

Ten Easy Steps to...

Voting with a clear conscience

by **Father Frank Pavone**
National Director, Priests for Life

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May 26, 2006

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Re: Voting with a Clear Conscience

Dear Fr. Pavone:

You have requested our opinion on whether the booklet entitled *Voting with a Clear Conscience* may be published and distributed by an organization income tax exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3).

First, we have reviewed the booklet and it is our opinion that it may be published by Priests for Life and distributed by churches and other organizations income tax exempt under IRC 501(c)(3). The Internal Revenue Service considers all the facts and circumstances in determining whether a communication is political campaign intervention. Some of the factors included in analyzing advocacy communications relating to public policy issues include:

- a. Whether the communication identifies a candidate for public office;
- b. Whether the timing of the communication coincides with an electoral campaign;
- c. Whether the communication targets voters of a particular election;
- d. Whether the communication identifies a candidate's position on the public policy issue that is the subject of the communication;
- e. Whether the position of the candidate on the public policy issue has been raised as distinguishing the candidate from others in the campaign, either in the communication itself or in other public communications; and
- f. Whether the communication is part of an ongoing series of substantially similar advocacy communications by the organization on the same issue.

The booklet does not identify particular candidates for public office and therefore is similar to issue advocacy communications. It does not target voters of a particular election, but will be distributed nationwide. It does not identify candidate positions on public policy issues

and, therefore, will not distinguish one candidate from another. It is part of an ongoing series of substantially similar advocacy communications by Priests for Life on the same issue. For these reasons, it is issue advocacy and not political intervention pursuant to the Internal Revenue Code.

Second, the booklet is not an electioneering communication under the Federal Election Campaign Act, because, by definition, the Act regulates only broadcast, cable and satellite communications. Thus, this provision does not apply and there are no restrictions on distribution of the booklet prior to an election.

Third, organizations exempt under IRC 501(c)(3) (e.g., churches, schools, foundations, charities) are prohibited from expressly advocating the election or defeat of candidates for public office. This would occur if, *in the same communication*, the organization both distributes the booklet *and identifies candidates whose voting records or public statements clearly violate the principles of the booklet*. This is so since the booklet urges people to vote against candidates whose voting records violate the principles explained in the booklet. Such statements may be viewed as opposing clearly identified candidates and thus may be political intervention under the Internal Revenue Code or express advocacy in opposition to federal candidates under the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA). Since organizations exempt under IRC 501(c)(3) are prohibited from engaging in political intervention, such activities may result in loss of tax exempt status. This issue does not arise if the booklet is distributed alone, without any communication identifying candidates, their voting records, and/or their public statements on these issues.

There may be communications that a 501(c)(3) organization wishes to make separate and apart from the booklet. It would be permissible for a spokesman for the organization to praise or criticize public officials for their adherence or lack thereof to Catholic principles as long as the spokesman does not also urge people to vote only for those candidates that adhere to those principles. Furthermore, someone associated with a 501(c)(3) organization may discuss these matters in their individual, rather than representative capacity, and thus what they say would not be attributable to the organization they are affiliated with. We urge such organizations to obtain specific legal advice regarding any such communication, which we would be happy to provide.

If we may be of further assistance, please contact us.

Sincerely,

BOPP, COLESON & BOSTROM



James Bopp, Jr.
Barry A. Bostrom

Introduction

If you want to vote in this year's elections with a clear conscience, then this booklet was written for you. Many people want to fulfill their civic responsibilities without feeling they have to compromise their moral integrity. They want to take part in the political process, but not get morally stained in the process.

The good news is that you *can fulfill your duty to vote* and *can also keep a clear conscience in the process!* This booklet will tell you how.

1. Vote!

The first step toward voting with a clear conscience is to make sure you actually vote. The General Election Day for 2006 is Tuesday, November 7, and that day should be clearly marked on your calendar. Jesus calls you to change the world, and you can't do that if you just sit on the sidelines while somebody else chooses your leaders who will then write the laws you have to follow! The duty to vote comes from our duty to build a better society.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says, “*Submission to authority and co-responsibility for the common good make it morally obligatory ... to exercise the right to vote*” (2240).

Pope John Paul II issued his encyclical letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* in 2003. In that document he teaches about how our faith in the world to come impels us to improve this world: “*Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of “new heavens” and “a new earth” (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today. I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world*” (n.20).

In 1998, the United States Catholic Bishops issued *Living the Gospel of Life*, their most comprehensive statement on the political responsibility of Americans. In that document they made this plea: “We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an opportunity meaningfully to participate *in building*

the culture of life. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power” (n. 34).

To make sure you are on the road to fulfilling that duty, you need to keep a few things in mind:

- a) Make sure you are properly registered to vote. At www.priestsforlife.org/states, we have a list of the states and the voter registration deadlines. If you have moved since the last election, you are probably in a different district. To be sure, contact your local Board of Elections. You certainly don't want to arrive at the voting booth on Election Day only to find that you're not registered!

- b) Vote in the Primaries! Another step to voting with a clear conscience is to do everything in your power to get the right candidates on the ballot in the first place. While the General Election Day is November 7, individual states have Primary Election Days on some earlier date. These are the elections in which we select the candidates who will be on the ballot in the general election. The Primary in your state may have already occurred for this year. Be sure you know when the Primaries are in your state (see www.priestsforlife.org/states) and vote in them. On Election Day, many people are not happy with any of the choices. Part of the problem is that not enough of them voted in the Primaries, where they had the chance to get the name of a better candidate onto the ballot!

- c) Absentee Ballots. Think ahead, and if you are going to be out of town on Election Day because of work, vacation, family responsibilities, school, military service, or some other reason, get an absentee ballot well in advance and fill it out! Likewise, if you are homebound or in a nursing facility and will not be able to get to the polls, don't let that make you lose your vote! Obtain an absentee ballot right away!

- d) Early Voting. Some states allow early voting. (To see if yours is one of them, visit www.priestsforlife.org/states.) This means that even if you are going to be in town on Election Day, you can vote within a specific period of time *before Election Day*. If your state has early voting, then *vote early!* This will minimize the risk of unforeseen obstacles arising on Election Day, like illness, car trouble, bad weather, unexpected family or work obligations, or just forgetfulness.

- e) Bring your voting decisions to prayer. Pray for wisdom and guidance, clarity and strength as you consider the candidates in the light of the principles explained here. Pray for the inner freedom to do the right thing in the voting booth.

2. Know the candidates.

It's a terrible feeling to be in the voting booth and to feel like you're tossing a coin, hoping that the individual you're voting for stands for the right values.

Of course, you can vote with a clear conscience if you *know for sure ahead of time where that candidate stands*. It is a moral obligation to do your homework to learn about the candidate, and the time is now, long before Election Day.

Candidates have websites you can visit, campaign headquarters you can call, and literature you can read. Also, candidates who already hold elected office in which they have voted on legislation *have a voting record*. That record is public information, some of which can be found at www.priestsforlife.org/legislation.

3. Reject the Disqualified.

Suppose a candidate came forward and said, “I support terrorism.” Would you say, “I disagree with you on terrorism, but what’s your health care plan?”

Of course not.

Rather, you would immediately consider that candidate as disqualified from public office. His position, allowing the killing of the public, is radically inconsistent with public service.

So it is with abortion. Abortion is no less violent than terrorism. Any candidate who says abortion should be kept legal disqualifies him/herself from public service. We need look no further; we need pay *no attention* to what that candidate says on other issues. Support for abortion is enough for us to decide not to vote for such a person.

Pope John Paul II put it this way: “Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights -- for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture -- is *false and illusory* if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination”

(*Christifideles Laici*, 1988).

A call for human rights while claiming authority to take away the most basic right – life – from unborn children is “false and illusory” precisely because if government can take away rights from some humans, then those rights aren’t human rights at all.

Such a politician, in other words, is saying that rights like health care *only belong to some humans, not to others.*

If a politician cannot respect the life of a little baby, how is he or she supposed to respect yours?

4. Distinguish Policy from Principle

There are many issues, but some are more important than others. The US Bishops make this clear in *Living the Gospel of Life* when they explain that the right to life is like the foundation of a house. It holds up every other issue, because it is *the principle at the heart and core* of every effort for justice and peace.

Most disagreements between candidates and political platforms do not have to do with *principle*, but rather with *policy*. For example, it is a basic principle that people have a right to the safety of their own lives and possessions. That's why we have to fight crime. We don't see candidates campaigning on opposite sides of that principle, with some saying, "Fight Crime" and other defending "The Right to Crime." Instead, there is agreement on the principle, but disagreement on *the best policies to implement the principle*. One voter concludes that one candidate has a better policy on crime than his opponent, while a second voter concludes the opposite. Both can vote in good conscience, because as long as the policy doesn't break the principle, both policies may well be morally legitimate. It remains to be seen by trial and error which works best.

But when a policy dispute involves questioning whether people deserve that protection in the first place, *the policy is the principle*. To allow abortion, which is the killing of a human child in the womb, is to break the principle that every human life is sacred and to deny the principle that life deserves protection. In fact, to allow abortion establishes a *different kind of government*, namely, one that claims authority to tamper with human

rights. The basic principle of our government is that “*all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. -- That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men*” (*The Declaration of Independence*).

When a policy breaks the very founding principle of government, that is more than an ordinary political disagreement. That’s why a candidate’s position on abortion is about more than abortion. It is about the kind of authority government has. It is about who is ultimately in charge, God or government? It’s about the most fundamental political question there can be.

Candidates are supposed to advocate policies that advance the common good and the dignity of the human person. A candidate who advocates policies that violate those fundamental principles should not be elected to public office, because he or she violates the purpose of public office.

Certain other political disputes have arisen that likewise are not mere policy disputes, but *disputes about principle*. They include:

- a) the killing of the tiniest humans through destructive embryonic stem cell research;
- b) the killing of infants already partially born (through partial-birth abortion);
- c) the killing of the disabled, like Terri Schiavo, and the advocacy of euthanasia and assisted suicide;
- d) the denial of religious freedom, such as the freedom of doctors and institutions to refrain from actions they hold to be immoral;
- e) the denial of the natural institution of marriage as the

- union of one man and one woman;
- f) the denial of the right to self-government. This denial occurs when candidates view judges and courts as the final arbiters of public policy, rather than the people themselves, acting through their duly elected legislators.

Candidates who advocate these errors are embracing positions that transcend normal political disagreements, and hence carry far more weight than positions on other policies.

5. Weigh other issues properly.

There are many issues that have to be considered in elections, but as we have already seen, *not all have equal weight*.

Once voters have disqualified those candidates who violate fundamental principles, they need to look at the wide spectrum of issues affecting the proper care of human life and promotion of human dignity. The US Bishops mention these issues in *Living the Gospel of Life* as well as in *Faithful Citizenship*. Both list the various issues in the context of some being more fundamental than others.

Living the Gospel of Life declares, “Any politics of human life must work to resist the violence of war and the scandal of capital punishment. Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care. Therefore, Catholics should eagerly involve themselves as advocates for the weak and marginalized in all these areas. Catholic public officials are obliged to address each of these issues as they seek to build consistent policies which promote respect for the human person at all stages of life. *But being ‘right’ in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life.* Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the ‘rightness’ of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community. If we understand the human person as the “temple of the Holy Spirit” -- the living house of God -- then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. *All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion*

and euthanasia, strike at the house's foundation. These directly and immediately violate the human person's most fundamental right the right to life. Neglect of these issues is the equivalent of building our house on sand" (23).

Faithful Citizenship explains, "In the face of all these challenges, we offer once again a simple image -- a table.² Who has a place at the table of life? Where is the place at the table for a million of our nation's children who are destroyed every year before they are born? How can we secure a place at the table for the hungry and those who lack health care in our own land and around the world? Where is the place at the table for those in our world who lack the freedom to practice their faith or stand up for what they believe? How do we ensure that families in our inner cities and rural communities, in *barrios* in Latin America and villages in Africa and Asia have a place at the table -- enough to eat, decent work and wages, education for their children, adequate health care and housing, and most of all, hope for the future? We remember especially the people who are now missing at the table of life -- those lost in the terror of September 11, in the service of our nation, and in the bloody conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East, and Africa."

Faithful Citizenship reminds us yet again about what is most basic and where we must begin. Quoting *Living the Gospel of Life*, the *Faithful Citizenship* document says, "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'...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.'"

In particular, capital punishment and the waging of war are troubling to the consciences of many voters. The Church clearly urges us to avoid both, but also teaches that at times, both activities can be morally legitimate. Take, for example, what Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in a letter in July 2004: *"Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. ... While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia"* (Letter to Cardinal McCarrick, n.3).

The bottom line, in other words, is that support for war and capital punishment do not automatically or necessarily violate fundamental moral principles; support for abortion and euthanasia always do. Therefore, supporting these latter policies is worse.

6. Keep your loyalty focused on Jesus.

When you vote, you say something about where your loyalties are. There is nothing wrong with being loyal to a candidate or to a political party. But there is something very wrong if your loyalty to either is stronger than your loyalty to Jesus Christ. Ask yourself, *“Is there a position that my party can take that would prevent me from voting the party line?”* Framed in another way, the question is, *“Is my loyalty to the Christian faith stronger than my loyalty to any political party?”*

In *Living the Gospel of Life*, the US Bishops reminded us, “We get the public officials we deserve. Their virtue -- or lack thereof -- is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, 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*” (n.34).

Sometimes people vote according to the party of the candidate, perhaps because that’s a family tradition, or because some group or friend has asked them to do so. But when is the last time you read the words of the platform of that party? Don’t you think you should? Platforms change, and if the platform of that party today contradicts the platform of the Gospel and the moral law, you need to have ***the inner freedom to depart from personal, family, or community tradition*** and vote instead for the candidate and party that best reflect God’s law. We are free to belong to the political party of our choice, but first *we belong to Jesus Christ*. And belonging to Him means that there are certain

things we can no longer assent to or go along with, including in politics and the voting booth.

7. Remember, the Party Matters.

Voting with a clear conscience also means that you consider how the outcome of the election in which you vote affects the balance of power. In other words, elections do not only put *individual candidates* into power; they put *political parties* into power. And it is not only the candidates who have positions. So do the parties.

The same questions, then, that you ask about the candidates' positions on fundamental issues have to be asked of the party. What is the platform of that party? Is it possible that the balance of power might shift as a result of the outcome of this particular race? Keep in mind that the party that is in power controls the committees responsible for initiating legislation. A pro-abortion party will not normally allow pro-life legislation to come forward, no matter how pro-life the individual lawmakers may be. Do not just look at whether the candidate is pro-life. Consider whether or not, if he or she wins, the pro-abortion party will come into power.

8. Distinguish “choosing evil” from “limiting evil.”

What happens if two opposing candidates both support abortion?

First of all, *refrain from putting any labels or endorsements on anyone*. Don't call them anything. Or, if you prefer, call them both pro-abortion. Then just ask a simple question: *Which of the two candidates will do less harm to unborn children if elected?*

For example, is either of the candidates willing at least to ban partial-birth abortion? Is either of them willing to put up some roadblocks to free and easy abortion? Will either support parental notification, or parental consent, or waiting periods? Has either of them expressed a desire to ban late-term abortion, or to support pregnancy assistance centers? How about stricter regulation of abortion facilities? Has either candidate expressed support for that idea? Nobody is saying that's the final goal. But ask these questions just to see whether you can see *any benefit* of one of the candidates above the other.

One of the two of them will be elected; there is no question about that. So you are *not free right now*, in this race, to really choose the candidate you want. Forces beyond your control have already limited your choices. Whichever way the election goes, the one elected will not have the position we want elected officials to have on abortion.

In this case, *it is morally acceptable to vote for the candidate who*

will do less harm. This is *not* “choosing the lesser of two evils.” *We may never choose evil.* But in the case described above, you would not be choosing evil. Why? Because in choosing *to limit an evil*, you are choosing a *good*.

You oppose the evil of abortion, in *every* circumstance, no matter what. You know that no law can legitimize even a single abortion, *ever*. If the candidate thinks some abortion is OK, *you don't agree*.

But by your vote, you can keep the worse person out. And trying to do that is not only legitimate, but *good*. Some may think it's not the best strategy. But if your question is whether it is *morally permissible* to vote for the better of two bad candidates, the answer -- in the case described above -- is yes.

Cardinal John O'Connor, in a special booklet on abortion, once wrote about this problem, “*Suppose all candidates support ‘abortion rights’? ... One could try to determine whether the position of one candidate is less supportive of abortion than that of another. Other things being equal, one might then morally vote for a less supportive position. If all candidates support “abortion rights” equally, one might vote for the candidate who seems best in regard to other issues*” (1990, “Abortion: Questions and Answers”).

In this context, the question also arises as to whether one is required to vote for a third candidate who does not have a strong base of support but *does* have the right position. The answer is, ***no, you are not required to vote for this candidate.*** The reason is that your vote *is not a canonization of a candidate. It is a transfer of power.* You have to look concretely at where the power is really going to be transferred, and use your vote *not to make a statement but to help bring about the most acceptable results*

under the circumstances.

Of course, our conscience may be telling us, “Don’t say it’s impossible to elect the candidate who doesn’t have a strong base of support.” Of course, it is possible to elect almost anyone *if the necessary work is done within the necessary time*. God doesn’t ask us to base our choices on “the possibility of miracles,” but rather on solid human reason. The point is that if there’s a relatively unknown but excellent candidate, *the time to begin building up support for that person’s candidacy is several years before the election*, not several months. What you have to ask as Election Day draws near is *whether your vote is needed to keep the worse candidate (of the two, less acceptable but more realistic choices) out of office*.

9. Support the candidate with more than your vote!

Another thing that will help you vote with a clear conscience on Election Day is to know that you did a lot of other things to help the candidate you are voting for. In other words, voting for the right candidate should be the culmination of a whole list of things you do to help get him or her into office. These things include donating to the campaign, volunteering for the campaign, handing out literature for the candidate, making phone calls and visits on the candidate's behalf, sending emails, using yard signs and bumper stickers, and praying for the candidate.

Elections, after all, are not contests between two candidates. They are contests between two teams. And it is the team that has more active members doing all these things that, in the end, will bring in the most votes.

There is also a follow-up phase to elections, and that is to lobby those who are elected. When you vote for candidates, also resolve that you are going to keep the pressure on them after they are elected. You gave them power by showing up and voting. After they are in office, keep showing up to make sure they use that power the right way. If they don't, then pressure them; if they do, then back them up.

10. Mobilize as many other voters as possible!

Each of us has one vote, but each of us can mobilize hundreds, even thousands of votes. That's the secret to helping the right people win elections: you simply need to get more people to vote for them. Remember that many people are not paying nearly as much attention to the elections as you are, and even less attention to the candidates and their positions. Many who trust you will accept your guidance about the importance of voting for a particular candidate. Don't be afraid to use that influence!

As Election Day draws near, focus on the “low-hanging fruit.” Remember, the numbers are what counts. You have a limited amount of time to try to garner as many votes as possible. It's much like going into an orange grove, with the goal of gathering as many oranges as you can in a limited amount of time. It doesn't make sense to expend time and energy climbing to the top of the trees to get the oranges there when you can get many more that are within arm's reach with much less time and energy. Reach for the low-hanging fruit!

So it is with elections. Rather than spend hours trying to convince one person to vote the right way, spend that time and energy reminding dozens of people – who are already in agreement with you on the issues – to get out and cast their vote. Don't go looking for the personal victory of catching the “hard to get” voter. Go catch the easier ones and bring the candidate to victory!

If you can take the day off on Election Day, do so. Spend the day contacting people by phone and email, reminding them to vote. Maybe a friend needs a ride to the polls or someone to watch the children while they go to vote. If you call a friend in the morning to remind him to vote, call him again later to verify that he did so!

Having done all this, rejoice in a clear conscience, and trust the Lord to bring about the victory for a Culture of Life!

Appendix: Some Relevant Quotes

The following quotes from various Church documents and Cardinals echo and develop the themes mentioned above.

Second Vatican Council: *Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*

“At all times and in all places, the Church should have the true freedom to teach the faith, to proclaim its teaching about society, to carry out its task among men without hindrance, *and to pass moral judgment even in matters relating to politics, whenever the fundamental rights of man or the salvation of souls requires it*” (n. 76).

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Pope John Paul II: Apostolic Exhortation *The Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World (Christifideles Laici)*, 1988:

“The inviolability of the person, which is a reflection of the absolute inviolability of God, finds its primary and fundamental expression in the inviolability of human life. Above all, the common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights -- for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture -- is false and illusory if *the right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination” (19).

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Pope John Paul II: Encyclical Letter *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*, 1995

“This view of freedom *leads to a serious distortion of life in society.*

If the promotion of the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy, people inevitably reach the point of rejecting one another ... At that point, *everything is negotiable, everything is open to bargaining*: even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life.

“[A]t the level of politics and government: the original and inalienable right to life is questioned or denied on the basis of a parliamentary vote or the will of one part of the people—even if it is the majority. This is the sinister result of a relativism which reigns unopposed: the “right” ceases to be such, because it is no longer firmly founded on the inviolable dignity of the person, but is made subject to the will of the stronger part. In this way democracy, contradicting its own principles, effectively moves towards a form of totalitarianism. The State is no longer the “common home” where all can live together on the basis of principles of fundamental equality, but is transformed into a *tyrant State*, which arrogates to itself the right to dispose of the life of the weakest and most defenseless members, from the unborn child to the elderly, in the name of a public interest which is really nothing but the interest of one part. ... Really, what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, *is betrayed in its very foundations*: “How is it still possible to speak of the dignity of every human person when the killing of the weakest and most innocent is permitted? In the name of what justice is the most unjust of discriminations practiced: some individuals are held to be deserving of defense and others are denied that dignity?” When this happens, the process leading to the breakdown of a genuinely human co-existence and the disintegration of the State itself has already begun.

“To claim the right to abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, and to recognize that right in law, means to attribute to human freedom

a perverse and evil significance: that of an absolute power over others and against others. This is the death of true freedom” (n.20).

•••••

Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Doctrinal Note On some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life, 2002

“[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” (n.4).

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Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (Vatican City): The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 2004

“The first right...is the right to life, from conception to its natural end, which is the condition for the exercise of all other rights” (155). “The dignity of the human person...is the foundation of all the other principles and content of the Church’s social doctrine” (160).

“It is difficult for the concerns of the Christian faith to be adequately met in one sole political entity; to claim that one party or political coalition responds completely to the demands of faith or of Christian life would give rise to dangerous errors. Christians cannot find one party that fully corresponds to the ethical demands arising from faith and from membership in the Church. Their adherence to a political alliance will never be ideological but always critical; in this way the party and its political platform will be prompted to be ever more conscientious in attaining the true common good, including the spiritual end of the human person” (573).

•••••

(Blessed) Mother Teresa (Nobel Lecture, delivered the day after receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, 1979, Oslo, Norway)

“The greatest destroyer of peace is abortion ... Many people are very, very concerned with the children of India, with the children of Africa where quite a number die, maybe of malnutrition, of hunger and so on, but many are dying deliberately by the will of the mother. And this is what is the greatest destroyer of peace today. Because if a mother can kill her own child, what is left for me to kill you and you to kill me? There is nothing in between.”

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United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: Living the Gospel of Life (1998, document of the full body of bishops)

“We cannot simultaneously commit ourselves to human rights and progress while eliminating or marginalizing the weakest among us. Nor can we practice the Gospel of life only as a private piety. American Catholics must live it *vigorously* and publicly, as a matter of national leadership and witness, or we will not live it at all. (20)

“Bringing a respect for human dignity to practical politics can be a daunting task. There is such a wide spectrum of issues involving the protection of human life and the promotion of human dignity. Good people frequently disagree on which problems to address, which policies to adopt and how best to apply them. But for citizens and elected officials alike, the basic principle is simple: *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.* (21)

“We encourage *all citizens*, particularly Catholics, to embrace their citizenship not merely as a duty and privilege, but as an

opportunity meaningfully to participate *in building the culture of life*. Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power. We must exercise that power in ways that defend human life, especially those of God's children who are unborn, disabled or otherwise vulnerable. We get the public officials we deserve. Their virtue -- or lack thereof -- is a judgment not only on them, but on us. Because of this, 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.*" (34)

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Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility (*Administrative Committee, US Catholic Bishops, 2003*)

"Politics cannot be merely about ideological conflict, the search for partisan advantage, or political contributions. It should be about fundamental moral choices. How do we protect human life and dignity? How do we fairly share the blessings and burdens of the challenges we face? What kind of nation do we want to be? What kind of world do we want to shape?

"Politics in this election year and beyond should be about an old idea with new power--the common good. The central question should not be, "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" It should be, "How can 'we'--all of us, especially the weak and vulnerable--be better off in the years ahead? How can we protect and promote human life and dignity? How can we pursue greater justice and peace?"

"A Catholic moral framework does not easily fit the ideologies of "right" or "left," nor the platforms of any party. Our values

are often not “politically correct.” Believers are called to be a community of conscience within the larger society and to test public life by the values of Scripture and the principles of Catholic social teaching. Our responsibility is to measure all candidates, policies, parties, and platforms by how they protect or undermine the life, dignity, and rights of the human person; whether they protect the poor and vulnerable and advance the common good.

“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.”

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Cardinal John O'Connor, Archbishop of New York: Abortion – Questions and Answers, 1990

“Bishops have every right and duty to be involved in public policy, which is a different thing altogether from politics, both because they are bishops and because they are American citizens.

“All citizens should express themselves on the moral dimensions of public policy issues. Those citizens who are generally perceived as “moral leaders,” such as the bishops, have a special obligation to do so. People expect bishops to denounce unjust war and aggression, to plead for the homeless, to denounce drug traffic, racism and so on. Bishops are criticized if they remain silent about such issues.

“Why are bishops criticized only when the public policy question involves abortion? Why would I be praised for encouraging the mayor, the governor, the Congress and the president to intensify the war on drugs, but criticized if I urge the same regarding abortion?

“Actually, many bishops find that local political leaders want to involve them, the bishops, in various public policy matters, rather than vice versa. Political leaders want bishops involved in community action. It is, again, only when abortion is involved that some political leaders complain about bishops.

“This brings up the “single issue” question. Bishops are told they should not criticize a political candidate for simply being “pro-abortion,” or favor a candidate simply for being “pro-life.” It is argued that a candidate’s entire record, his or her entire set of attitudes must be considered.

“There are several things to be said about this. First, with the staggering increase in abortion in less than 20 years, other issues, important as they are, are secondary to this direct taking of human life.

“Secondly, in regard to many other issues, the question is one of public policy strategy, a question of the best way to do things. But abortion is not a question of mere strategy, or of how best to accomplish a particular public policy objective. Abortion—every abortion—is the destruction of human life. There is no “best way” of destroying human life. That is an absolute.

“For example, everyone can argue that we need a stronger police force. How is that achieved? That’s a matter of strategy. For example, some might recommend raising taxes. Others believe that higher taxes will ruin the economy and result in a very high rate of unemployment. Are they right or wrong? That’s an economic judgment more than it’s a moral judgment. Many such examples could be given.

“In reality, aren’t “single issues” always driving forces in American political life? Doesn’t the state of the economy or employment strongly influence thinking? Could any candidate win office today who favored a return to slavery, even if he had a wonderful record in regard to all other issues? Could a candidate win who supports drug traffic? Suppose a candidate said the vote should be withdrawn from women? Clearly, these are “single issues” which many people consider serious enough that no other qualities of a candidate would compensate. Why is it wrong, then, to look at abortion in this light, if one believes that abortion is the taking of innocent life?

“As a matter of fact, an interesting development has taken place since the famous Webster decision of the United States Supreme Court, which gave states new latitude in restricting abortions. The very day the decision was announced, leaders of the pro-abortion movement were threatening political office holders on national television: “Take away our right (to abortion), and we will take away your job.” That is certainly a “single issue” approach!

We have seen a boycott threatened against a potato crop, then against an entire state because of proposed legislation restricting abortion. On May 28, 1990, The New York Times reported that the National Abortion Rights Action League “has jumped into” a certain state’s gubernatorial race, vowing to defeat the only candidate who opposes abortion. This was generally perceived as a call for “single issue” voting. This phenomenon has clearly swept the country in the 1990 primaries.

“In a day in which it can prove very embarrassing to a candidate if it is learned that he belongs to a country club that excludes blacks or women, it should be reasonable enough to ask a candidate if he excludes the right to life to the unborn. Strange. He can not be “pro-choice” about a country club, but he can be “pro-choice” about human life” (1990, “Abortion: Questions and Answers”).

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Statements from Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, Archbishop of Chicago, who was the chief spokesperson on the Consistent Ethic of Life.

“Faithful Citizenship” is the latest in a line of statements on political responsibility issued every four years since the mid-1970’s. In 1984, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, the most well-known spokesperson regarding the consistent ethic of life, had this to say about the role of such statements: *“The purpose is surely not to tell citizens how to vote, but to help shape the public debate and form personal conscience so that every citizen will vote thoughtfully and responsibly. Our “Statement on Political Responsibility” has always been, like our “Respect Life Program,” a multi-issue approach to public morality. The fact that this Statement sets forth a spectrum of issues of current concern to the Church and society should not be understood as implying that all issues are*

qualitatively equal from a moral perspective...As I indicated earlier, each of the life issues—while related to all the others—is distinct and calls for its own specific moral analysis” (A Consistent Ethic of Life: Continuing the Dialogue, The William Wade Lecture Series, St. Louis University, March 11, 1984).

Cardinal Bernardin also explained, *“A consistent ethic of life does not equate the problem of taking life (e.g., through abortion and in war) with the problem of promoting human dignity (through humane programs of nutrition, health care, and housing). But a consistent ethic identifies both the protection of life and its promotion as moral questions” (Wade lecture, as above). “The fundamental human right is to life—from the moment of conception until death. It is the source of all other rights, including the right to health care” (The Consistent Ethic of Life and Health Care Systems, Foster McGaw Triennial Conference, Loyola University of Chicago, May 8, 1985).*

On Respect Life Sunday, 1 October 1989, Cardinal Bernardin issued a statement entitled “Deciding for Life,” in which he said, *“Not all values, however, are of equal weight. Some are more fundamental than others. On this Respect Life Sunday, I wish to emphasize that no earthly value is more fundamental than human life itself. Human life is the condition for enjoying freedom and all other values. Consequently, if one must choose between protecting or serving lesser human values that depend upon life for their existence and life itself, human life must take precedence. Today the recognition of human life as a fundamental value is threatened. Nowhere is this clearer than in the case of elective abortion. At present in our country this procedure takes the lives of over 4,000 unborn children every day and over 1.5 million each year.”*

Father Frank A. Pavone

Father Frank A. Pavone was ordained by Cardinal John O'Connor in 1988, and is a priest of the Diocese of Amarillo, Texas. In 1993 he became National Director of Priests for Life and continues in that position with his bishop's permission. He travels throughout the country preaching and teaching against abortion and helping other priests to do the same. He produces programs regularly for the world's most popular Catholic television and radio shows. He has authored many articles and widely distributed pro-life brochures. He has been asked by Mother Teresa to speak in India on the life issues, and was invited to address the pro-life caucus of the United States House of Representatives. In 1997 he was asked to become an official of the Pontifical Council for the Family at the Vatican, which coordinates the pro-life activities of the Catholic Church. In 2001, he was given the "Proudly Pro-life Award" by the National Right to Life Committee. In recognition of his contributions to the cause of life, Fr. Pavone was awarded an honorary doctorate by the Franciscan University of Steubenville. Norma McCorvey, the "Jane Roe" of the Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade* abortion decision, called Fr. Pavone "the catalyst that brought me into the Catholic Church."

Priests for Life

The mission of Priests for Life is to encourage and equip God's people to respond to the tragedies of abortion and euthanasia.

It is an Association of the Faithful recognized under the Canon Law of the Catholic Church. Priests, deacons, and lay persons may join as members simply by contacting the main office. Priests for Life is also a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization.

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