



Subsidiarity, solidarity, and the lay mission

Bishop's Column

Thursday, Aug. 16, 2012 -- 12:00 AM

Dear friends,

It was no shock at all for me to learn that our diocesan native son, Paul Ryan, had been chosen to be a candidate for the Vice Presidency of the United States. I am proud of his accomplishments as a native son, and a brother in the faith, and my prayers go with him and especially with his family as they endure the unbelievable demands of a presidential campaign here in the United States. It is not for the bishop or priests to endorse particular candidates or political parties. Any efforts on the part of any bishop or priest to do so should be set aside. And you can be assured that no priest who promotes a partisan agenda is acting in union with me or with the Universal Church.

It is the role of bishops and priests to teach principles of our faith, such that those who seek elected offices, if they are Catholics, are to form their consciences according to these principles about particular policy issues.

However, the formation of conscience regarding particular policy issues is different depending on how fundamental to the ecology of human nature or the Catholic faith a particular issue is. Some of the most fundamental issues for the formation of a Catholic conscience are as follows: sacredness of human life from conception to natural death, marriage, religious freedom and freedom of conscience, and a right to private property.

Violations of the above involve intrinsic evil — that is, an evil which cannot be justified by any circumstances whatsoever. These evils are examples of direct pollution of the ecology of human nature and can be discerned as such by human reason alone. Thus, all people of good will who wish to follow human reason should deplore any and all violations in the above areas, without exception. The violations would be: abortion, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide, same-sex marriage, government-coerced secularism, and socialism.

Where intrinsic evil is not involved

In these most fundamental matters, a well-formed Catholic conscience, or the well-formed conscience of a person of good will, simply follows the conclusions demanded by the ecology of human nature and the reasoning process. A Catholic conscience can never take exception to the prohibition of actions which are intrinsically evil. Nor may a conscience well-formed by reason or the Catholic faith ever choose to vote for someone who clearly, consistently, persistently promotes that which is intrinsically evil.

However, a conscience well-formed according to reason or the Catholic faith, must also make choices where intrinsic evil is not involved. How best to care for the poor is probably the finest current example of this, though another would be how best to create jobs at a time when so many are suffering from the ravages of unemployment. In matters such as these, where intrinsic evil is not involved, the rational principles of solidarity and subsidiarity come into play. The principle of solidarity, simply stated, means that every human being on the face of the earth is my brother and my sister, my "neighbor" in the biblical sense. At the same time, the time-tested best way for assisting our neighbors throughout the world should follow the principle of subsidiarity. That means the problem at hand should be addressed at the lowest level possible — that is, the level closest to the people in need. That again, is simply the law of human reason.

We can disagree on application

As one looks at issues such as the two mentioned above and seeks to apply the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, Catholics and others of good will can arrive at different conclusions. These are conclusions about the best means to promote the preferential option for the poor, or the best means to reach a lower percentage of unemployment throughout our country. No one is contesting here anyone's right to the basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, healthcare, etc. Nor is anyone contesting someone's right to work and so provide for self and family. However there can be difference according to how best to follow the principles which the Church offers.

Making decisions as to the best political strategies, the best policy means, to achieve a goal, is the mission of lay people, not bishops or priests. As Pope Benedict himself has said, a just society and a just state is the achievement of politics, not the Church. And therefore Catholic laymen and women who are familiar with the principles dictated by human reason and the ecology of human nature, or non-Catholics who are also bound by these same principles, are in a position to arrive at differing conclusions as to what the best means are for the implementation of these principles — that is, "lay mission" for Catholics.



+ Bishop
Robert C.
Morlino

Under the Gospel Book

This column is the bishop's communication with the faithful of the Diocese of Madison. Any wider circulation reaches beyond the intention of the bishop.

Thus, it is not up to me or any bishop or priest to approve of Congressman Ryan's specific budget prescription to address the best means we spoke of. Where intrinsic evils are not involved, specific policy choices and political strategies are the province of Catholic lay mission. But, as I've said, Vice Presidential Candidate Ryan is aware of Catholic Social Teaching and is very careful to fashion and form his conclusions in accord with the principles mentioned above. Of that I have no doubt. (I mention this matter in obedience to Church Law regarding one's right to a good reputation.)

Peace and reconciliation in coming months

I obviously didn't choose the date for the announcement of Paul Ryan's Vice Presidential Candidacy and as I express my pride in him and in what he has accomplished, I thought it best to move to discussion of the above matters sooner rather than later. No doubt it will be necessary to comment again on these principles in the days ahead for the sake of further clarification, and be assured that I will be eager to do so.

Above all, let us beg the Lord that divisions in our electorate will not be deepened so as to have a negative impact on pre-existing divisions within the Church during this electoral season. Let there be the peace and reconciliation that flow from charity on the part of all. Thank you for reading this. God Bless each one of you! Praised be Jesus Christ!
