
St. Bernadette Respect Life Committee

Newsletter

August 2006

A Call to Faithful Citizenship

In 2004, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) published *The Challenge of Faithful Citizenship*, a summary of a statement by its Administrative Committee on the challenges Catholics face when fulfilling their duties as voters. The bishops remind us that "In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. Believers are called to become informed, active, and responsible participants in the political process."

The Constitution of the United States protects our right to speak without governmental favoritism or discrimination. The Administrative Committee notes, "Our nation is enriched, not threatened, when religious groups join public debate. A Catholic moral framework is often not 'politically correct;' it does not fit the rigid ideologies of 'right' or 'left,' or the platform of any party."

Catholics are called to test every candidate and party for how they affect human life and dignity and how they pursue justice. We are urged to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or self-interest. The USCCB emphasizes, "As bishops, we do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We hope that voters will examine candidates on the full range of issues and on their personal integrity, philosophy, and performance. A consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework to address issues in the political arena."

They go on to point out, "For Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life. A recent Vatican statement reminds us that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit voting for a political program or law that contradicts fundamental principles of our faith...Protecting human life begins with our opposition to abortion and euthanasia, which are pre-eminent threats to human life and dignity, and extends to our opposition to cloning, assisted suicide, and the death penalty, and our efforts to promote peace."

The bishops conclude, "We urge Catholics to register, vote, and become more involved in public life, to protect human life and dignity and to advance the common good. Faithful citizenship challenges us to seek a place at the table of life for all God's children in the elections of 2004 and beyond."

A Foundation of Life

On the occasion of the feast of the Annunciation, March 25, 2006, Mother Agnes Mary Donovan, SV wrote about human life as a gift of God. She stated, "The dignity of every human being derives from the fact that life finds its origin in God, and that each person is destined to live forever with Him."

Mother Agnes Mary linked our failure to recognize the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist to our failure to recognize the inviolable dignity of the human person. She related our faith in the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus in the consecrated Host to our ability to believe that the unborn, the elderly, and the chronically and terminally ill are made in the image and likeness of God.

"Lack of such a faith vision," Mother Agnes Mary wrote, "has resulted in the killing of millions of unborn children, in the passage of laws that contemplate allowing the destruction of embryos for scientific research, in assisted suicide and euthanasia, in all assaults on the dignity and sanctity of human life."

Our faith is the foundation upon which we, as Catholics, can build a Culture of Life. Mother Agnes Mary advises us to invite Christ to be the center of our lives, and to witness to His presence in every human life by our words and our actions. She urges us to pray to Mary to intercede with her Son so that our country, and the world, will be remade into a culture of life and love.

Mother Agnes Mary Donovan is superior general of the Sisters of Life. Her full essay, "Gift of Life, Gift of Love", can be found in the March 2006 issue of *Columbia*.

"It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop. A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized." (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, March 25, 1995)

The Participation of Catholics in Political Life

Catholics, called to participate in the political life of democratic societies, are faced with many questions in how they are to meet their moral obligations. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith compiled a Doctrinal Note on this subject, and Pope John Paul II approved it and ordered its publication on November 21, 2002. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, was the Prefect of this document.

This Doctrinal Note begins by reaffirming the Catholic Church's consistent teaching that Catholics have a moral obligation to perform their civic duties, including voting in elections for lawmakers and government officials. The Second Vatican Council stressed that the laity are never to relinquish their participation in public life.

The Doctrinal Note reminds us, "Pope John Paul II, continuing the constant teaching of the Church, has reiterated many times that those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a **grave and clear obligation** to oppose any law that attacks human life. For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them."

In his Encyclical, *Evangelium Vitae*, Pope John Paul II speaks to Catholics about a cultural relativism that exists today. Some people argue that ethical pluralism is the very condition for democracy. Lawmakers maintain that they are respecting the freedom of choice by enacting laws that ignore the principles of natural ethics. Pope John Paul II responds, "Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality.... The value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes.... The basis of these values cannot be provisional and changeable 'majority' opinions, but only the acknowledgment of an objective moral law which, as the 'natural law' written in the human heart, is the obligatory point of reference for civil law itself."

Catholics are required to have a well-formed conscience when voting in an election. Catholics should not vote in favor of a candidate who proposes to advance programs or laws that are intrinsically immoral. Catholic voters should exercise their power of citizenship in ways that defend innocent human life.

A Lesson in Semantics

Ron Galloy is the Director for Life: God's Sacred Gift, whose mission is to give pro-life witness to national media outlets headquartered in New York City. In an article published in the *New Oxford Review* in February 2006, he offered a glossary to help readers to navigate the new vocabulary often used in America today.

He put forth the premise that, because words shape ideas and affect the way people think, those who govern a culture's language govern that culture. In other words:

Words teach. Mr. Galloy believes that semantics is the reason so many people have come to think that killing is a human "right." He offers the following:

New Vocabulary – Abortion "rights"

Traditional Vocabulary - Killing unborn children

Killing innocent life can never be a human right, and calling it such can never make it so. No one who calls abortion a "right" would want to have been aborted himself, which demonstrates the hypocrisy of the term. *Killing unborn children* is the correct term.

New Vocabulary – "Choice"

Traditional Vocabulary - It's a child not a choice

Human rights are inalienable because they are God-given. Thus, they don't fall into the category of another person's choice. Expressing life as a choice puts life in a subjective context.

New Vocabulary – Emergency "contraception"

Traditional Vocabulary – Abortive

Contraceptive needs to be in quotes when the reference is to hormonal drugs, such as the "morning-after pill" that causes abortions. The overriding harm is abortion, so it needs to be the primary qualifier. The proper term is *abortive*.

New Vocabulary – "Legal" abortion

Traditional Vocabulary – Government-protected child-killing

St. Augustine said, "Every law made by man can be called a law insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but a corruption of law." Nothing could be more the case than "laws" that protect abortion. The proper term is *government-protected child-killing*.

New Vocabulary – Privacy "rights"

Traditional Vocabulary – Protected child-killing

Privacy "rights" is a fantasy term that hides the act of murder. Needless to say, every murderer would want the murder he commits to be private. Since murder is not a privacy right, the correct term is *protected child-killing*.

What is really being said?

When a candidate tells you that his position on reproductive choice includes a priority to first reduce unwanted pregnancies by providing access to regular and emergency contraception, what is he really saying? When a candidate tells you that pregnant women should be able to talk with their doctors about all their options including safe, legal abortion without interference or violation of their right to privacy, what is he really saying?

Finally, Mr. Galloy reminds us that, to many, perception is reality. He tells us, "Hitler stated in his book *Mein Kampf*, 'Tell a lie often enough and people will believe it.'" Words have power, and we must know the language in order to understand what's being said.

St. Bernadette Respect Life Committee

Rich Carberry, President

Claire M. Schweitzer, Editor