

Pope Francis: A 'good Christian' prays for bad politicians

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ROME (RNS) Wading into ongoing debates over religion and politics, Pope Francis on Sunday (Sept. 15) gently chided Christians to pray for politicians, saying “a Christian who does not pray for his leaders is not a good Christian.”

The pope’s remarks during a two-hour closed-door meeting of Roman clergy did not touch on more controversial issues like the separation between church and state, abortion, or refusing Communion to Catholic politicians who are not in sync with church teachings.

Instead, Francis quoted St. Paul, who urged prayer “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life.”

Francis said Christians should not refrain from praying for leaders they do not agree with: “Pray for him, pray for her, that they can govern well,” the pontiff said, adding: “A Christian who does not pray for his leaders is not a good Christian.”

The pope’s remarks were notable for the divisive issues that he did not mention. His predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, tended to take a more activist role when it came to political priorities and hot-button culture wars.

The pope’s relative silence on cultural issues has upset some conservatives in the U.S. church, including Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, R.I., who said he has been “a little bit disappointed in Pope Francis” for not speaking out on abortion.

The remarks come at an important time for Italy, which is in the midst of a political crisis between those who support three-time Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and those who seek to strip Berlusconi of his Senate seat in the wake of a Supreme Court

ruling to uphold a conviction for tax fraud.

If Berlusconi loses his seat, his supporters have threatened to withdraw support for the government, forcing new elections for the second time in less than a year.