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*New Book RENDER UNTO CAESAR Is Manifesto for Catholic Moral and Civic Duty*

## **Archbishop Charles Chaput Calls for Active, ‘Authentic’ Catholic Engagement in Political Life as Nation Heads into Election**

The Catholic archbishop of Denver, Charles Chaput, one of America’s most publicly engaged religious leaders, urges Catholics to live their faith more honestly and vigorously in public life in his new book, *Render Unto Caesar: Serving the Nation by Living Our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life* (Doubleday, August 2008).

Chaput urges Catholics to deepen their commitment to Catholic teaching on abortion, the death penalty, immigration, poverty and other matters of social justice – and to carry their faith-rooted convictions into the voting booth. Grounding our citizenship in our religious beliefs is not just a right, the archbishop says, but a moral duty and a gift to American democratic life.

Archbishop Chaput defends the right of religious believers, leaders and communities to challenge secular authority in the name of human dignity. “In this sense, the Catholic church cannot stay, has never stayed, and never will stay out of politics,” he writes.

*Render Unto Caesar* forcefully reaffirms the classic Catholic linkage between personal faith and public action. Arguing that the Catholic faith is “always personal but never private,” Archbishop Chaput blends a consistent ethic of life with a new urgency for serving the poor, defending the unborn child and building the common good. He calls on American Catholics to recover what it means to be truly “Catholic” and to take part in American democratic life “as Catholic Christians first, not in opposition to the country, but to serve its best ideals.”

“Citizens serve their country best when they take their moral convictions respectfully, but unapologetically, into public debate,” Chaput says. “American Catholics are better citizens when they first live as more faithful Catholics.”

Archbishop Chaput issues a stinging critique of a nation that has changed from “the land of opportunity to the land of private appetites;” of leaders who make public, political choices that mock their personal religious convictions; of Orwellian political language and dishonest manipulation of our civic vocabulary; and of the lukewarm and self-absorbed who fail their country by not fighting for their beliefs.

American Catholics have made huge strides over the past 200 years, climbing out of the cultural ghetto into the mainstream. There are 69 million Catholics in the U.S. today— nearly one quarter of the American population. More than 150 self-described Catholics now serve in Congress, including a quarter of all senators. A majority of the Supreme Court justices are Catholic. But as Archbishop Chaput asks: What difference has it made?

“American culture is not noticeably more ethical or upright nor is it more informed by the spirit of the Gospel,” he says. “American Catholics face a crisis of faith, mission and leadership—and the task of fixing it falls equally on lay people and their bishops.”

“The time for easy Christianity is over. We need to be more zealous in our faith, not more discreet, clearer in our convictions, not muddier, and more Catholic, not less.”

In fact, the archbishop says, the most powerful ‘political’ act a Catholic can make is to live their faith—not just in word but in all of their choices, decisions and actions, both in public and private life.

“America’s great witness to the world,” Chaput writes, “has always been its legacy of freedom. Despite its sins and flaws, our nation’s history is finally a story of opportunity, religious harmony, respect for the human person, constitutional democracy and the rule of law. These great achievements made America a beacon. Generations of American Catholics have rightly embraced America as their own. But if our nation now exports other values – violence, greed, vulgarity, abortion, a rejection of children – American Catholics must work to change that or be held co-responsible.”

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***Render Unto Caesar***

*Serving the Nation by Living our Catholic Beliefs in Political Life*

by Archbishop Charles Chaput

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