

Why Should We Vote?

The American people seem to be very divided in their opinions about the two men who are candidates for the Presidency of the United States in 2004. Many Catholics also seem to be divided because neither of the candidates hold views consistent with the Catholic Church on all of the most important issues. Many American people are undecided and still others may very well not vote. In the past as many as 60 percent of those eligible to participate in the election of the president have stayed away from the polls. I and my brother bishops of the United States urge everyone to participate in this year's election by learning about the issues, studying the positions of the candidates and making an informed decision when they vote. The Bishops of the United States have prepared reflections of some of the more important moral, social concerns which deserve consideration in selecting the new president of the United States. Below you will find a continuation of our reflections for your prayerful consideration. - + Bishop Edward K. Braxton.

WHY SHOULD WE VOTE?

FAITHFUL CITIZENSHIP

(The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops)

PART II

The Role of the Church

The Church is called to educate Catholics about our social teaching, highlight the moral dimensions of public policies, participate in debates on matters affecting the common good, and witness to the Gospel through our services and ministries. The Catholic community's participation in public affairs does not undermine, but enriches the political process and affirms genuine pluralism. Leaders of the Church have the right and duty to share Catholic teaching and to educate Catholics on the moral dimensions of public life, so that they may form their consciences in light of their faith.

The recent Vatican statement on political life points this out:

[The Church] does not wish to exercise political power or eliminate the freedom of opinion of Catholics regarding contingent questions. Instead, it intends—as is its proper function—to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and the common good. We urge our fellow citizens “to see beyond party politics, to analyze campaign rhetoric critically, and to choose their political leaders according to principle, not party affiliation or mere self-interest.” As bishops, we seek to form the consciences of our people. We do not wish to instruct persons on how they should vote by endorsing or opposing candidates. We hope that voters will examine the position of candidates on the full range of issues, as well as on their personal integrity, philosophy, and performance. We are convinced that a consistent ethic of life should be the moral framework from which to address issues in the political arena.

For Catholics, the defense of human life and dignity is not a narrow cause, but a way of life and a framework for action. A key message of the Vatican statement on public life is that Catholics in politics must reflect the moral values of our faith with clear and consistent priority for the life and dignity of the human person. This is the fundamental moral measure of their service. The Vatican statement also points out:

It must be noted also that a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals. The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good. Decisions about candidates and choices about public policies require clear commitment to moral principles, careful discernment and prudential judgments based on the values of our faith.

The coming elections provide important opportunities to bring together our principles, experience, and community in effective public witness. We hope parishes, dioceses, schools, colleges, and other Catholic institutions will encourage active participation through non-partisan voter registration and education efforts, as well as through ongoing legislative networks and advocacy programs. As Catholics we need to share our values, raise our voices, and use our votes to shape a society that protects human life, promotes family life, pursues social justice, and practices solidarity. These efforts can strengthen our nation and renew our Church.

Themes of Catholic Social Teaching

The Catholic approach to faithful citizenship begins with moral principles, not party platforms. The directions for our public witness are found in Scripture and Catholic social teaching. Here are some key themes at the heart of our Catholic social tradition.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, each person's life and dignity must be respected, whether that person is an innocent unborn child in a mother's womb, whether that person worked in the World

Trade Center or a market in Baghdad, or even whether that person is a convicted criminal on death row. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death, that people are more important than things, and that the measure of every institution is whether it protects and respects the life and dignity of the human person. As the recent Vatican statement points out, “The Church recognizes that while democracy is the best expression of the direct participation of citizens in political choices, it succeeds only to the extent that it is based on a correct understanding of the human person. Catholic involvement in political life cannot compromise on this principle.”



Bishop Edward K. Braxton

Call to Family, Community, and Participation

The human person is not only sacred, but social. The God-given institutions of marriage—a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman—and family are central and serve as the foundations for social life. Marriage and family should be supported and strengthened, not undermined. Every person has a right to participate in social, economic, and political life and a corresponding duty to work for the advancement of the common good and the well-being of all, especially the poor and weak.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every person has a fundamental right to life—the right that makes all other rights possible. Each person also has a right to the conditions for living a decent life—faith and family life, food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing. We also have a duty to secure and respect these rights not only for ourselves, but for others, and to fulfill our responsibilities to our families, to each other, and to the larger society.

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

Scripture teaches that God has a special concern for the poor and vulnerable. The prophets denounced injustice toward the poor as a lack of fidelity to the God of Israel. Jesus, who identified himself with “the least of these”, came to preach “good news to the poor, liberty to captives . . . and to set the downtrodden free.” The Church calls on all of us to embrace this preferential option for the poor and vulnerable, to embody it in our lives, and to work to have it shape public policies and priorities. A fundamental measure of our society is how we care for and stand with the poor and vulnerable.

Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers

The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's act of creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers, owners, and others must be respected—the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and choose to join a union, to economic initiative, and to ownership and private property. These rights must be exercised in ways that advance the common good.

Solidarity

We are one human family. We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they may be. Pope John Paul II insists, “We are all really responsible for all”. Loving our neighbor has global dimensions in a shrinking world. At the core of the virtue of solidarity is the pursuit of justice and peace. Pope Paul VI taught that “if you want peace, work for justice.” The Gospel calls us to be “peacemakers.” Our love for all our sisters and brothers demands that we be “sentinels of peace” in a world wounded by violence and conflict.

Caring for God's Creation

The world that God created has been entrusted to us. Our use of it must be directed by God's plan for creation, not simply for our own benefit. Our stewardship of the Earth is a form of participation in God's act of creating and sustaining the world. In our use of creation, we must be guided by a concern for generations to come. We show our respect for the Creator by our care for creation.

These themes anchor our community's role in public life. They help us to resist excessive self-interest, blind partisanship, and ideological agendas. They also help us avoid extreme distortions of pluralism and tolerance that deny any fundamental values and dismiss the contributions and convictions of believers. As the Vatican's statement on public life explains, we cannot accept an understanding of pluralism and tolerance that suggests “every possible outlook on life [is] of equal value”. However, this insistence that there are fundamental moral values “has nothing to do with the legitimate freedom of Catholic citizens to choose among the various political opinions that are compatible with faith and the natural moral law, and to select, according to their own criteria, what best corresponds to the needs of the common good”.

Moral Priorities for Public Life

We wish to call special attention to issues that we believe

are important in the national debate in this campaign and in the years to come. These brief summaries do not indicate the depth and details of the positions we have taken in the documents which are cited at the end of this statement.

Protecting Human Life

Human life is a gift from God, sacred and inviolable. Because every human person is created in the image and likeness of God, we have a duty to defend human life from conception until natural death and in every condition.

Our world does not lack for threats to human life. We watch with horror the deadly violence of terror, war, starvation, and children dying from disease. We face a new and insidious mentality that denies the dignity of some vulnerable human lives and treats killing as a personal choice and social good. As we wrote in *Living the Gospel of Life*, “Abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human life and dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental good and the condition for all others”. Abortion, the deliberate killing of a human being before birth, is never morally acceptable. The destruction of human embryos as objects of research is wrong. This wrong is compounded when human life is created by cloning or other means only to be destroyed. The purposeful taking of human life by assisted suicide and euthanasia is never an act of mercy. It is an unjustifiable assault on human life. For the same reasons, the intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong.

In protecting human life, “We must begin with a commitment never to intentionally kill, or collude in the killing, of any innocent human life, no matter how broken, unformed, disabled or desperate that life may seem.”

We urge Catholics and others to promote laws and social policies that protect human life and promote human dignity to the maximum degree possible. Laws that legitimize abortion, assisted suicide, and euthanasia are profoundly unjust and immoral. We support constitutional protection for unborn human life, as well as legislative efforts to end abortion and euthanasia. We encourage the passage of laws and programs that promote childbirth and adoption over abortion and assist pregnant women and children. We support aid to those who are sick and dying by encouraging health care coverage for all as well as effective palliative care. We call on government and medical researchers to base their decisions regarding biotechnology and human experimentation on respect for the inherent dignity and inviolability of human life from its very beginning, regardless of the circumstances of its origin.

Catholic teaching calls on us to work to avoid war. Nations must protect the right to life by finding ever more effective ways to prevent conflicts from arising, to resolve them by peaceful means, and to promote post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation. All nations have a right and duty to defend human life and the common good against terrorism, aggression, and similar threats. In the aftermath of September 11, we called for continuing outreach to those who had been harmed, clear resolve in responding to terror, moral restraint in the means used, respect for ethical limits on the use of force, greater focus on the roots of terror, and a serious effort to share fairly the burdens of this response. While military force as a last resort can sometimes be justified to defend against aggression and similar threats to the common good, we have raised serious moral concerns and questions about preemptive or preventive use of force.

Even when military force is justified, it must be discriminate and proportionate. Direct, intentional attacks on civilians in war are never morally acceptable. Nor is the use of weapons of mass destruction or other weapons that cause disproportionate harm or that cannot be deployed in ways that distinguish between civilians and soldiers. Therefore, we urge our nation to strengthen barriers against the use of nuclear weapons, to expand controls over existing nuclear materials and other weapons of mass destruction, and to ratify the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty as a step toward much deeper cuts and the eventual elimination of nuclear weapons. We also urge our nation to join the treaty to ban anti-personnel landmines and to address the human consequences of cluster bombs. We further urge our nation to take immediate and serious steps to reduce its own disproportionate role in the scandalous global trade in arms, which contributes to violent conflicts around the world.

Society has a right and duty to defend itself against violent crime and a duty to reach out to victims of crime. Yet our nation's increasing reliance on the death penalty cannot be justified. We do not teach that killing is wrong by killing those who kill others. Pope John Paul II has said the penalty of death is “both cruel and unnecessary”. The antidote to violence is not more violence. In light of the Holy Father's insistence that this is part of our pro-life commitment, we encourage solutions to violent crime that reflect the dignity of the human person, urging our nation to abandon the use of capital punishment. We also urge passage of legislation that would address problems in the judicial system, and restrict and restrain the use of the death penalty through use of DNA evidence, a guarantee of effective counsel, and efforts to address issues of racial justice.

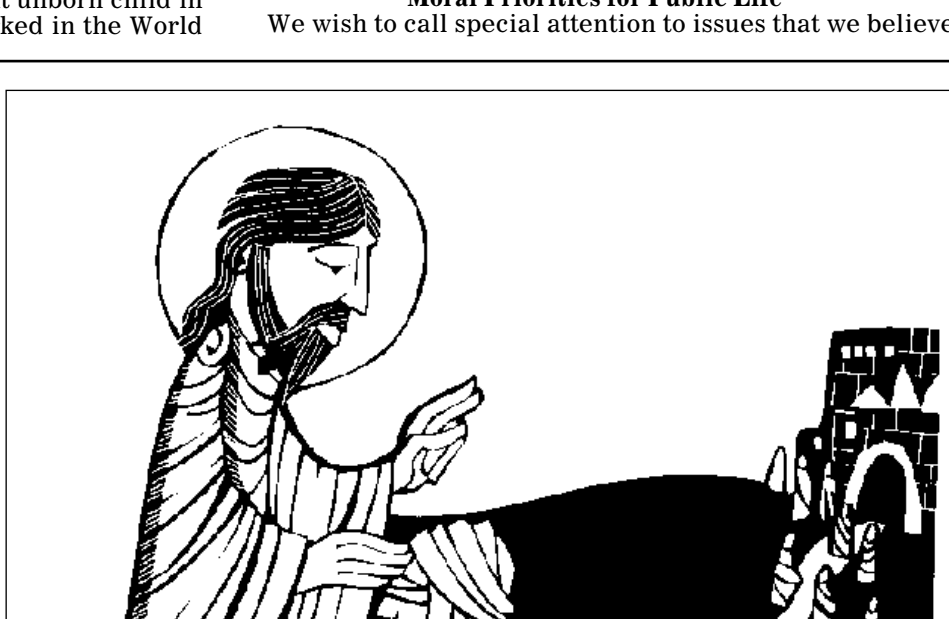
To obtain copies of *Faithful Citizenship*, call 1-800-235-8722 or go to www.usccb.org.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

As Jesus continued his journey to Jerusalem, he traveled through Samaria and Galilee. As he was entering a village, ten lepers met him. They stood at a distance from him and raised their voice, saying, “Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!” And when he saw them, he said, “Go show yourselves to the priests.” As they were going they were cleansed.

And one of them, realizing he had been healed, returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. He was a Samaritan. Jesus said in reply, “Ten were cleansed, were they not? Where are the other nine? Has none but this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?” Then he said to him “Stand up and go; your faith has saved you.”

Luke 17:11-19



Jesus heals the lepers

9/11 recommendations threaten immigrants, asylum-seekers

WASHINGTON — Legislation implementing the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission contains a number of provisions “extremely harmful to immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees,” according to the chairman of the bishops' migration committee, who urged that the language be dropped.

“The provisions ... will have serious ill-effects on immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to this nation without necessarily making our nation safer,” said Bishop Thomas Wenski, coadjutor bishop of Orlando. “Many reach beyond the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission report.”

Specifically, Bishop Wenski's letter urged members of the U.S. House to oppose sections of the bill related to:

- Alien identification standards: The bill would require aliens in the United States to use only Department of Justice or Department of Homeland Security-issued identification or a foreign passport.

- Expedited removal: This provision would increase the period an immigrant is subject to expedited removal from two years to five years.

- Due process: Several sections of the bill would undermine standard due-process protections for immigrants, such as prohibiting federal courts from holding up a deportation even while a case is pending

- Revocation of visas and other travel documents: The bill contains language that precludes administrative or judicial review of the revocation of a visa, among other related provisions.

- Drivers' licenses and personal identification cards: The bill establishes minimum standards for federal recognition of state-issued driver's licenses or identification cards.

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