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THE END OF THE BERNARDIN ERA

Cardinal Joseph L. Bernardin died on November 14, 1996, after a moving and profoundly Christian battle with pancreatic cancer that edified Americans across the political and religious spectrums. Fourteen years after his holy death, the cardinal is remembered primarily for his end-of-life ministry to fellow cancer sufferers, for his chairmanship of the committee that produced the American bishops' 1983 pastoral letter "The Challenge of Peace," and for his advocacy of a "consistent ethic of life." Those achievements were not the whole of the Bernardin story, however.

In his prime, Joseph Bernardin was arguably the most powerful Catholic prelate in American history; he was certainly the most consequential since the heyday of James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When he was in his early forties, Bernardin was the central figure in defining the culture and modus operandi of the U.S. bishops' conference. Later, when he became archbishop of Cincinnati and cardinal archbishop of Chicago, Bernardin's concept and style of episcopal ministry set the pattern for hundreds of U.S. bishops. Bernardin was also the undisputed leader of a potent network of prelates that dominated the affairs of the American hierarchy for more than two decades; observers at the time dubbed it the "Bernardin Machine." The machine's horsepower inevitably diminished after the cardinal's death. But it was still thought by many to have enough gas left in the tank to elect Bishop Gerald Kicanas of Tucson (who had begun his episcopal career as one of Bernardin's auxiliaries) as president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) this past November.

It didn't. Bishop Kicanas was defeated for the conference presidency by Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York in a vote that left those bishops who still adhered to the Bernardin model speechless in disbelief. And if their stunned silence following the announcement of the vote did not conclusively demonstrate the point, the reaction to Archbishop Dolan's election in self-identified Catholic progressive circles—which ranged from bitterly disappointed to just plain bitter—confirmed that an era had ended and a corner had been turned in the history of Catholicism in the United States.

The Bernardin Era is over and the Bernardin Machine is no more. Understanding what that era was about, and what that machine embodied, is important for understanding the options that have now been opened for a different pattern of episcopal leadership in the Catholic Church in the United States and a different mode of engagement between the Church and American public life.

The era and the machine reflected the background, the perspective on the U.S. Catholic experience, and the ecclesiastical and political convictions of the man for whom both epoch and network were named.

Joseph Louis Bernardin was born in 1928 in Columbia, South Carolina, a son of Italian immigrants. Columbia was, and is, in the American Bible Belt, so Bernardin grew up in the least Catholic part of the United States—unlike, say, the prelates of his generation who were products of a vibrant Catholic urban culture in the Northeast and Midwest. Some of them may have lacked Bernardin's gracious manners and polish, but they never doubted that Catholics belonged in the United States. By contrast, an alert young man growing up in South Carolina in the years after the Al Smith presidential debacle could not have been unaware of Catholics being profoundly *other*, indeed suspect.

After briefly exploring a career in medicine, Bernardin discerned a call to the priesthood, studied philosophy at St. Mary's Seminary in Baltimore and theology at the Catholic University of America, and was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Charleston in 1952. His ascent up the ecclesiastical ladder was swift, with Father Bernardin becoming Monsignor Bernardin only seven years after his ordination. In fourteen years in Charleston, Bernardin served four different bishops in a variety of administrative posts prior to being chosen auxiliary bishop of Atlanta. In April 1966, Bernardin received his episcopal ordination from the hands of Atlanta's first metropolitan archbishop, Paul Hallinan, the beau ideal of the post-conciliar bishop within the progressive wing of the American Church and one of the grandfathers of the Bernardin Era and the Bernardin Machine. The other grandfather, John Cardinal Dearden of Detroit, plucked Bernardin from Atlanta to become the first general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) in 1968.

Bernardin and Dearden were the two dominant figures in the formative years of what was then a dyad: the NCCB, known internally as "the body," and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), the NCCB's public-policy arm. Dearden famously took counsel with the Booz Allen Hamilton management-consultant firm

in designing the dyad's structure and procedures. But it was Bernardin who, more than anyone else, defined the structure's bureaucratic ethos, which deferred to "the body's" authority while establishing a conference "process" that gave its bureaucracy significant power and influence in U.S. Catholic affairs. As the conference's voice increased, that of individual bishops tended to decrease.

Bernardin's sustained influence on the conference's approach to public policy was frequently linked to the considerable impact of the man who became one of the NCCB/USCC's most influential staff members: the Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, a Boston priest with a Harvard doctorate who arrived in 1973. Hehir and Bernardin shared an ecclesiology (sympathetic to the progressive wing of the post-conciliar spectrum, but careful not to appear radical); a politics (similarly tilted *à gauche*, but always with an eye toward "the center"); and a determination to put the NCCB and the USCC "in play" in American public life and keep it there. That determination, and the bureaucratic steps taken to give it force, were embodied in Bernardin's style of leadership, which was silken on the outside (for Joseph L. Bernardin was a thoroughly charming man) and quite tough on the inside (for Bernardin knew what he wanted the conference to do, knew how to make the conference do it, and knew how to get anyone who might be an obstacle out of the way).

Once Bernardin had finished his term as conference general secretary, Cardinal Dearden wanted him to have room to "operate," as the Detroit prelate once put it. And that, in Dearden's terms, meant that Bernardin ought to become the head of a large Midwestern diocese, en route to a traditional cardinalatial see. Thus in November 1972 Bernardin was named archbishop of Cincinnati, where he remained as metropolitan for a decade. But Bernardin's work was not limited to the city that specializes in chili with chocolate (a culinary curiosity that may have caused some distress to the archbishop, who knew his way around an Italian kitchen). In 1974, after a three-year interregnum in which Philadelphia's John Cardinal Krol served as NCCB/USCC president, Bernardin became the conference president, commuted regularly between Cincinnati and Washington, and put the Bernardin Machine into high gear. He was succeeded as conference president by five men (John Quinn, John Roach, James Malone, John May, and Daniel Pilarczyk) who were all members of the Bernardin Machine, and whose positions in the U.S. Church had no little to do with Bernardin's service on the Vatican's Congregation for Bishops (which Andrew Greeley once dubbed the "patronage office") and Bernardin's relationship with Belgian archbishop Jean Jadot, the Vatican representative in Washington from 1974 to 1980. In those halcyon days, Bernardin, master of the scene, could, with quiet confidence and no fear of contradiction, tell fellow American clerics that, "No, Jim Malone won't be the next archbishop of Cincinnati, but he will be the next president of the conference."

The Bernardin Machine's approach to governance within the Church was frequently described as "collegial," but those clergy and laity who, in their dioceses or in their interaction with the NCCB/USCC, felt the sting of authoritarian Catholic

liberalism in the 1970s and 1980s would likely demur. For the Machine was quite rigorous in enforcing its ecclesiology and its politics, and it was perfectly capable of withdrawing its favor when bishops once thought loyal club members showed signs of intellectual or ecclesiastical independence. One prominent example was now-retired Cardinal James Francis Stafford. Stafford was thought part of the Bernardin world when he was named a member of the U.S. delegation to the 1980 Synod of Bishops on the family. But he eventually took a different path, in part because of his unhappiness with how Bernardin, also a member of the Synod, quietly tried to maneuver that body's deliberations into a critique of Paul VI's teaching on the morally appropriate way to regulate births in *Humanae Vitae*.

Stafford was surprised at this, but he shouldn't have been. For the Bernardin Era and the style of governance characteristic of Bernardin Machine bishops were deeply influenced by the Roman-brokered "Truce of 1968," an ill-fated attempt to settle the disciplinary situation in the Archdiocese of Washington, where dissent from *Humanae Vitae* was widespread and public. Whatever the Vatican's intentions vis-à-vis the difficult situation in Washington, what was learned from the truce were two lessons that would shape an entire era of U.S. Catholic history. The first lesson was that the Holy See would retreat from rigorously enforcing doctrinal discipline if it could be persuaded of the danger of schism. The second lesson was that American bishops were ill advised to go out on a public limb in defense of Catholic teaching (as Patrick Cardinal O'Boyle of Washington had done by disciplining priests who had publicly rejected *Humanae Vitae*), for that could result in the Holy See sawing off the limb and leaving the bishop in question in a bad way.

Keeping peace within dioceses in the wake of the post-*Humanae Vitae* chaos thus became one of the prime imperatives of bishops adhering to the Bernardin model, even if that meant tolerating a measure of what Father Charles Curran liked to call "faithful dissent." Bishops who condoned "faithful dissent" were unlikely to be vigorous in enforcing catechetical standards or liturgical discipline. Their approach to problems of clerical indiscipline and malfeasance also helped shape the ecclesiastical culture in which bishops turned to psychology rather than moral and sacramental theology in dealing with cases of the sexual abuse of the young.

As for its interaction with American public life, the Bernardin Machine was constructed at a moment when few could imagine a former Hollywood B-movie actor as president of the United States and a Democratic majority seemed locked in place on Capitol Hill. Thus the USCC in its first decades came to be regarded in Washington as an adjunct of the Democratic majority in the Congress, even as the bishops took some tentative steps into the murky worlds of radical activism by creating the Campaign for Human Development, which began to support programs of community organizing modeled on or promoted by Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation.

Yet for all their occasional playing with Alinskyite fire, the politics of the bishops' conference during the Bernardin Era were more reflective of a determina-

tion to position the Catholic Church as part of a liberal vital center than they were of the politics of the American hard left. A fine example of Bernardin's cast of mind and method in moving the bishops to address contested issues this way may be found in his chairmanship of the special NCCB committee charged with drafting a national pastoral letter on war and peace after the unthinkable had happened, the B-movie actor was in residence at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, and fears of a Reagan-initiated nuclear war were considered quite rational in U.S. Catholic leadership, intellectual, and activist circles.

Archbishop Bernardin's shaping of the war/peace committee was a classic expression of his ecclesial and political style. As for the bishop-members of the committee, get the pacifist (Thomas Gumbleton) and the former military chaplain (John J. O'Connor) aboard in order to define the "extremes," then appoint two other bishops who could be counted on to follow the lead of Bernardin and the committee's chief staffer, Father Hehir, in defining the liberal "consensus." That was clever, if not terribly original, bureaucratic maneuvering. What was more telling was Bernardin's instruction to the committee members at the beginning of their work: namely, that the one policy option they would *not* consider was unilateral nuclear disarmament. For that option, adopted, would brand the bishops as cranks who would no longer be "in play" in the public-policy debate.

Yet, one wanted to ask at the time (and one wants to ask now), why not? If the bishops' committee on war and peace was an ecclesial body that would begin with moral theology and work its way to public policy from there, surely every policy option ought to have been on the table. Despite his insistence that the bishops were approaching this complex set of problems as "pastors and teachers" (a mantra of the bishops' conference), Bernardin's preemptive exclusion of the unilateralist option made clear that this was an exercise in which political criteria of viability would play a considerable role.

In the event, and despite all efforts to stay "in play," "The Challenge of Peace" quickly became a dead letter. Its recommendations on arms control were over-run by the debate inaugurated by the Reagan administration's Strategic Defense Initiative, as its assumption of the relative permanence of the Cold War became moot after the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989–1991. "The Challenge of Peace" sought to make a contribution to easing the undoubted dangers of the Cold War. By paying minimal attention to the potential of human rights activism in changing the internal political dynamics of the Soviet bloc, however, the bishops' letter missed what turned out to be the key, not simply to managing the superpower competition, but to freedom's victory over tyranny. (In his own reading of the undercurrents of history in the 1980s, Bernardin took a conventional liberal view. After a fellow guest at a dinner party in 1991 had spoken of John Paul II's pivotal role in the collapse of European communism, Bernardin, asked for his opinion, said that he thought Mikhail Gorbachev had been the key figure.)

Even during the years of its greatest influence, when Bernardin appeared on the cover of *Time* and his allies seemed fully in control of the bishops' conference, the Bernardin Machine was not omnipotent. Bernardin and those of his cast of mind seem not to have considered the possibility that, post-Paul VI, the College of Cardinals in 1978 would anticipate the American electorate in 1980 and do the unthinkable: elect a fifty-eight-year-old Pole with a sharp mind, a charismatic personality, and a firm will as bishop of Rome. It took some time for the effects of this dramatic change in the Vatican to be felt. Thus John Paul II, who seems to have had some doubts about the matter (perhaps because of that 1980 Synod on the family), nonetheless acceded to the wishes of the Bernardin-dominated U.S. hierarchy by appointing Archbishop Bernardin as archbishop of Chicago in 1982 and nominating him to the College of Cardinals in 1983.

But if John Paul was willing to have Joseph Bernardin in Chicago and in the College of Cardinals, he was not willing to have one of Bernardin's protégés (and his former deputy at the bishops' conference), Thomas C. Kelly, O.P., as archbishop of New York after Terence Cardinal Cooke died in 1983. Kelly seems to have expected the appointment; he reportedly remarked to fellow bishops at Cooke's funeral that St. Patrick's Cathedral would "take some getting used to." But in a surprise at least as great as the recent Dolan/Kicanas election, the post instead went to John J. O'Connor after John Paul II rejected the Bernardinian terna, or list of possible nominees, submitted by the Congregation for Bishops. (John Paul asked the secretary of the congregation, the Brazilian Dominican Lucas Moreira Neves, whether he was happy with the terna, on which Kelly's name presumably appeared in first place; Moreira Neves said he was not and pulled out the O'Connor file.)

O'Connor's staunch and unyielding pro-life activism as archbishop of New York was crucial in keeping that issue alive at a moment when the pro-life energies of the American episcopate showed some signs of flagging. In doing so, O'Connor, who had very little use for bishops' conference politics, set in place one of the markers that would eventually help displace the Bernardin approach to the Catholic Church's interaction with the U.S. public-policy debate. After being named a cardinal in 1985, O'Connor's work as a member of the Vatican Congregation for Bishops was also important in putting brakes on the power of the Bernardin Machine to reproduce itself episcopally.

A further sign that the ecclesiology and leadership style of the machine would not go uncontested during John Paul II's pontificate came in 1985, when the pope summoned an Extraordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to mark the twentieth anniversary of the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council and to consider the problems the Church had experienced in implementing the Council's teaching. The pre-Synod period was dominated by debate over a book-length interview with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, which was sharply critical of the kind of implementation of the Council that Bernardin and his allies favored (and led). In retrospect, though, the turning point that the 1985 Synod re-

presented for the Bernardin Machine and the Bernardin Era only came into focus in a press conference marking the Synod's conclusion.

The Synod Fathers had recommended to the pope that a new catechism be written. Asked by a reporter at the post-Synod press conference what he thought of that, Bishop James Malone, then the NCCB president and very much Cardinal Bernardin's ally, said that the reporter needn't worry, as neither one of them would live long enough to see any such catechism published. Seven years later, John Paul II issued the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which gave lay people throughout the Church an instrument with which to contest "faithful dissent," and which began a slow but steady catechetical revolution in which the adventure of orthodoxy would be stressed.

World Youth Day 1993 in Denver was another moment when a prescient observer might have sensed an ebbing in the Bernardin Machine's power. John Paul was eager to hold a World Youth Day in the United States; the bishops' conference and its Washington staff, which still reflected the default positions Bernardin had implanted during his years as general secretary and conference president, were dubious, to put it gently. But the pope insisted, so the conference proposed holding World Youth Day in either Buffalo (to take advantage of that city's proximity to Canada) or Chicago (Bernardin's base). John Paul, however, was intrigued by the idea of bringing World Youth Day to Denver, a self-consciously secular city where Archbishop J. Francis Stafford was working vigorously, and not without opposition, to bring the archdiocese of Denver out of the Bernardin Era. The Pope won the argument; World Youth Day 1993 in Denver was a tremendous success; and a marker was put down—the gospel without apology could be proclaimed with effect in a cultural environment that regarded the most challenging of gospel demands as bizarre. (Eleven years later, John Paul II was still chortling over his coup. Looking at photos of Rocky Mountain National Park outside Denver, the aged and crippled pontiff smiled, stabbed the photo album with his index finger, and said, "Denver! World Youth Day 1993. The American bishops said it couldn't be done. I proved them wrong!")

In the last decade and a half of his life, Bernardin continued to advance a distinctive understanding of Catholicism's engagement with American politics. Even as work on "The Challenge of Peace" was being completed, the cardinal began promoting the concept of a "consistent ethic of life," which linked issues such as abortion, capital punishment, and arms control in what was quickly styled the "seamless garment." As articulated by Bernardin, the "consistent ethic" rooted itself in the foundational Catholic social-ethical principle of the dignity of the human person and then suggested a moral symmetry between the defense of unborn life in the womb, the rejection of the death penalty, and resistance to the rearmament programs of the Reagan administration. Cardinal Bernardin was a committed pro-lifer; charges that he developed the "consistent ethic" approach in order to give cover to liberal (and pro-choice) Catholic legislators who were "good on capital punish-

ment and nuclear weapons” were false. Intentions aside, however, the “consistent ethic” did help buttress the Bernardin Machine’s “in play” approach to the Catholic Church and public policy, which inevitably blunted criticism of such determinedly pro-abortion Catholic politicians as Edward M. Kennedy and Robert F. Drinan.

Shortly before his death in 1996, Bernardin initiated the “Catholic Common Ground Initiative,” an ongoing forum for fostering conversation across the spectrum of what had become, in the Clinton years, an increasingly polarized U.S. Church—a polarization that now seems, in retrospect, to reflect the further decline of the Bernardin Machine and the beginnings of an alternative correlation of forces within the American hierarchy. Because the Initiative intended to include as full participants known dissenters from settled Catholic teaching, it was publicly criticized by former Washington archbishop William Cardinal Baum and James Cardinal Hickey, then the incumbent in the nation’s capital, for promoting a false irenicism that tacitly accepted the notion of “faithful dissent.” Bernardin died before the Initiative could achieve any significant critical mass; perhaps any such outcome was unlikely, given the changing theological contours of the U.S. Catholic scene in general and the American episcopate in specific. In any case, it was unlikely that “common ground” could be found with those dissenters who were in a state of psychological, if not canonical, schism, imagining themselves (as they did) the true Church of Vatican II. The Initiative nonetheless testified to Bernardin’s enduring conviction that the liberal/progressive consensus that informed the Bernardin Era remained at the fifty-yard line of the U.S. Catholic playing field.

Three years after Cardinal Bernardin launched the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, his successor as archbishop of Chicago, Francis Cardinal George, O.M.I., redefined that playing field conceptually, declaring the liberal Catholic project dead in an October 1999 lecture to mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of *Commonweal*. Cardinal George’s remarks, which stressed a certain liberal Catholic surrender to the ambient culture, brought into synthesis several trends that had been underway in U.S. Catholicism throughout the John Paul II years, trends that ultimately undermined the Bernardin Machine and that would ultimately draw the curtain on the Bernardin Era.

One of these trends, which became a hallmark of Cardinal George’s own presidency of the bishops’ conference from 2007 to 2010, was an increased concern among bishops, clergy, and engaged laity about Catholic identity that touched issues as various as catechetics, liturgy, health care, and the relationship of Catholic institutions of higher learning to the local church and its bishop. A second trend was the emergence of pro-life activism as *the* cultural marker of serious Catholicism in America. That trend, it should be noted, was itself accelerated by the U.S. bishops’ 1998 statement, “Living the Gospel of Life,” which effectively replaced the “consistent ethic”/“seamless garment” metaphors with a new image: the “foundations of the house of freedom,” in which the defense of innocent human life from conception until natural death was understood to be fundamental, both theologically and

in terms of sound democratic theory, in a way that other public-policy questions engaging American Catholic attention were not. The third trend, most striking on campuses, was a willingness to reconsider, and in some instances enthusiastically embrace, the fullness of the Catholic ethic of human love, often by reference to John Paul II's Theology of the Body.

When John Paul II sent Archbishop Pio Laghi to Washington as apostolic delegate in 1980, the pope ticked off on one hand his concerns about the Church in the United States. He was worried about the effectiveness of the Church's evangelical mission, including the ways in which the sacraments were celebrated and religious education was conducted; he had serious reservations about the state of consecrated religious life in monasteries and convents; he thought priestly formation in seminaries needed to be tightened up; and he wanted a new approach to the appointment of bishops. The last amounted to a tacit instruction to dismantle the Bernardin Machine. It was an unlikely assignment for Laghi, who shared much of Joseph Bernardin's ecclesiastical sensibility; and while Laghi's arrival on Massachusetts Avenue did begin to blunt the capacity of the Bernardin Machine to reproduce itself by shaping the episcopal appointment process, it was the pontificate of John Paul II as a whole that proved the ultimate dismantler of the powerful ecclesiastical machine that Bernardin had built and operated with considerable skill.

John Paul II embodied a heroic model of the priesthood, and a heroic exercise of the office of bishop, that had a profound effect, over-two-and-a-half decades, on the Catholic priesthood and episcopate in the United States. The men who elected Timothy Dolan as USCCB president in November 2010 were men deeply influenced by the John Paul II model, as they were men intellectually formed by the Polish pope's dynamic magisterium on questions ranging from the Catholic sexual ethic to Catholic social doctrine. They understood, in a way that those who embodied the Bernardin Era did not quite seem to grasp, that it was important for the Catholic Church to be able to give a comprehensive, coherent, and compelling account of its faith, hope, and love in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, just as they understood that the reaffirmation of classic Catholic moral theology in *Veritatis Splendor* was an important weapon in the war against what John Paul II's successor called the "dictatorship of relativism."

And they were prepared to challenge the culture—and American politics—to rediscover the public-policy implications of America's founding commitment to self-evident moral truths; they were not interested, in other words, in finding an agreeable fifty-yard line. They had learned from John Paul II and the Revolution of 1989 in east central Europe that seemingly invincible forces could be defeated, and they were determined to defeat, not find an accommodation with, the cultural forces that, in their judgment, were at war with the gospel even as they were eroding the fabric of American life.

There was paradox here. Joseph Bernardin, growing up in that part of America where Catholics were most suspect, defined a style of engagement with American public life that put great stress on remaining “in play.” The bishops who ultimately brought an end to the Bernardin Machine and the Bernardin Era grew up comfortably Catholic and comfortably American—and then came to understand that their Catholicism could require them to be forthrightly countercultural in dealing with American culture and politics. The paradox underscored that a sea change had taken place, the effects of which were likely to be felt for generations.

The ecclesiastical sensibility that characterized the Bernardin Era can still be discerned in several parts of the complex reality that is the Catholic Church in the United States. That sensibility is perhaps most palpably felt in Boston, where Father Hehir has wielded considerable influence over archdiocesan affairs in recent years and has done so according to the Bernardin model. The Bernardin ethos is also felt within the bishops’ conference bureaucracy, as it is within diocesan bureaucracies. But if the Bernardin Era is indeed over, one should expect to see some continuing shifts of default position, not least within the bishops’ conference.

The conference might, for example, reexamine its habit of having a comment on virtually every contested issue in American public life. The late Fr. Richard John Neuhaus used to say that, when the Church is not obliged to speak, the Church is obliged not to speak; that is, when the issue at hand does not touch a fundamental moral truth that the Church is obliged to articulate vigorously in the public-policy debate, the Church’s pastors ought to leave the prudential application of principle to the laity who, according to Vatican II, are the principal evangelizers of culture, politics, and the economy. The USCCB’s habit of trying to articulate a Catholic response to a very broad range of public-policy issues undercuts this responsibility of the laity; it also tends to flatten out the bishops’ witness so that all issues become equal, which they manifestly are not.

In addition, the conference might reexamine its reliance on domestic policy default positions that were set as long ago as 1919, when the National Catholic War Council (which begat the National Catholic Welfare Conference, which begat the NCCB/USCC dyad, which begat today’s USCCB) issued the Bishops Program of Social Reconstruction. Echoes of that program, filtered through the liberal-consensus politics of the Bernardin Era, could be heard in the 2009 healthcare debate, with the bishops continually stressing the moral imperative of universal health care. That moral imperative exists; but it is not at all clear that meeting it requires a first, indeed primary, recourse to governmental means. Or at least that is what the core Catholic social–ethical principal of subsidiarity, with its skepticism about concentrations of governmental power, would suggest.

Putting that comprehensive vision—universality *and* subsidiarity—into play in the new healthcare debate that will unfold in the wake of Obamacare and the 2010 midterm elections would be a genuine service to the country, and a distinctively Catholic service. Catholics bring a cluster of concerns to the table of the heal-

thecare debate: They bring concerns about the unborn, the elderly, and the severely handicapped; they bring concerns for the poor and their empowerment; they bring concerns for maintaining a healthy pluralism in our national life through the principle of subsidiarity and the use of private-sector mechanisms for solving social problems. It would be a real sign of movement beyond the public-policy orientation of the Bernardin Era if that concern for linking universality to subsidiarity (which a few bishops began to articulate in 2009) were to achieve a higher prominence in the bishops' address to these issues, even as the USCCB continues to press hard on the pro-life agenda and the protection of the conscience rights of Catholic medical professionals.

Then there is the question of Catholic identity. Throughout his three-year presidency of the USCCB, Francis Cardinal George steered the conference toward a more intense focus on issues of Catholic identity as they touched on the work of Catholic colleges and universities, Catholic health care institutions, Catholic professional associations, and Catholic publications. Cardinal George's sense of urgency on these questions was primarily *ad intra*: It was important, he believed, for the bishops to take more seriously their roles as stewards of the integrity of Catholic identity.

But that internal concern also bore on a public matter the cardinal discussed in an important lecture in February 2010 at Brigham Young University: the tendency in some quarters to privatize religious freedom, reducing that first of human rights to a matter of personal conviction and worship. As aggressive secularists and their allies in government continue their efforts to drive religious communities and religiously grounded moral argument to the margins of the public-policy debate, the post-Bernardin bishops' conference will be required to be ever more vigilant in defending the rights of individual Catholics and the Church as a body to work within the democratic process according to religiously informed moral convictions.

Finally, the new era opening up at the USCCB might be the occasion to revisit one of the few enduring effects of "The Challenge of Peace," namely, its contribution to confused Catholic thinking about the intellectual architecture and purposes of the just war tradition. The country as a whole remains seriously disabled in its capacity to apply the canons of classic just war reasoning to the new world disorder; thus a fresh Catholic discussion of how Christians apply moral principles to world affairs would be an important public service.

The Bernardin Era was one of institutional maintenance and bureaucratic expansion in which a liberal consensus dominated both the internal life of the Church and the Church's address to public policy. It is not self-evidently clear what the post-Bernardin Era, just beginning, will turn out to be. But if the Church's ordained leaders look to John Paul II as their model, they will increasingly embody an evangelical Catholicism that is unafraid to be countercultural in its engagement with public life, even as it stresses the imperative of radical conversion to discipleship and friendship with Jesus Christ as the *raison d'être* of the Church's existence.

If they do so, these new-era bishops will help define a Catholicism in America in which the liberal/conservative taxonomy of the past two generations of Catholic life will crumble into irrelevance.

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