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ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO PRINT ... SORT OF

The motto of The New York Times is, "All the news that's fit to print." On October 6, 2004, David Kirkpatrick, a reporter for The Times, conducted an extensive interview with Denver's Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, O.F.M. Cap., on issues surrounding this year's national elections. In the interests of accuracy, archdiocesan staff recorded the interview. A heavily truncated and framed version of the archbishop's views appeared in an October 12 New York Times story. [Read story here.](#)

A transcript of the full interview appears below. Readers are invited to compare the published New York Times story and the actual interview transcript, and then decide for themselves whether the October 12 Times story is slanted or fair; complete or misleading.

NYT: Well, I'm interested in doing an article on how Catholics are applying their faith to politics this election season and how some bishops are speaking up in some ways that they haven't in the past. And Denver seemed like a pretty interesting place, partly because you're here. I work with Laurie Goodstein who is my coworker, and she seemed to think that you are an interesting figure to watch.

AB: Were you going to interview the Senator out at Inverness?

NYT: Senator Kerry?

AB: Yes

NYT: I don't think so. I don't think for this one. What he has to say about his Catholicism, I think he said.

AB: There is a piece on National Public Radio this morning.

NYT: Yes?

AB: He didn't say much...

NYT: What did you think of it?

AB: I really didn't pay close attention to it, so I shouldn't say what I think of it. I was getting ready to go to a funeral.

NYT: Well, I guess I can start by asking, is this year different [from] previous years in any way?

AB: Well, it is different for Catholics because you have a Catholic running for President, and the press seems to be very interested in his Catholic identity. I think in some ways because of the coverage the issue is getting...it looks like bishops are speaking out in a new way, but really, many of us have been speaking about this for a very long time. That fact that there is a Catholic running and there is a situation where [a] potential conflict exists, reporters seem to focus and gawk. I say that with respect; I know you are a reporter. But it's true.

NYT: Sure, sure, totally.

AB: It's amazing. Before I was Bishop of Denver, I was Bishop of Rapid City, South Dakota, and I would say many of the same things there as I say here, and nobody paid attention to me because I was the Bishop of Rapid City.

NYT: Yes.

AB: A lot depends on who is writing/running and where you are. I think there are many of us who are speaking about this rather clearly and carefully for a long, long time. And my fear is, of course, that as soon as the election is over, no matter who wins, it will die down until the next election cycle. Then, people will start talking about it again and we'll be asked questions, and we'll have a little flash, and it'll die down again, rather than being sure that this continues.

NYT: When you talk about "it" as "it will die down," I assume you mean the Church's ...the life issue?

AB: No not just the life issue, but I'm talking about the Church's involvement in the political life of our country. Other than that individual Catholics can be involved in political life of our country, how much should their Catholic faith influence their positions? That's really the fundamental issue here...a problem with the voters and a problem with the candidates. And that's what we as a Church need to keep bringing to the attention of our people, long after the election is over -- the importance of our faith having a substantial impact on our public life, whether it be the generosity of our giving or the public policy we embrace in our speaking, or the positions we take in running for office or voting.

NYT: What all are you doing, just from reading the papers and the Catholic Register, I see you've been...here and there reminding people of the salient issues of this election. Is that deliberate?

AB: It is, but, if you look at my history here in Denver over the last seven years, you'll see that I do this every year. I probably do it more every two years when there is an election because people...you know, my columns are supposed to be about issues people

are interested in and not just theoretical speculation in a vacuum because we believe our faith life is engaged in the real world, with real people, with real history, learning about all of the major issues if there is something to say. I have much less to say about technical issues of the economy than I would about basic principles, but I think we have a duty to speak about all issues if we have something to say. Another thing that is important for you to know is that people ask us questions, and legitimately so. I think it is legitimate for the press to ask if Senator John Kerry should receive communion. I mean, that is a significant question. I think the *more* significant question is, what does the Church believe about *anybody* receiving communion? You can't answer the first without understanding the answer to the second. The people ask us questions. They didn't ask me questions two years ago about politicians receiving communion. They *did* ask me questions about how important should the abortion issue be in perspective of voting.

NYT: And your answer there was?

AB: That it's foundational, it's been foundational for the many years that have passed since Roe vs. Wade became the law of the land.

NYT: Archbishop Burke in St. Louis caught my attention again on Friday [October 1]. He issued a statement basically stating that it's a sin if you vote for a pro-choice politician, I believe he was saying even if that wasn't the reason you voted for him, that you voted for a pro-abortion politician that is still something that you ought confess. Is that...?

AB: I don't believe that's where you should start. The place to start would be, does our voting for someone make us responsible for what that person does as a legislator or as a judge?...And the answer is yes, because we are in some ways materially -- we use the word "materially" -- cooperating in that person's activity because we've given [him or her] the platform to be elected. Now, if the person does something wrong, are we responsible for that? Well, if we didn't know they were going to do something wrong, our participation is remote, but if we knew they were going to do something wrong and we approved of it, our responsibility would be really be close, even if we knew they were going to do something wrong and we voted for them for another reason, we would still be responsible in some ways.

The standing is that if you know someone is going to do evil and you participate in that in some way, you are responsible. So it's not... "if you vote this way, should you go to confession?" The question is, "if you vote this way, are you cooperating in evil?" Now, if you know you are cooperating in evil, should you go to confession? The answer is yes. There's a more sophisticated thing here...it's not so crude. The reason I want to stress that is because it is not like bishops are issuing edicts about who should vote for whom. It's issuing statements about how a Catholic forms her conscience, or his conscience...and remote material cooperation or proximate material cooperation is cooperation, and it's important for Catholics to know that, to be sophisticated in their judgments.

NYT: What all are you doing to try to keep the folks in this Archdiocese informed?

AB: Well...we have talks. We have a group of people in the Archdiocese giving talks on *Faithful Citizenship* and the appropriateness on being involved in political issues. We have Catholic candidates running for office who I personally talk to about their positions. I write columns for the Denver Catholic Register. I do interviews like this. I have done radio programs on these issues. Well, I think that most of us who are speaking out right now, are not just speaking out on abortion. It's about the appropriateness of...involvement, on part of individual Catholics and on part of the Church community. And the importance of forming one's conscience intelligently and in an involved fashion on the major moral issues of the day. Now, you know, it is true that the Church sees abortion as the foundational issue of our time. It is. There is no way around it. There is nothing more foundational than the right to life. And, it is really based on our understanding of the dignity of human beings. If human life has dignity, if human beings have dignity, we have no right to violate that dignity by our acts, whether it be killing that person or denying that person of adequate housing, food, and clothing or anything else. There is really a matter of human dignity from our point of view.

NYT: How are your conversations with the two Senate candidates going?

AB: I've had personal, honest discussions with both of them. You know...when I speak to them, I tell them, and they tell me, that our conversations are off the record for the public, so I don't talk about it.

NYT: It's worth a try.

AB: Sure, I understand that. I would try very much. I really wish I could be more forthcoming, but I can't because both they and I decided that the ground rules for starting to talk is that we talk to each other and not to others.

NYT: When you speak about the need for Catholics to take their faith with them into public affairs and their voting, and when you talk about which issues are foundational, do you get any...mixed responses?

AB: Oh absolutely mixed responses, because people hear me in different ways depending on where they stand politically. There are three or four kinds of people, well, there are all kinds of people, but there are those who are staunch Republicans, those who are staunch Democrats, those who are staunch Catholics, there are those who aren't educated, you know there are all kinds of people. And depending upon whether when they come to the question from, they hear it in different ways. Yes, there are a lot of people who write to me saying that they've been a Catholic for 70 years, that they went to Catholic colleges, and high schools, and grade schools, they go to church every Sunday, and the Church is wrong.

NYT: Really?

AB: Sure

NYT: How about...do you...?

AB: Which proves nothing. That fact that they've done all those things proves nothing, except that they've done all of those things -- and that they have some kind of certain attachment to the Church. But that doesn't mean they know anything about theology or about this particular issue. They might not have thought it through. Of course, it could be they are very well educated, too.

NYT: How are...at the parish level, at the priest level...I was in St Louis and I attended a few masses there in St. Charles, which is very Catholic.

AB: I know it well.

NYT: And uh...

AB: I'm a Potawatomi Indian and a woman who came to work with us is buried there, she's a saint, Saint Rose Philippine Duchesne. You know she's buried in St. Charles Missouri. No one knows about her...but she's on of...four canonized American saints and she's buried in St. Charles, Missouri.

NYT: You know what? I think... I think I saw her...

AB: Her shrine maybe?

NYT: Yeah, right, not far from the river.

AB: No, you're right.

NYT: Uhm...and, but I had the odd experience, I just visited two parishes holding Saturday afternoon services...uh...and got diametrically opposed answers from the two priests I talked to. One was very...was handing out...insert in the bulletin basically saying "This is what Archbishop Burke says on the subject and you ought to keep it in mind...about which issues are non-negotiable." And the other fellow said, "You know seamless garment...life means lots of things...life is foundational, but it is about the war in Iraq, it's about poverty, and it's about a lot of other issues." Basically, he was a Democrat. And he sort of laughed and said he thought...he was probably the only one in his parish. But do you...you know...do you get disagreements like that within the Church here?

AB: Oh I'm sure...I'm sure there have been...When you say within the Church, do you mean among our people, do you mean between the bishops and the priests? I'm not sure I understand your question. Let me say this. A lot of Catholic Democrats, whether they are clergy or laity, have used the "seamless garment" as an excuse to sideline the abortion issue, making it one among many others. And, we can't do that. The bishops,

themselves, issued a statement several years ago, called *[Living t]he Gospel of Life*, which was a reflection on the centrality of the abortion and life issues for our public life. And it's important to read that in order to understand a document like "Faithful Citizenship" because it's a more theoretical background kind of document. You know...all of those issues that you mentioned are life issues that are very, very important, but they are not all foundational. In the way...similar issue in terms of Catholic theology. At the heart of Catholic theology is the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We believe it to be absolutely true. We also believe that Mary's Assumption into heaven is absolutely true. But one doctrine is foundational and the other doctrine depends on the foundation to be true and to be meaningful. And the same thing is true about moral issues. You know some moral issues, all moral issues are moral issues, and it's good to be on the right side of them all the time, but some are dependent on the basic principles of human life. The dignity of human life. You never violate it. Whether it's the creation of embryos for embryonic stem cell research or abortion, are violations of the dignity of human beings, from our perspective. And you can never justify it. You can sometimes justify going to war. You may think that the Iraq war is horrible, but there may be sometimes when you can justify [going to war]. It doesn't have the same moral weight. And, it's not calculating 40 million abortions against 40,000 deaths in Iraq. That's not how you do the calculus. The calculus is on the intrinsic act itself. You know, and abortion is never, ever, *ever* right. And so to elect someone who has no respect for unborn human life...or has a...what kind of respect?...a kind of respect that is wobbly...it doesn't make any sense. Why would you trust someone with your life, if that person is willing to let unborn babies die?

NYT: When you say wobbly, you mean the kind of person that would say, "I know that life starts at conception, but I still am..."

AB: That's even worse. Those who claim the life didn't...doesn't start at conception are bad enough, because they are just turning their eyes from scientific fact. But those who say that it is human life, but it's alright to kill babies anyway...it's really strange. And, it is just far from what we Catholics believe...It's not understandable...People can say, well, "I didn't mean what I said," but when you talk about basic issues like this, if you don't understand what you said, there's something wrong. These are really important issues...And, I think it is important for Catholics, whether they are Republicans or Democrats, to get over this compromising, "yes, but" and just give a very clear, collective "no!" A grand refusal to vote for anybody who is pro-choice, so that we have some political influence on this issue. You know, if Catholics voted on this issue as the central issue of our time, we would change things quite drastically, quite quickly, and if we don't do it, it's our responsibility, and we participate somehow in the awful history of abortion in our country. So, I think we better just stop playing around with these words.

NYT: You said, "if Catholics started voting on this issue as the central issue of our time, we would change things quite rapidly and quite...?"

AB: Radically!

NYT: Radically.

AB: I think if politicians on both parties had to calculate their position on whether or not they're getting a significant amount of the vote of their constituency, it would make a difference. You know the fact that Catholics have been overwhelmingly Democrat and have had no impact on the Democrat platform on this matter for the last 20 years is horrible. What does that say about our commitment to Catholic values?...So, can I say this too?...Not only is this a different year because one of the candidates is Catholic, it's also, perhaps, a different year because I think even those who have been hoping for change have seen that the old ways of approaching this haven't worked. Abortion is more accepted than ever before. A lot of young Catholics are born into a world where they know nothing but abortion. And they think that if it's legal, it must be moral. You know I think we've been hoping that some kind of reasoned discourse would turn our country around and it hasn't because the other side doesn't reason. They are ruthless...in their position. It seems that Catholics should be just as ruthless in their pro-life positions as the pro-choice people are ruthless in theirs. And I use "ruthless"...that word...I don't mean that in an unkindly way. I mean just be determined and stubborn...persistent.

NYT: Speaking of reasons why this year is different [from] other years, the fact that Kerry is a Catholic, yes, he causes the press to ask questions that will induce controversial answers, but I think also it's bothersome to a lot of Catholics in a way that a Protestant who was pro-abortion wouldn't be. Am I right?

AB: I'm not sure what your question is, but I'll answer it...see, I think Catholics have to grapple with the fact that their moral positions impact their relationship with the Church. And they haven't often thought of that, you know? "I know abortion is wrong, but if I vote for abortion, that doesn't have any impact on me." Well the Church says, "Like heck it doesn't. It means you're not a Catholic and you shouldn't receive communion, if you are in favor of abortion." They don't think they connect. And, now that some people have been making a very clear connection between the position and one's relationship to the Church, people have gotten angry, they've gotten nervous, they've gotten mad, they've threatened to take their money away, they've threatened to join other churches. You ought to see this stuff. It's just...

NYT: What do you mean?

AB: Letters...people write letters, they say things you can't imagine them saying, they didn't think they would say it themselves...which means we haven't done a good job in the Catholic Church of helping people understand the consequences of their moral decisions. You can't take every position in the world and be a Catholic.

NYT: The question that I had before, let me state it again quickly. The bishops...are the bishops speaking out in a new way in part because Kerry is Catholic? In ways they wouldn't...does it bother people more, bishops and lay Catholics, because Kerry is taking the positions he is, *because* he's a Catholic?

AB: It has huge consequences for the Church. If Senator Kerry is elected President and promotes the destruction of unborn children, through embryonic stem cell research, what is the Church going to do? If the Church challenges a President Kerry on this issue, it will appear to be interfering. If the Church remains silent, it will appear cowardly.

NYT: Have you taken a position on the [Federal] Marriage Amendment?

AB: Well, it seems to us because of the way the court handled the abortion issue that the courts may handle the marriage issue in exactly the same way, and making a decision in favor of personal freedom over the real meaning of things. You know...personal freedom then trumps the life of the unborn child. Personal freedom then trumps the meaning of marriage, if the same kinds of court decisions are made. So it seems to us, that the best way for that not to happen is not to let the courts get a hold of it. From our perspective, marriage has two dimensions. One is our sacramental, religious meaning but that's not what we are defending here. We are defending the right of a state to write laws that define marriage in a way that supports that family unit to provide security for the life of children. It has nothing to do with our religious perspective -- I say "nothing" to do with it; it certainly has something to do with it -- but our primary position isn't religious. It's about the civil meaning of marriage. That's what marriage means civilly. That's why we have laws that support marriage rather than support other kinds of relationships. Because we think it's important for that stable relationship for the sake of children. This doesn't take rocket science or religious fervor; it just makes sense.

NYT: The Republican Party, at the national level in the last four years, has taken an accelerating interest in Catholic voters.

AB: Well sure, I think they see us as a natural ally on some of the cultural issues.

NYT: Yes

AB: As the Evangelicals are; as Orthodox Jews would be; as Muslims would be who are serious about their religious faith.

NYT: What do you think of that? They're probably right. You are natural allies.

AB: We might be. It depends on where the Republican Party goes. If it goes in the wrong way, we won't be natural allies. Political parties change their positions, Churches don't and shouldn't. If the Republican Party would stay with us on these issues, I think there would be sympathy there. If the Democratic Party would be with us on these issues, there would be sympathy there. If they both were, it would be a non-issue in the election perhaps. So, it's not like we're with Republicans, it's that *they're* with *us*.

NYT: I'm wondering if you've heard from them? Do they...people at the White House, at the campaign...

AB: I personally have not, I've not heard from them...I have some relationship with the White House because I'm a Commissioner for International Religious Freedom and I was appointed by the White House to that position. But that has nothing to do with this election, and it was done before this election became a prominent issue, and we don't sit around discussing party politics at the commission level. But I have had *no* contact from the Republican Party locally or nationally on the religious issue. I've talked to Democrats and I've talked to Republicans and I've talked with Senator Daschle...

NYT: So...I guess I'm wondering what if any perspective you have on the efforts that the Republican Party has made to try to persuade more Catholics to abandon what...

AB: I think that's what parties do. This is so silly. You know...the Republicans have been attacked recently I think for trying to get a hold of parish lists of Evangelical churches.

NYT: Yeah, they're trying...

AB: Oh, they're trying to get ours too? I didn't know they were trying to get ours. Well, what would you expect them to try and do? And the Democrats would try to do the same if they thought they would have a chance to use them, and that's what parties do. What's this "outrage"? It seems just too silly to me. Now would I ask my priests to give lists to either party? No! But if a member of a parish gives the parish list to a party, do I control that? No! I don't think our pastor should be doing that, but you know, what do party activists do? They try to gain advantage. Why do you think there is so much outrage about that kind of thing? It's just what they do; they get an Elks Club list, they get a church list...

NYT: Right

AB: ...they get a telephone book. You know...it works. They get contacts.

NYT: People have special sensitivities about churches. They feel like, oh my gosh, I'm going to get up from church and receive mail from the parties and that's terrible, but you and I both know that good machines can get a hold of those lists.

AB: And that's what they should do, right? They should try...

NYT: That's right. If I was a priest, I would try my best not to give a list away.

AB: I would too. But see they didn't go and get it from the ministers; they wanted to get it from members of the community. So we have to be honest about that. If any of my priests gave those lists to a party, I would be upset. But if a member of parish does it, I can't tell them what to do. Those are very public lists by the way. You can stop by a parish and pick up a parish directory.

NYT: Back to...a minute ago you said, "we're not with the Republican Party, the Republican Party is with us"...

AB: On *this* issue...

NYT: On this issue, right.

AB: It's not with us on some other issues.

NYT: Right

AB: So you have to weigh foundational issues against non-foundational issues perhaps. The calculus on who you are going to vote for is important and you have to take it very seriously. I have to pray about who I am going to vote for, I can't presume anything until I get into the voting booth and I'm going to vote early by the way so I'm not going into a voting booth, but it won't be a casual thing and I'll probably go to chapel with my ballot.

NYT: I'd like to get you to handicap the chances that the Republican Party has...the way the two parties are currently lined up...what are the chances that the Republican Party has for making the sort of inroads they hope to make among observant Catholics?

AB: Well, I think if the Republican candidate is pro-life, he will attract a whole lot of Catholic voters. If a Democrat candidate is pro-life, he'll attract a whole lot of Catholic voters. But if Rudy Giuliani is a Republican nominee the next go around, you're going to see the Republicans screaming at the Church for making such a big issue of a pro-life matter, because -- if I understand Mr. Giuliani's position -- he is in favor of abortion. So, people will notice that it just isn't just a party thing for us. It's not partisan, it's issue. Of course, we hope for the conversion of all Catholic political politicians to live out what their Church teaches if they claim to be Catholics.

NYT: The last question is... there has been more and more cooperation between Protestants who are conservative on social issues and Catholics who are conservative on social issues. What do you think of that? Do you think that's interesting?

AB: I haven't seen it except on the issue. I haven't seen cooperation extend to other areas of Church life. There is a commonality of issues that makes us allies on a particular issue, but has that led to...an ecumenical kind of...

NYT: No, no there is no Baptist saying Ave Marias...

AB: Or thinking that they are going to become Catholic someday...

NYT: But it's novel even to see this degree of cooperation on the issues.

AB: I don't think so. We have been cooperating on a lot of issues. It depends if there is the heart on the issues. For example, in Colorado, we have huge cooperation with the Mormons on the issues of family life and marriage -- that we wouldn't have with some of the mainline Protestant churches. Now we are much farther away from the Mormons than we would be from the Protestants [on doctrinal issues], and they would be far away from us from their perspective. They re-baptize anybody that becomes Mormon, and we re-baptize Mormons if they became Catholic, we don't recognize even their baptism. We do recognize baptism with mainline Protestant Churches. So, we have issues, I don't think it's anything else but issues.

NYT: I talked to conservative Protestant organizers and they say, "years ago, if I were to hold a meeting on an issue like opposing same sex marriage, you would never get any Catholics to come because they'd think we would try and convert them, which we were."

AB: I think people are becoming so worried about the cultural issues that it has broken down the distrust between one another. I think that's clear. Because I am really worried about them too. I think these things are very worrisome. They are not something that might happen in the future, they are happening now. And again, abortion hasn't gone away. And, I think a lot of Catholics thought that well after this initial phase, we will back away from it. But every time we try to begin partial birth abortion legislation—which would limit abortions—the court disembowels it, every time, *every time*. So, it's not going away, it's getting worse.