

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 6TH OF 8

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”

- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 13

Since participation in political life is a moral obligation, Catholics need to form their conscience with the mind and heart of the Church on issues of consequence. This outline is the sixth of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This sixth outline will provide an overview of the issue of racism.

Racism

In their November 2018 Pastoral Letter Against Racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call to Love*, the U.S. Catholic bishops wrote, “Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that ... all [humans are] equally made in the image of God.” (p.4) Racism fails to acknowledge the dignity with which God creates each person, and it contributes to a culture of death.

Since the Civil Rights Movement in our nation, the country has moved forward in many positive ways past racial discrimination. Nevertheless, the nation still has a long way to go to reach reconciliation on race, as evident by the nightly news. Thus, it is imperative that especially as members of the body of Christ, we seek to reach out and listen to those whose race and ethnicity is different from our own to create a culture of communication, which may then lead to a culture of communion. As the USSCB states:

We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just. As Christians, we are called to listen and know the stories of our brothers and sisters. We must create opportunities to hear, with open hearts, the tragic stories that are deeply imprinted on the lives of our brothers and sisters, if we are to be moved with empathy to promote justice. Many groups, such as the Irish, Italians, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Poles, Jews, Chinese, and Japanese, can attest to having been the target of racial and ethnic prejudice in this country. It is also true that many groups are still experiencing prejudice, including rising anti-Semitism, the discrimination many Hispanics face today, and anti-Muslim sentiment. Especially instructive at this moment, however, are the historical and contemporary experiences of Native and African Americans. (Open Wide Our Hearts, p.10)

It is therefore incumbent upon Catholic Christians to reach outside of our comfort zones to communities different from our own to help rebuild a fractured human family. For while we may not be hurting from the scars of racism, members of our Church and the human family are. Racism ultimately then is an attack on human life and the human family, thus we are called to respond forcefully to it because of its broad range of effects into other areas which effect the dignity of the human person. As the USSCB has written:

The injustice and harm racism causes are an attack on human life. The Church in the United States has spoken out consistently and forcefully against abortion, assisted suicide, euthanasia, the death penalty, and other forms of violence that threaten human life. It is not a secret that these attacks on human life have severely affected people of color, who are disproportionately affected by poverty, targeted for abortion, have less access to healthcare, have the greatest numbers on death row, and are most likely to feel pressure to end their lives when facing serious illness. (Open Wide Our Hearts, p.30)

In summation, racism is an issue that still exists in our society. As Catholic faithful, we must lead the way in how we speak, act and love each member of our human family. Correspondingly, we should desire candidates that uphold the dignity of every human person, no matter their race or ethnicity.

Peter Range, Director, Office for Life and Justice, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Toledo, prange@toledodiocese.org. Learn more and watch videos at www.awakencatholic.org/election. Read the party platforms: Democratic Party, <https://bit.ly/3hrosqq>; Republican Party, <https://bit.ly/3hqWV8D> (Note: Rep. Party voted to continue their 2016 Platform)

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Socialism

Pope John XXIII stated in *Mater et Magistra* (“On Christianity and Social Progress”) that “No Catholic could subscribe even to moderate socialism.” (Saint John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, 34)

The Church believes that socialism is a grave threat to the social order. Socialism violates the third major principle of Catholic Social Teaching: subsidiarity, or the belief that problems are best handled at the level in which they arise. Subsidiarity insists on limits to States intervention in the affairs of the family and society. As St. John Paul II wrote in *Centesimus Annus*, Subsidiarity “insists on necessary limits to the State’s intervention... inasmuch as the individual, the family and society are prior to the state, and inasmuch as the State exists in order to protect their rights and not stifle them.” (Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 11)

Socialism, on the other hand, puts ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange of wealth exercised through the government and its officials. This type of power should not reside in the State. As Pope Benedict has taught:

We do not need a state which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 28)

That much power in the hands of the State dispossesses individuals and families of their autonomy. As Pope Francis has commented: “No actual or established power has the right to deprive peoples of the full exercise of their sovereignty.” (Pope Francis, *Address to the Second World Meeting of Popular Movements, Bolivia, 9 July 2015*)

Furthermore, socialism treats people as groups, not individuals, including denying man his natural law right to private property for the common good. Saint Pope John Paul II, in *Centesimus Annus* (“The Hundredth Year”), wrote that this error is:

Anthropological in nature. Socialism considers the individual person simply as an element, a molecule within the social organism, so that the good of the individual is completely subordinated to the functioning of the socio-economic mechanism. (Saint John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 12)

This is why every Supreme Pontiff, from Pius IX in 1849 through Pope Francis, has opposed socialism. Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (“On Reconstruction of the Social Order”), went so far as to say that socialism is “Irreconcilable with true Christianity,” and thus “No one can be at the same time a good Catholic and a true socialist.” (Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 120)

In summation, if socialism is called ‘democratic socialism’ or ‘Christian socialism’ it remains, socialism – something the Catholic Church has clearly and forcefully spoken against as it deprives the individual of personal responsibility and attributes power to the State which belong in the hands of families and communities. A Catholic when voting, at every turn, must reject socialism as a legitimate principle of change.

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Environment

As Catholic Christians, we are tremendously blessed to receive from God our Father the gift of this earth, what Pope Francis has called our ‘common home.’ Thus, from the first man, Adam, down to our day, we are called to work, revere and protect the great gift of our environment. Therefore, as our ‘common home’ is received as gift, protecting our environment is not ‘optional to the Christian experience.’ As Pope Francis remarked in *Laudato Si*:

Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 257)

To live out our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork it is essential that we have an adequate anthropology to appreciate the importance of our ecology. In other words, if we more deeply appreciate the human person, and the human relationships we engage in, the better our relationship can be with nature and creation. Again, quoting Pope Francis:

When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. (LS, 117)

There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology. When the human person is considered as simply one being among others, the product of chance or physical determinism, then “our overall sense of responsibility wanes”. (LS, 118)

The human person, the crown of God’s creation, must then be respected, cherished and loved if we are to in turn respect and cherish our environment. When we fail to respect the human person, we fail to respect our environment:

If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. Christian thought sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures; it thus inculcates esteem for each person and respect for others. (LS, 119)

Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away”. (LS, 120)

In summation, when we vote as Catholics approaching the issue of the environment, we recognize that our care for creation flows from the centrality of the dignity of the human person. Because God has made us in his image and likeness, the environment in which he has deposited us is a great gift to help us flourish and create a culture of life and love. When, we fail to see God in each other, we fail to see the gift God has given us in our ‘common home’: A home that we must protect, cultivate and revere for future generations and for the common good of all.

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