms, we wish to offer a listing of some issues which we believe are important in the national debate during 1984. These brief summaries are not intended to indicate in any depth the details of our positions in these matters. We refer the reader to fuller discussions of our point of view in the documents listed in the summary which appears below. We wish to point out that these issues are not the concerns of Catholics alone; in every case we have joined with others to advocate these positions. They represent a broad range of topics on which the bishops of the United States have already expressed themselves and are recalled here in alphabetical order to emphasize their relevance in a period of national debate and decision.

#### A. Abortion

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

Abortion is the deliberate destruction of an unborn human being and therefore violates this right. We do not accept the concept that anyone has the right to choose an abortion. We reject the 1973 Supreme Court decisions on abortion which refuse appropriate legal protection to the unborn child. We support the passage of a constitutional amendment to restore the basic constitutional protection of the right to life

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<sup>13</sup>*Redemptor Hominis*, 16.

for the unborn child. We reject the public funding of abortion.

*(Documentation on the Right to Life and Abortion, 1974, 1976, 1981; Pastoral Plan for Pro-Life Activities, 1975.)*

## **B. Arms Control and Disarmament**

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) has now addressed a broad range of national security policies that depend on the possession and planned use of nuclear weapons. The process began with the NCCB/USCC general meeting in November of 1980 and involved extensive consultations with military experts, strategic planners, arms control negotiators, moral theologians, political scientists and biblical scholars. The result is a pastoral statement which (1) condemns the counter-city or counter population use of nuclear weapons, (2) rejects the notion of waging limited nuclear wars (because of the risk of escalation to all-out nuclear war) and (3) questions the moral acceptability of policies that contemplate the initiation of nuclear war to repel a conventional attack, as is the case in NATO strategy.

The NCCB statement did not, however, rule out the reliance on possession and deployment of strategic (long range) nuclear weapons for the purpose of deterring an enemy nuclear first strike. The bishops joined with Pope John Paul II in affirming that such a policy was morally acceptable under current conditions. The U.S. bishops' judgment of "strictly conditional moral acceptance of nuclear deterrence" means that the deployment of certain kinds of new weapon systems that are not clearly essential to deterrence should be avoided; moreover they recommended a bilateral, verifiable and negotiated halt to all new nuclear weapons deployment, and called for intensified negotiations to achieve real reductions in the nuclear arsenals of the superpowers and a comprehensive test ban treaty.

We urge those who wish their votes to reflect their concerns about the dangers and the moral evil of preparations for nuclear war to read and reflect on the NCCB statement and to become

involved in study and action groups in their local dioceses and parishes.

*(The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response, 1983.)*

### **C. Capital Punishment**

In view of our commitment to the value and dignity of human life, we oppose capital punishment. We believe that a return to the use of the death penalty is leading to, indeed can only lead to, further erosion of respect for life in our society. We do not question society's right to punish the offender, but we believe that there are better approaches to protecting our people from violent crimes than resorting to executions. In its application, the death penalty has been discriminatory toward the poor, the indigent and racial minorities. Our society should reject the death penalty and seek methods of dealing with violent crime which are more consistent with the Gospel vision of respect for life and Christ's message of healing love.

*(Community and Crime, 1978; U.S. Bishops' Statement on Capital Punishment, 1980.)*

### **D. Civil Rights**

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

Racism is a particularly serious form of discrimination. Despite significant strides in eliminating racial prejudices in our country, there remains an urgent need for continued reconciliation in this area. Racism is not merely one sin among many. It is a radical evil dividing the human family. The struggle against it demands an equally radical transformation in our own minds and hearts as well as in the structures of our society.

*(Brothers and Sisters to Us: A Pastoral Letter on Racism in Our Day, 1979; The Hispanic Presence: Challenge and Commitment, 1983.)*



## **E. The Economy**

Our national economic life must reflect broad values of social justice and human rights. Above all, the economy must serve the human needs of our people. While the economy has improved for many citizens, it is important to call attention to the fact that millions of Americans are still poor, jobless, hungry and inadequately housed and that vast disparities of income and wealth remain within our nation. These conditions are intolerable and must be persistently challenged so that the economy will reflect a fundamental respect for the human dignity and basic needs of all.

Current levels of unemployment and the tremendous human costs which they represent are unnecessary and should not be tolerated. We support an effective national commitment to genuine full employment as the foundation of a just and responsible economic policy. We believe that all Americans who are willing and able to work have a right to useful and productive employment at fair wages. We also call for a decent income policy for those who cannot work and adequate assistance to those in need.

Efforts to achieve responsible fiscal policies and to stimulate economic growth and security are important and necessary tasks, but they should be governed by a fundamental concern for equity and fairness. Our nation's economic ills must not be solved at the expense of the poor and most vulnerable members of society.

*(The Economy: Human Dimensions, 1975.)*

## **F. Education**

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

1. Sufficient public and private funding to make an adequate education available for all citizens and residents of the United States of America and to provide assistance for education in our nation's program of foreign aid.
2. Governmental and voluntary action to reduce inequalities of educational oppor-

tunity by improving the opportunities available to economically disadvantaged persons.

3. Orderly compliance with legal requirements for racially integrated schools.
4. Voluntary efforts to increase racial ethnic integration in public and nonpublic schools.
5. Equitable tax support for the education of pupils in public and nonpublic schools to implement parental freedom in the education of their children.

(*Sharing the Light of Faith*, 1979; *To Teach as Jesus Did*, 1972.)

### **G. Energy**

Energy issues have a wide-ranging impact on the economic and social well-being of our nation. As society undergoes a major transition from reliance on petroleum to alternative energy resources, certain moral principles should guide public decision-making in this field. We seek policies which would:

- promote conservation and responsible stewardship of our limited energy resources;
- commit energy development to improving safety for the workforce and the community;
- promote international cooperation in developing and distributing energy, thus reducing the tensions which may lead to international conflict;
- provide for equitable access to energy resources and benefits, particularly for low-income people; and
- promote the development of renewable energy sources.

(*Reflections on the Energy Crisis*, A Statement by the Committee on Social Development and World Peace, U.S. Catholic Conference, April 2, 1981.)

### **H. Family Life**

The test of how we value the family is whether we are willing to foster, in government and

business, in urban planning and farm policy, in education, health care, in the arts and sciences, in our total social and cultural environment, moral values which nourish the primary relationships of husbands, wives and children and make authentic family life possible.

Implicit government policy and explicit government planning and programs can contribute to an erosion of the health and vitality of the family. Comprehensive decisions of a national or regional scope must take into account their impact on family life. Families, especially those whose influence is lessened by poverty or social status, must be allowed their rightful input in those decisions which affect their daily lives.

*(Vision and Strategy: The Plan of Pastoral Action for Family Ministry, 1978.)*

## **I. Food and Agricultural Policy**

The right to eat flows directly from the right to life. We support a national policy aimed at securing the right to eat for all the world's people.

Internationally, U.S. food aid should effectively combat global hunger and malnutrition and be aimed primarily at the poorest countries and neediest people without regard to political considerations. In order to help establish adequate supplies, the U.S. should help to develop a world grain reserve fair to both producers and consumers. Development assistance should emphasize equitable distribution of benefits and help other nations move towards food self-reliance.

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

*(Food Policy and the Church: Specific Proposals, 1975.)*

Through its income support programs, its credit and research programs, its tax policies, its strategies for rural development, and its foreign aid, the U.S. should support the maintenance of an agricultural system based on small and moderate-sized family farms both at home and abroad.

*(The Family Farm, 1979.)*

We support legislation to protect the rights of farm workers and we call for measures to improve the working conditions and the general welfare of farm worker families. We reaffirm the Church's traditional teaching in support of the right of all workers to organize and bargain collectively.

## **J. Health**

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

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

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

- strengthening existing programs for the poor, the elderly, and disabled people;
- development and enhancement of alternative delivery systems;
- broad consumer participation in health planning decisions at all levels; and
- a vigorous national cost containment program.

*(Health and Health Care: A Pastoral of the American Catholic Bishops, 1981.)*

## **K. Housing**

Decent housing is a basic human right. A greater commitment of will and resources is required to meet our national housing goal of a decent home for every American family. To meet this housing need, the government must continue to adequately fund housing assistance programs that will assist people to obtain affordable

housing. Continuation of housing production and preservation programs is vital to maintaining the stock of affordable housing. Housing policy must better meet the needs of low and middle income families, the elderly, rural families and minorities. It should also promote reinvestment in central cities and equal housing opportunity. Preservation of existing housing stock and a renewed concern for neighborhoods are required.

*(The Right to a Decent Home, 1975.)*

#### **L. Human Rights**

Human dignity requires the defense and promotion of human rights in global and domestic affairs. With respect to international human rights, there is a pressing need for the U.S. to pursue a double task: (1) to strengthen and expand international mechanisms by which human rights can be protected and promoted; and (2) to take seriously the human rights dimensions of U.S. foreign policy. Therefore, we support U.S. ratification of the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Further, we support a policy which gives greater weight to the protection of human rights in the conduct of U.S. affairs. The pervasive presence of U.S. power creates a responsibility to use that power in the service of human rights.

*(U.S. Foreign Policy: A Critique from Catholic Traditions, 1976.)*

#### **M. Mass Media**

We are concerned that the communications media be truly responsive to the public interest and that future laws governing the electronic media make the benefits that the new communication technologies have created available to all our citizens. We reject any philosophy of marketplace economics as applied to the telecommunication industries which have the effect of widening the gap between the information rich and the information poor in our society. Specifically, we oppose those legislative initiatives in the Congress which would remove the accountability of broadcasters and the owners of cable

systems to the communities they are licensed or franchised to serve.

We support the concept of universal telephone service at a cost affordable to all Americans. While we oppose government control of the content of the mass media of communication, we support reasonable and legitimate common carrier regulations to restrict the use of these vehicles in making available to the young, in particular, indecent or pornographic materials, many of which violate every rational standard of decency and are an affront to Christian values.

(Statements and Testimony by the USCC Department of Communication before the Congress and the FCC.)

## **N. Regional Conflict in the World**

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

Central America has come to be the most visible focus of our attention to regional conflicts. Our position concerning the indigenous roots of the conflicts, the imperative need for fundamental social change, and the futility, not to say immorality, of proposed military solutions has been stated often and is well known. As the dominant external actor, our government must play the creative diplomatic role that it uniquely has in supporting the goals of dialogue leading to cessation of hostilities, resulting in a negotiated end to the conflicts and an internationally guaranteed process of political and social reform and of economic reconstruction. Under no reasonably foreseeable circumstances can direct intervention of military personnel in the region, on the part of the United States or any other outside power, be justified. We have constantly supported substantial economic assistance for the countries of Central America; while recognizing that military assistance will be a dimension of the United States presence in Central America, we continue to reaffirm that our principal contribution to peace in the region should be through our diplomatic role. With

bishops of the region we continue to express our alarm over the growing militarization of the Central American countries, the danger of a more generalized war, violations of fundamental human rights and lack of progress in judicial redress, and the wrenching tragedy of so many refugees and displaced persons. We have asked the United States government to institute a policy of Extended Voluntary Departure for nationals of El Salvador in the United States and to make a major commitment to meet the immediate human needs of the refugees and displaced persons in Central America.

(USCC Testimony on Central America, 1983, 1984.)

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

(*The Middle East: The Pursuit of Peace with Justice*, 1978.)

The position of South Africa has long been of grave moral concern to the world because of its internal racial policies and its occupation of Namibia/South West Africa. In recent years it has become a threat to the entire area of Southern Africa because of its military incursions into the territories of several of its neighbors; indeed, it has virtually occupied a large portion of Angola.

The United States is South Africa's largest trading partner and second largest foreign investor. U.S. foreign policy and its influence on corporate activity in South Africa should be directed in effective ways toward needed change in South Africa and in its relations with neighboring states.

*(USCC Administrative Board Statement on Namibia, 1983.)*

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This is not an exclusive listing of the issues that concern us. As Pope John Paul II has said, "The Church cannot remain insensible to whatever serves true human welfare any more than she can remain indifferent to whatever threatens it. . . ." <sup>14</sup> Thus we are also advocates for the civil and political rights of the elderly, the handicapped, immigrants and aliens. We oppose excessive government interference in religious affairs as well as any unjust bias of government against religious institutions. We support measures to reform our criminal justice system. We are concerned about protection of the land and the environment as well as the monumental question of peace with justice in the world.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, we believe that the Church has a proper role and responsibility in public affairs flowing from its Gospel mandate and its respect for the dignity of the human person. We hope these reflections will contribute to a renewed political vitality in our land, both in terms of citizen participation in the electoral process and the integrity and accountability of those who seek and hold public office.

We pray that Christians will provide courageous leadership in promoting a spirit of responsible political involvement. May they follow the example of Jesus in giving special

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<sup>14</sup>*Redemptor Hominis*, 13.



concern for the poor, and may all their actions be guided by a deep love of God and neighbor.

For in the world of American politics, as in all human communities, the words of Pope John Paul II apply:

What is in question here is the human person. We are not dealing with the abstract human person but the real, concrete, historical person. . . . Every person coming into the world on account of the mystery of the redemption is entrusted to the solicitude of the Church. . . . The object of her care is human persons in their unique, unrepeatable human reality, which keeps intact the image and likeness of God himself. . . ."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>*Redemptor Hominis*, 13.







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