

A stylized graphic featuring a large blue cross on the left side. The bottom-left corner of the cross is filled with the stars and stripes of the American flag. The rest of the flag's stripes and stars extend from the cross towards the bottom right of the page. The background is a light blue gradient.

How to Vote Catholic

Prepared by
Crisis Magazine

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Introduction

By Rev. Frank Pavone, National Director, Priests for Life

If you're like most people, you can sometimes feel besieged at election time with so many promises and so much rhetoric coming from all sides. Sorting through the candidates and issues can become confusing.

That's why I'm so pleased to introduce you to this brief and refreshing booklet, which will help you to get through election year with the feeling that you know where you're going, and why.

One of the Church's oldest documents, the Letter to Diognetus (circa second century), states that we Christians "have a share in everything as citizens, and endure everything as foreigners." One of the Church's newest documents, Pope John Paul's 2003 encyclical on the Eucharist, says the same: "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" (Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 20).

This is one of the most practical and important lessons in Catholic spirituality, and is often summed up succinctly in the phrase, "In the world but not of the world." But why is it that the one who awaits the world to come should not just sit and wait? Why is our effort to improve this world not what a Jehovah's Witness once told me, "like washing windows on the Titanic?"

The reason is beautifully explained in Vatican II's "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World" (Gaudium et Spes, 39). It states that while we are not to confuse earthly progress with the growth of God's Kingdom, we are also not to see them as disconnected. Through our cooperation with God's grace, we are able to bring about some good in this world. We can work for a more just society, for racial reconciliation, for better working conditions, and for the defense of unborn children. We can elect public officials who respect life and work for peace with justice.

Then the document explains, "When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise—human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom—according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal

kingdom ‘of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.’”

The prayers of each Mass help us avoid the two extremes of thinking we build heaven on earth, or just sit back and wait for heaven to replace earth. At the offertory we pray, “Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made, it will become for us the Bread of life.” In other words, we don’t make the Body of Christ, but we do make the bread. We don’t sit back and wait for the Body of Christ to be dropped on the altar from the sky. Rather, we present to God the work of human hands, and then his Spirit transforms it. Similarly, we work to renew the earth, and his Spirit transforms the fruits of our work at the end of time.

In this brief and important work, Crisis Magazine offers us the framework in which we as Catholics are to exercise a key aspect of our citizenship: the privilege and duty of voting. To exercise self-governance, we have to participate in the process of electing our leaders. Yet people cannot govern themselves if they forget the difference between right and wrong. Our Founding Fathers understood that government could not possibly survive without religion, nor self-governance succeed without virtue.

Drawing from the sources of natural law and Church teaching, this practical tool will help Catholics 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” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [USCCB], *Living the Gospel of Life*, 34).

May we use this moment in our history well as we fulfill our call to renew the face of the earth.

THE BASICS

1. Voting Our Values

Catholics make up about 30 percent of those who vote in national elections. These 30 million Catholics have the power to make our country a better nation, more welcoming to life, more supportive of families, and more effective in its programs to help the poor and marginalized.

In recent years, Pope John Paul II and the U.S. bishops have been calling Catholics to renew their participation in political life. That participation means, above all, to take the moral principles of the Catholic Faith in the voting booth.

COMMON GOOD

Catholic voters elect legislators whose job it is to make laws and policies that serve the common good. Thus, we expect our legislators to protect our basic human rights as stated in the Declaration of Independence—to life, to liberty, and to the pursuit of happiness. These rights don't mean just anything; they are grounded in an authentic understanding of human life.

Once the right to liberty became the excuse to deny the right to life for the most innocent and vulnerable in society, politics lost its grounding in the truth about human existence. Catholics must use their political participation to renew the political arena with the Church's teaching on fundamental values.

HUMAN DIGNITY

For example, when the Church uses the phrase “human dignity,” she is always referring to the relationship that human beings have with God due their being created in His “human likeness” (Genesis 1:26). To say there is human dignity is a reminder that the human person is from God and destined after this earthly life to live with God in eternity. This is why an innocent life cannot be taken to make another life more comfortable or less complicated.

HUMAN RIGHTS

The notion of human rights follows from human dignity: Natural rights—the rights that precede any government or society—are the privileges or powers that we have the duty to respect so that all persons can seek genuine happiness in this world and the next (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] 1930). Politicians differ on whether or not these rights specify something that should be directly supplied by the government or something whose access should be protected.

CATHOLIC VOTER

Catholics who attend mass regularly vote more often and express heightened

concern for issues at the core of Catholic social teaching. When politicians start noticing that Catholics vote their values, Catholics have an opportunity to influence their leaders.

FOUR CONFUSIONS

First, Catholics who vote should not worry about “imposing” their values on others. Catholics do not seek laws requiring citizens to attend church or observe Lenten fasts. On the contrary, Catholics seek the protection of basic human rights through legislation and policy, such as the right to life and the right to educational freedom. Laws and policies embody the values we-as a nation-agree to live by.

Second, Catholics know that the protection of the unborn is the “dominant issue” among all political issues. Though some have criticized Catholics as being “single-issue” voters, the principle underlying the rejection of abortion extends to other issues, such as bioethics, population, euthanasia, and defense. The mandate to protect life in politics is unconditional and should be the dominant issue.

Third, not all the policy positions taken by candidates are of equal importance to Catholics. As dominant-issue voters, Catholics should learn to give various issues their proper priority, thus preserving the hierarchy of values at the core of Church teaching and, by the way, the founding of America itself.

Fourth, Catholics are often confused by the difference between principle and prudential judgment. General principles are proposed in Church teaching. How they are implemented is a matter of prudential judgment. It's crucial for Catholic voters to understand the principles so they may best consider the judgments put forward by politicians, church officials, and other leaders.

These confusions, among others, are treated in the course of this book. There is no need for any Catholic who enters the voting booth to leave any part of the Faith outside. The tradition of Catholic moral and social teaching, as will be seen, is a practical voting guide second to none.

Summary:

1. Catholics are obliged to participate in politics by voting.
 2. Legislators are elected to serve and protect the common good, human dignity, and rights of human persons.
 3. Voters should have a clear understanding of the principles of Catholic moral and social teaching.
 4. The life issues are dominant in the hierarchy of issues for the Catholics voter.
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2. Applying the Principles

Political judgments are rarely black and white—the defense of unborn life is one of those few instances. Most political judgments require prudence, the application of a general principle to a concrete situation.

All Catholics bear the responsibility of making prudential judgments, but these judgments rely on information that is often not easily available. We need guidance, and the bishops offer it through the publications of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

THE BISHOPS' CONFERENCE

The USCCB represents a merging in 2001 of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), which were created in 1966. Since then, the bishops have released more than 100 pastoral letters and statements that take positions on dozens of public policy matters, ranging from hand-guns, racial prejudice, and U.S. relations with Panama to treatment of the aging, farm laborers, and war in the Middle East.

These statements are intended to educate Catholics on pressing issues of law and policy. Some confusion has also been created unintentionally by this official commentary on such a wide range of issues: Few Catholics make the distinction between binding statements of principle and the non-binding prudential judgments on policy issues.

The bishops themselves recognize the potential for confusion and have addressed it directly, for example, in their pastoral *Economic Justice for All*: “We do not claim to make these prudential judgments with the same kind of authority that marks our declarations of principle” (xii). Instead, the letters are attempts at applying Catholic principles to concrete situations. But the authority of bishops in matters of faith and morals does not extend to their prudential judgments in other matters.

PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENT

Voting Catholic requires what the Church and tradition calls prudence. “The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid” (CCC 1806).

Catholics need the education in social teaching offered by the bishops. We can learn from the bishops’ examples of how to think prudentially and how to gather the expertise and data necessary to put principle into practice. But the habit of prudence belongs to individuals not to a group. Prudence is not prudence when it is handed down like a rule to be followed. Individual prudential judgment follows from principles and cannot be commanded or dictated.

The U.S. bishops have clearly stated, “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” (Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility).

As Bishop Wilton D. Gregory, the president of the USCCB, recently wrote about the Iraq War, “People of good will may apply ethical principles and come to different prudential judgments, depending upon their assessment of the facts at hand and other issues” (Letter to President Bush on Iraq, September 13, 2002).

What’s important to recognize, first of all, is the commitment to principle at the core of policy recommendation. What must be considered is how effective a policy will be in implementing the principle that underlies it.

Summary:

1. Prudential judgment is the application of principle to concrete situations.
 2. Catholic principles apply to all political issues but in many cases do not lead prudentially to one acceptable Catholic position.
 3. The bishops’ teachings on faith and morals are binding; their prudential judgments on policy guide us but do not bind us.
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3. Public Witness

Should a political candidate talk publicly about his faith? Should an elected official allow his or her faith to inform political decisions? These are questions that have been discussed for decades, but the debate has grown more heated in recent years.

It’s a crucial issue for Catholic voters: If Catholic politicians cannot be guided by faith in making laws and policies, then Catholic voters should not be guided by their deposit of faith either.

The Church’s position is clear: “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” (Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life, 4).

COMPARTMENTALIZING

The Church teaches very clearly that the political order is not separate from the divine order revealed by faith (Gaudium et Spes, 74). Yet some well-known Catholic politicians over the past decades have argued that Catholic values should remain personal, not political. These same politicians, however, claim a Catholic basis for policies addressing, for example, a preferential option for the poor, yet wholeheartedly reject Catholic teachings on the protection of life.

This insistence on compartmentalizing faith restricts our compassion and concern to our immediate family. A religion with “love thy neighbor” as its central tenet cannot remain restricted to one’s family. It also means that Catholic values should not inform the rule of law—the Catholic perspective becomes off limits in the Congress and in the courts.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision recognizing the legality of slavery would have never been overturned in law if men and women of faith had chosen to keep their religious convictions private. The voters who supported Lincoln didn’t worry about “imposing” their faith in ending the scourge of slavery.

PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY

Yes, history demonstrates it is voters who change laws. Catholics recognize the grassroots nature of political change—it’s called the principle of subsidiarity. This principle states that social problems should first be addressed at the local level. If they remain unsolved, then it is the proper role of larger institutions to act.

Pius XI inaugurated the term in 1931 and construed its meaning in the political realm by censuring as “an injustice, a grave evil and a disturbance of right order” for any higher association to usurp what a smaller one could more effectively address (Quadragesimo Anno, 79). Fundamentally, subsidiarity is optimism about people and their ability to help each other and themselves.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

There are many facets of the Catholic Faith that the faithful do not seek to express through law or public policy—the need to attend mass regularly, to pray, to give alms, to seek the kingdom of heaven. The Constitution wisely forbids the establishment of state religion in order to preserve the religious liberty of all citizens. We are not required by law to be religious.

Some Catholic teaching does not reach into the public square, but that which serves the common good, human rights, and human dignity cannot be ignored. Catholic bishops have condemned again and again the growing tendency of Catholic politicians to ignore the moral teaching of the Church on the protection of innocent life.

Certain bishops have publicly criticized politicians within their diocese who claim the label Catholic while opposing such legislation as the ban on partial-birth abortion. It would not be necessary for bishops to deny these politicians communion or declare them excommunicated if Catholic voters themselves would remove them from office.

No doubt politicians would rethink their positions if they felt their offices were in jeopardy.

Some argue that this is a case of the Church insisting on its authority over the secular realm. This is not the case at all: The Church recognizes the legitimate distinction between Church and state. The issue is what happens to human

beings when the perspective of faith is eliminated from governance and politics. The result is a practical atheism in the policy-making arena, leading to legalized abortion in the United States, legalized euthanasia in Oregon, and legalized homosexual marriage in Massachusetts.

The faith of the Church upholds the fundamental freedom and human rights of the person against the power of the state, a power that murdered more people in the twentieth century than in the entire history of mankind combined.

Summary:

1. The Christian Faith cannot be restricted to oneself and one's family, making it impossible to "love one's neighbor."
 2. The principle of subsidiarity teaches that Catholics should first address social problems at the local level before asking the government to intervene.
 3. Politics and government need the public witness of what faith teaches about the common good, human rights, and human dignity.
-

LIFE ISSUES

4. Abortion

“Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or means, is gravely contrary to the moral law” (CCC 2271).

Those who treat abortion as just one of many issues are misleading Catholic voters. Abortion is unique among policy issues because it is not a matter of prudential judgment. From a Catholic perspective, politicians are not making an application of a principle to a specific situation: All instances of abortion are morally wrong.

Those politicians who are pro-abortion but want to be known as Catholic will try to minimize the importance of the issue by citing a long list of issues, with abortion being only one among them. Their method of convincing voters of their Catholic credentials is to trade disagreement on this issue with agreement on several others. But as the bishops point out in *Living the Gospel of Life* (1998), this would be like saying that you can build a house without a foundation, because all the other parts of the house are strong.

SOLIDARITY

When we look at persons who are in need of food and shelter we immediately feel it our duty to help them. Why? We naturally sense the moral obligation to help persons protect and recover their dignity. This fact of human solidarity in Church teaching—the necessity of community in seeking the common good—never changes.

The natural law at the basis of our moral judgment inclines us to respond to human need; the same inclination is at the basis of our desire to protect life before it is born. Commitment to social justice arises from the same moral vision as the defense of innocent life.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In short, there’s continuity between providing someone with food and shelter and the willingness to defend their life when it is threatened. The Church often employs the phrase “social justice” when addressing “the conditions that allow associations or individuals to obtain what is their due, according to their nature and their vocation. Social justice is linked to the common good and the exercise of authority” (CCC 1928).

The demands of social justice begin with the right to life and end with the right to be protected from euthanasia or the temptation of assisted suicide. It’s

a mistake to detach the idea of social justice from the protection of vulnerable life: The source of moral obligation to protect the unborn and to feed the hungry spring from the same source—the inherent dignity of the human person (CCC 1929).

THE DOMINANT ISSUE

The Church’s pronouncements on abortion as an evil are spoken with the highest level of authority—there is not the least hint that either a Catholic voter or a Catholic candidate can ignore them. The reason the abortion issue is the dominant issue in determining how to vote is twofold:

First, the protection of life—the right to life—is a moral principle that sits at the foundation of morality itself. This right is “inalienable,” meaning that it cannot be removed, even by the choice of the mother or father.

Second, the Catholic injunction to oppose abortion is unqualified: Individuals are not required, or allowed, to make prudential judgments of the principle to a specific case. Appeals to private “conscience” cannot override this infallible teaching.

INCREMENTALISM

The president and Congress must take whatever action they can to reduce the number of abortions and, in the future, put an end to abortion for good. For the moment, no step is too small.

The Church allows support for politicians “whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known” who take an “incremental” approach to restoring the culture of life (*Evangelium Vitae*, 73).

In other words, it’s permissible for a Catholic voter to vote for a politician who attempts to pass, for example, the ban on partial-birth abortion. The support for such a ban is not to be construed as political indifference to the thousands (and millions) of other abortions. The recently signed Born-Alive Infant Protection Act and Unborn Victims of Violence Act are other examples of incremental measures to protect life.

Summary:

1. Abortion is the dominant political issue.
 2. Being pro-abortion disqualifies a candidate from a Catholic vote.
 3. Catholics can justly support politicians who advocate incremental means toward eliminating abortion.
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5. Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

“Intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator” (CCC 2324).

The Church views euthanasia and assisted suicide as the direct killing of a human being and, therefore, an immoral act. Support for euthanasia and assisted suicide is not a matter of prudential judgment—there are never any reasons that justify such killing: “Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable” (CCC 2277).

A Catholic politician’s support of these practices is promoting the culture of death and is not acceptable in the view of the Church.

CULTURE OF DEATH

Scrutinizing the position of Catholic politicians on this issue is very important. Recently what was unthinkable—the state endorsement of euthanasia—became a reality when the State of Oregon enacted a law legalizing euthanasia in 1997. Since then, similar legislation has been introduced in other states. This is an initiative that every Catholic citizen and politician should oppose.

Those who have watched the spread of the culture of death since the *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1972 were not surprised that the same attitude that led to the legalization of abortion has opened the door to arguments in support of euthanasia.

The intrinsic dignity and sacredness of human life—the inalienable right to life—has been replaced by the primacy of personal preference and the protection of pleasure. In *Evangelium Vitae* (1995), John Paul II spoke directly to that issue: “When the prevailing tendency is to value life only to the extent that it brings pleasure and well-being, suffering seems like an unbearable setback, something from which one must be freed at all costs” (64).

Rather than subjectively ending the lives of those who suffer, John Paul II has said that true compassion calls us to share in their suffering. In so doing, we may use appropriate levels of palliative care—pain relief—as long as we do not remove their personal experiences of life and death.

HIPPOCRATIC OATH

The ban against euthanasia does not mean that caregivers and families cannot stop extraordinary medical procedures used to keep their loved ones alive. To reject such treatment is not euthanasia, “it is the refusal of ‘over-zealous’ treatment. Here one does not will to cause death; one’s inability to impede it is merely accepted” (CCC 2278).

Choosing to stop such treatment is a prudential judgment belonging to the patient’s family and the assisting physician. The need to make such judgments

demonstrates how laws allowing euthanasia harm the relationship between doctors and patients. The Hippocratic oath, taken by physicians since before the time of Christ, specifies that the physician “do no harm.”

The euthanasia option fundamentally changes the relationship between doctor and patient: Patients can no longer trust their doctors to absolutely seek life over death.

But what if a patient seeks help in hastening his or her death? Some argue that this consent justifies what is known as assisted suicide. Yet Church teaching is clear in its rejection of suicide ever being morally permissible, even under conditions of extreme suffering. “Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life ...[and] is contrary to love for the living God” (CCC 2281).

Just as a person should not “put someone out of their misery” by means of euthanasia, he should not assist someone in committing suicide.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide belong to those sets of moral obligations that allow no exception to Catholic teaching. They are among those acts that “are a supreme dishonor to the Creator” (Gaudium et Spes, 27).

Thus, along with abortion, a Catholic politician’s support for euthanasia disqualifies him or her from the Catholic vote.

Summary:

1. The ban against euthanasia and assisted suicide admit of no exception.
2. Removing extraordinary means of supporting life is allowable as a prudential judgment.
3. The growing acceptance of euthanasia and assisted suicide rests on the assumption that pain detracts from the value of life, which is always good.

6. Bioethics

“[M]ethodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God” (CCC 159).

Bioethics is taking center stage in the arena of public policy and morality. The past few years have witnessed highly visible debates on human embryonic stem cell research and cloning. Since the future of such research has a direct impact on the life and death of human persons, it’s a life issue for all Catholics.

In recent years, the Church has been highly supportive of technological advances in medicine, pursued in conformity with basic moral principles and

respectful of the inherent dignity of life: “Science and technology by their very nature require unconditional respect for fundamental moral criteria. They must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights, of his true and integral good, in conformity with the plan and the will of God” (CCC 2294).

“ASSISTED REPRODUCTION”

Catholics take seriously what science reveals about human embryogenesis and intrauterine human development. Human life begins at conception, and the gift of a child is linked with the conjugal act. Therefore, the Church opposes abortion and embryo-destructive research and rejects reproductive procedures that attempt to substitute for the marital act, such as in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination. In this way, the Church upholds the sanctity of human life and the dignity of the marriage union.

With the use of so-called “assisted reproduction,” we can see a link between these ideals and the practices that threaten to undermine them. The most disturbing is the use of cryopreservation (e.g., freezing) to store “spare” embryos. This practice, in effect, sentences an embryonic human being to a state of permanent suspension—literally frozen in time. For many, these embryos represent biological material for scientific experimentation, such as stem cell research.

STEM CELLS

The Church’s message is one of enthusiastic support for biomedical science, yet firm opposition to killing in the name of research. To experiment on unused, unimplanted, or frozen embryos violates Church teaching and “reduces human life to the level of simple ‘biological material’” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 14). The fact that surplus embryos have been effectively orphaned does not reduce them to the status of expendable research material, nor does it remove their rights to be protected by law.

U.S. government policy limits federal funding for research to stem cell lines that were created prior to August 9, 2001. The Bush administration successfully prohibited federal funding for research involving embryo-killing after that date. However, Federal law does not restrict privately funded embryo-destructive research, although there are prohibitions on such research in some states.

What makes the practice of using embryonic cells especially abhorrent is the fact that scientists have made significant progress on adult stem cells to the point that they now offer a promising alternative. Many people are alive today as a result of therapies using adult stem cells, while no one has ever been cured of any disease by embryonic stem cell therapies.

CLONING

Some researchers seek to “harvest” tissues and organs by creating life through

a cloning process known as “somatic cell nuclear transfer” (SCNT). The Church teaches that cloning is morally wrong: “These techniques, insofar as they involve the manipulation and destruction of human embryos, are not morally acceptable, even when their proposed goal is good in itself” (Pope John Paul II, Address to International Congress on Transplants).

Members of the U.S. Congress are now facing the issue of whether or not human clones, once they are created, can be killed for the sake of medical research or benefit. Immediate attention to this matter is critical.

New Jersey recently passed stem cell legislation that failed to prohibit cloned embryos from implantation and gestation. Delaware is also on the brink of passing legislation that will allow cloned embryos to be implanted, although the law would ban “gestation and subsequent birth.”

No Catholic can justify such a policy—it’s not a judgment call, ever.

Summary:

1. Since science serves human ends, not its own, scientific research must always respect the moral law.
 2. Science must respect the inherent dignity of the human person.
 3. Unused and unwanted embryos must be treated with the respect afforded to other human beings.
 4. Killing cannot be justified in the name of therapeutic (i.e., medical) benefits to other persons.
-

7. Population

“Thus the Church condemns as a grave offense against human dignity and justice all those activities of governments or other public authorities which attempt to limit in any way the freedom of couples in deciding about children” (Familiaris Consortio, 30).

In recent decades the issue of overpopulation has led the United States to spend millions of dollars on population control efforts. Much of this money is given to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who work in developing nations to address what they see as problems of over-population. Abortion, sterilization, and contraception have become part of U.S. foreign policy.

MEXICO CITY POLICY

The so-called “Mexico City” policy, implemented in 1984 by President Reagan and reinstated in 2001 by President George W. Bush, restricts federal money earmarked for family planning from being spent on abortion overseas or on military bases. It specifically prohibits funding for programs that force,

promote, or advocate changes in laws to legalize abortion. As a result, many NGOs are now barred from receiving federal family planning money from USAID and similar organizations.

CONTRACEPTION

As with voluntary sterilization, unnatural contraceptive techniques remain entrenched in government-funded family planning programs. In fact, the U.S. annually spends \$425 million on contraception around the world. Yet the Church teaches that contraception is immoral.

The many Church documents that address the problem of contraception stress the self-giving that stands at the heart of the relationship between a husband and wife. Contraception is a deliberate refusal of this gift. “This leads not only to a positive refusal to be open to life but also to a falsification of the inner truth of conjugal love...” (*Familiaris Consortio*, 32).

NFP & ABSTINENCE

Artificial family planning techniques do not represent perfect solutions to undesirable outcomes, and they do nothing to benefit a person’s character. The best way to deal with destructive behavior is to change the behavior, not to render the behavior seemingly innocuous. In fact, recent statistics highlight that increased contraceptive use does not result in decreased recourse to abortion, and condom use alone has not been successful in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Abstinence programs, which the Church does applaud, have recently been successfully employed to fight the plague of AIDS, most notably in Africa. Despite this success, natural family planning (NFP) has never been employed by any of the federally-funded NGOs around the world, even though the Foreign Assistance Act was amended in 1981 to ensure that NFP methods were included in the global family planning discussion.

“REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS”

Controversies over population policy became quite visible during the pontificate of John Paul II when the Holy See participated in a succession of world conferences on population: Cairo (1994), Beijing (1995), New York (1999), and Beijing (2000). During these conferences the Holy See delegation united with key allies, including most Muslim countries, to keep the documents from enshrining such things as a “universal women’s right to abortion” and an unfettered right of adolescents to “reproductive health services.”

Despite their efforts, each conference incrementally added more “reproductive rights” until, in arguably the worst event, the U.N. called for the training of health care workers to perform and make abortion available. To make matters worse, the Vatican’s repeated calls to include conscientious objection protection for pro-life healthcare workers were totally ignored.

DOMESTIC POLICY

Population policy also has a domestic side. At least 23 states have mandated that employee insurance policies cover contraceptives, including the abortifacient “morning-after pill.”

For a Catholic institution, such as a hospital or university, such a mandate is a clear violation of conscience. While some states have included a “conscience clause” that allows a business to opt out on religious grounds, some do not, and some are so poorly written that the Catholic Church does not qualify. The threat is real since a federal mandate would override all the conscience clauses of the states and require all religious employers to provide contraception, including the USCCB.

Summary:

1. Population policy must not/should not include abortion and sterilization as methods of slowing population growth.
 2. The use of contraception in population policy undermines marriage and ignores the moral issues of promiscuity and disease.
 3. Catholic institutions should not be required to support contraception or abortion through mandated insurance coverage.
 4. The right to abortion should not be allowed to enter international law under the rubric of women’s “reproductive health” or fears of overpopulation.
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8. The Death Penalty

“Assuming that the guilty party’s identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the Church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor” (CCC 2267).

Capital punishment is probably the most misunderstood moral issue in the Catholic Church. This confusion stems from the change made in the Catechism in 1997 to bring the teaching into conformity with the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

The change was widely reported in the media and by some Catholic commentators as the Church declaring total opposition to the use of the death penalty. This view is incorrect and is not supported by the words of the revised Catechism or *Evangelium Vitae* itself.

The Church’s position can be summarized in this way: The Church is not opposed to the death penalty in principle but in practice. To oppose the death penalty in principle would be to remove one of the most basic responsibilities

of the common good-to provide defense and security against aggression.

“BLOODLESS MEANS”

The Church acknowledges that criminals must be punished and leaves open the possibility that alternatives to the death penalty may not be sufficient to protect the common good. However, thanks to advances in the judicial and penal systems, it is becoming more possible for the state to fulfill its obligation to protect the common good by “bloodless means.” Modern penology has made the necessity of capital punishment “very rare, if not practically non-existent” (*Evangelium Vitae*, 56).

However, what is true in the United States and other developed countries may not be true in less developed parts of the world where prisons provide security for neither those on the inside or the outside. Prudential judgment is required to apply this teaching to circumstances.

PENAL CARE

Political candidates best represent Church teaching when they recognize the necessity of protecting the common good from aggression and providing the necessary resources for the improvement of prison care, while still upholding the inherent dignity of individuals.

Elected representatives have a threefold responsibility: first, to recognize the preference of bloodless means in treating the worst criminals; second, to ensure judicial sentences are commensurate with the crimes and the threat to the common good; and third, to provide the resources needed to keep prisons secure for inmates, staff, and the public.

We have nothing to lose by ending the practice of capital punishment.

Yet, if we are to rely on life-imprisonment, the underlying sentencing policies must prevent dangerous criminals from returning to general society until the threat they pose is removed. The only way to completely eliminate the death penalty is to ensure that the penal system truly protects society from the most dangerous of its inmates.

REFORM AND RENEWAL

The primary purpose of punishment is to prevent further harm, but the Church also holds forth the hope that those being punished will experience moral renewal in the acceptance of a just punishment: “Punishment then, in addition to defending public order and protecting people’s safety, has a medicinal purpose: as far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party” (CCC 2266).

The Holy Father and the bishops hope that this view of punishment will itself be a witness to the culture of life. Rather than seeing justice in reflexive eye-for-an-eye terms, they urge Catholics to understand the cost of violence, even when violence is sanctioned by the state in the name of protecting the common good.

The Church urges us to go beyond the action that is justified to the action that is a better witness to the moral order.

Summary:

1. The Church teaches that the death penalty is acceptable in principle but should be avoided in practice.
 2. The responsibility of elected officials is to ensure that penal systems and sentencing policies do in fact protect society from known aggressors.
 3. The practical elimination of the death penalty is based upon the strength of the penal system and the commensurateness of the sentencing procedures.
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9. War

“All citizens and all governments are obliged to work for the avoidance of war. However, as long as the danger of war persists and there is no international authority with the necessary competence and power, governments cannot be denied the right of lawful self-defense, once all peace efforts have failed” (CCC 2308).

The Church has never taught pacifism as an option for those in charge of the common good, only for individuals in certain circumstances. Military servicemen, for example, serve with honor and “contribute to the common good of the nation” (CCC 2310). Just as a person is entitled to self-defense, so too is a government responsible for protecting its people. The most powerful of all protective methods is to wage war against those who pose legitimate and significant threats. In certain cases, war can be a moral duty.

JUSTIFIED WAR

When war threatens, Catholics are obliged to apply these criteria in shaping their opinions on whether or not conflict is justified. It’s entirely appropriate for Catholics, lay and religious alike, to voice their opinions on the justness of a potential or actual conflict. Yet these opinions are prudential in nature.

Not all wars are just, according to Church teaching. Therefore, all Catholics and political leaders must consider carefully their reasons for going to war, the process by which they arrived at their decisions, and all probable outcomes. As a guide, the Church has delineated specific criteria for a “just-war.”

FOUR CRITERIA

According to the Catechism, the four conditions for a “just-war” are 1) “the damage inflicted by the aggressor on the nation or community of nations must be lasting, grave, and certain”; 2) “all other means of putting an end to it must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective”; 3) “there must be serious

prospects of success”; and 4) “the use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated” (CCC 2309).

Note that these considerations apply to more than the reasons for war but also to the way a war is fought and its outcome. With the development of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons, the human cost of war has multiplied many times over. The potential for vast destruction of innocent life is ominous, thus a nation’s response to an aggressor must be proportionate and limited.

PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENT

Those who offer their opinions on war do not always have the data needed to fully inform their prudential judgments. While the published opinions of bishops or priests inform the decisions of political leaders and Catholic citizens, their opinions are not binding, except in certain circumstances such as that of Nazi Germany where the regime itself was morally indefensible. Ultimately, the authorities responsible for the common good of the U.S. citizens are the president and the Congress, who must use the vast resources at their disposal to make wise and honest choices. The Catechism recognizes it is their collective prudential judgment upon which the decision to wage war is based.

VOTING THE PRINCIPLES

If we want to ensure that the United States goes to war rarely and in a just manner, all Catholics should consider their elected officials in light of the principles listed in the Catechism. Political candidates should be willing to defend the country against aggression, but they should demonstrate an even greater inclination toward peace. Candidates should also be prepared to take decisive and proportionate actions in the face of credible and imminent threats.

INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITY

The Church alludes to the option of “international authority” in avoiding the decision to go to war. The only such authority at the present time is the United Nations, a deliberative body whose various actions are empowered by the agreement of its member nations. Despite this influence, the U.N. has only authorized two of the many wars since its founding: the Korean conflict and the first Persian Gulf War. Nonetheless, it is an important player in the deliberative process, since it represents the only stage upon which all nations participate diplomatically in avoiding war through non-violent means.

Summary:

1. States have the right to engage in war in self-defense but should first exhaust all peaceful solutions.
 2. Just war is waged within defined moral boundaries in regard to its targets, goals, and its outcomes.
 3. Political leadership must have both the inclination toward peace and the capacity for decisive action if war is just and necessary.
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10. Defense and Terrorism

“Finally, the common good requires peace, that is, the stability and security of a just order. It presupposes that authority should ensure by morally acceptable means the security of society and its members. It is the basis of the right to legitimate personal and collective defense” (CCC 1909).

A nation has a duty to defend itself and the lives of its citizens as part of serving the common good. To achieve this goal, the military capacity of a nation should be at least equal to that of its enemy. The Catechism allows for this: “Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense” (CCC 2266). The alternative renders the government powerless to fulfill its primary obligation. For if a nation’s military is unprepared or its capacity to respond is poor, the aggressors will most likely prevail.

MORAL BOUNDARIES

This does not mean that governments have complete latitude in planning their defenses. Those entrusted with the defense of the common good are expected to act within a moral framework when waging war. For example, the Catechism allows for the use of arms when the common good is threatened (CCC 2265), but these weapons should not have the potential to become an even greater threat than the original source of danger (CCC 2309).

In the past, nuclear weapons were considered a viable deterrent to a more traditional type of war. The enemies were easily identified and clearly defined. Yet, in this new age of terrorism, how do nations defend themselves against isolated attacks and hidden aggressors? As terrorism becomes an almost daily occurrence in places like Northern Ireland, Iraq, Israel, and Pakistan, the social teaching of the Church, like every other body of thought on national defense, is in a development stage. What is “morally acceptable” when it comes to terrorists groups who are willing to take innocent life in order to intimidate nations, influence policy, and affect the outcome of elections?

TERRORISM

The present debate over preemptive attacks is an example of this internal discussion within the Church. Some bishops, especially those in the U.S., have questioned the legitimacy of using preemptive attacks to remove the threat from states supporting or shielding terrorist organizations.

But the Church has long taught that terrorism is never a just form of war: “The purposeful taking of human life is an unjustifiable assault on human life. For the same reasons, the intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks is always wrong” (USCCB, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*). While recognizing the legitimacy of one soldier taking the life of another soldier under the condition of war, the Church does not recognize the legitimacy of terrorist attacks under any circumstances.

In response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, the bishops reminded political leaders to look beyond military solutions: “Without in any way excusing indefensible terrorist acts, we still need to address those conditions of poverty and injustice which are exploited by terrorists” (USCCB, *Living with Faith and Hope after September 11*).

The bishops recognize that poverty and inequality is not the sole, or even the chief, cause of terrorism, especially in the case of Muslim extremists, but these are conditions that are “exploited” by terrorists looking to clothe themselves in political legitimacy. Without a strategy that includes diplomatic and intelligence cooperation among the nations of the world, terrorist organizations and cells will always find “rogue” states to train and house their agents.

CONDITIONS FOR PEACE

Peace is not merely the absence of war; it’s not only achieved through defense, but through communication, respect, and solidarity.

In short, the best defense against aggression combines three elements: first, a military prepared to implement a proportionate and effective response; second, international diplomacy that identifies and resolves the causes of conflict before military action becomes necessary; and third, a foreign policy that seeks to correct social conditions that foster aggression and terrorism through international cooperation.

Summary:

1. Nations have a duty to protect their citizens from legitimate threats.
2. Nations should build their capacity for defense in light of just-war theory.
3. Terrorism-the injury and murder of innocent civilians-is never justified.
4. Defending a nation combines military, international diplomacy, and a compassionate foreign policy.

11. Judicial

“Some there must be who devote themselves to the work of the commonwealth, who make the laws or administer justice, or whose advice and authority govern the nation in times of peace, and defend it in war. Such men clearly occupy the foremost place in the State, and should be held in highest estimation, for their work concerns most nearly and effectively the general interests of the community” (Rerum Novarum, 34).

Judges are either elected directly by the people or nominated and approved by our elected leaders (e.g., the president and the U.S. Senate). In recent years, prolonged political battles have been waged over presidential nominations to federal courts of appeals. Future U.S. Supreme Court nominees will likely face fierce scrutiny and political battering, even to a greater extent than the tumultuous nominees of the past.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The issue that often has driven the debate is abortion, now followed closely by homosexual marriage. Since these are the current flashpoints in the battle over judicial nominations, it’s not surprising that the religious commitments of court nominees have been so closely scrutinized. Given that evangelicals and faithful Catholics are united in defending unborn life and marriage between a man and woman, the judges from those faith traditions have been attacked.

ROLE OF JUDGES

The role of a judge is to interpret law, not create it. The separation of powers in the U.S. Constitution gives the Congress the power to make laws and courts only the limited power to interpret them. Judges are expected to overlook their personal beliefs and base their decisions on the law alone.

It’s especially unfortunate when Catholic politicians lead the fight against those justices who have demonstrated strong commitments to Catholic teaching. Public officials who treat a judicial nominee’s Catholic faith as an obstacle to serving as a judge not only demonstrate a bias against religious beliefs but also reveal a misunderstanding about Catholic teaching on judicial responsibility itself.

In fact, faithful Catholics, who are grounded in the concepts of following rules and exhibiting humility, should be especially well-suited for judicial service because they would naturally eschew the qualities that lead a judge to being activist.

JUDICIAL LAWLESSNESS

The most serious problem in the judiciary is the presence of activist judges who use every opportunity to misconstrue, contort, and stretch the law to create the maximum amount of legal justification for abortion, euthanasia, and homosexual marriage. Those who nominate and confirm judicial activists try to shape the courts because they cannot get what they want in the political

process. Activist judges disenfranchise voters of faith.

NATURAL LAW

Catholics both within government and without must be on guard against an attitude that holds law to be whatever the legislator says it is. This reduction of law can endanger democracy and morality by removing the objective foundation of morals and law as given by nature and recognized by reason.

Eternal laws are the government of all things by God and form the basis of the social moral order. Their assimilation to human society through reason gives the immediate basis of political morality; natural law is the foundation of a sound political vision. Human laws that contradict the natural law—for example, American laws legalizing abortion—have no authority for Catholics. Martin Luther King quoted St. Thomas Aquinas on this point in his influential “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”

What does this mean in our system of democratic government? First, our elected officials must make laws that respect natural law. Second, individuals who use the judiciary to create rights or obligations that have no basis in our Constitution are acting improperly.

Some would have us believe that reference to natural law is a veiled attempt simply to establish a new “conservative” brand of judicial activism. These pundits, though, disregard the natural law’s emphasis on the necessity for officials (including judges) to act only within the bounds of their legitimate authority.

Summary:

1. Judges should be evaluated according to their judicial records and commitment to the limited judicial role, not attacked for their privately held religious views.
 2. Those who would nominate and confirm judicial activists disenfranchise the faithful Catholic voter.
 3. Catholic leaders have a duty to respect their constituents and their Church’s traditional commitment to natural law tradition when considering judicial appointees.
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FAMILY ISSUES

12. Marriage and the Family

“A man and a woman united in marriage, together with their children, form a family. This institution is prior to any recognition by public authority, which has an obligation to recognize it. It should be considered the normal reference point by which the different forms of family relationship are to be evaluated” (CCC 2202).

The Catholic Church teaches that the institution of marriage comes prior to the state and therefore must be accepted as normative. Indeed, all the nations in the world over the past 20 centuries have never questioned this standard, until recently.

On February 3, 2004, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the state laws restricting marriage to the union of one man and one woman were based upon a religious prejudice. This decision unleashed a national debate on the meaning of marriage and spurred the determination of many to pass an amendment to the U.S. Constitution specifying the legal meaning of marriage to a relationship between men and women.

FIRST SOCIETY

The Holy Father and bishops around the world have directly rejected the idea of “same-sex marriage”: “It is not based on the natural complementarity of male and female; it cannot cooperate with God to create new life; and the natural purpose of sexual union cannot be achieved by a same-sex union” (USCCB, *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers About Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*).

The Church asserts the priority and norm of marriage not to condemn what is different but to underline that marriage, more than any other form of relationship, serves the common good.

Therefore, the Church must defend the marriage tradition not only because it was instituted by God but also because the family is the foundation of all society: “The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God, and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society” (CCC 2207).

NATURAL LAW

The Catholic tradition is in an ongoing debate with those outside the Church—on purely rational grounds—regarding its views on marriage and morality. When a Catholic enters the public sphere, he or she can do more than quote Scripture or the Catechism. There is the whole spectrum of reasonable debate

based upon the natural order of things, or natural law.

Catholic social teaching defends the privileged position that marriage is given based upon natural law. This law states that man is born with a moral standard that he comes to realize through reason and free will. Scripture and tradition may aid persons in their understanding of marriage, but rational accounts of marriage, sexuality, and children justify the primacy of man-woman marriage.

PUBLIC POLICY

The Catholic view of marriage should inform public policy in several ways. As the U.S. bishops have said, “Policies related to the definition of marriage, taxes, the workplace, divorce, and welfare must be designed to help families stay together and to reward responsibility and sacrifice for children” (USCCB, *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*).

The specific policies are a matter of prudential judgment, but what is behind them—the firm belief that marriage between a man and a woman should be protected by the state—is a non-negotiable principle of Catholic teaching.

The USCCB is strongly supportive of the constitutional amendment to defend marriage recently introduced in the Congress. A majority of Catholic Senators, unfortunately, voted against it, in spite of the bishops’ lobbying effort.

CIVIL UNIONS

Politicians will disagree prudentially on how best to protect marriage through law and public policy. The option being considered by some states, that of recognizing “civil unions” between homosexuals and affording to them some or all of the benefits of married persons, should be judged by its impact on the common good and especially on marriage and children.

The Pontifical Council for the Family has criticized the prospect of civil unions: “This would be an arbitrary use of power which does not contribute to the common good because the original nature of marriage and the family proceeds and exceeds, in an absolute and radical way, the sovereign power of the State” (Family, Marriage and “De Facto” Unions, 9).

Summary:

1. Marriage was instituted prior to the state and should be recognized by the state as something inviolate and necessary to the common good.
2. Prudential judgments about law and public policy should always seek to strengthen marriage and families.
3. So-called same-sex marriages cannot be recognized by the Catholic Church, and civil unions are likely to undermine marriage and damage its foundational role in society.

13. Education

“The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable” (CCC 2221).

In an era dominated by public education, parents sometimes forget that it’s their right to oversee the education of their children. Since the heyday of Catholic schools has passed, more and more Catholic children now attend public schools and colleges, leaving the impression that education is the responsibility of the state.

RIGHTS OF PARENTS

Parents should know that it’s their job to oversee the education of their children. “As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise” (CCC 2229).

As public schools have become more and more secular in their curriculums, with some even hostile to the expression of religious views, parents have been forced to find alternatives that are “consonant with Catholic convictions.” This has led to a modest revival in diocesan and private Catholic education. It has also led many parents to enroll their children in private schools without religious affiliation or non-sectarian Christian schools. For those who cannot find or afford private schools, home schooling has become the most viable option.

SCHOOL CHOICE

The problem of choosing a private school is that many Catholic parents cannot afford it, even at the reduced prices often available at parish schools. For this reason, some Catholic leaders have made a prudential judgment to support the idea of school choice.

Choice in education means that parents who qualify can receive an annual stipend from the government for use at private schools. Some would argue, however, that the state should not provide financial support for those parents who choose to send their children to parochial schools. Their argument is based on the perceived threat that such contributions make to the separation of church and state.

Yet if the voucher system is limited only to public schools and non-sectarian private schools, the majority of private schools will be left out of the mix. Furthermore, most non-sectarian private schools are well beyond the financial reach of parents, even those who receive government subsidies.

So, in essence, a voucher program that excludes parochial schools is really a

public school program. For reasons already discussed, this is not much of a choice for those Catholic parents who are concerned with the direction of public education.

GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT

At the same time, Church supporters are concerned that any form of accepted state funding signals their consent for government oversight. This may not be much of an issue, since the oversight may be limited to the reporting standards that the government requires of public schools, including test results, teacher qualifications and graduation rates.

Of course, if Catholic parents have a right to an education “consonant with Catholic convictions” then it’s up the Church, not to the state, to supply it. The state is obliged to respect the prerogative of parents in regard to their children’s education but cannot be reasonably asked to supply a Catholic education.

SEX EDUCATION

The introduction of sex education into public and private school curriculum has met with resistance from parents who feel that schools are treading on sensitive territory. Parents have the prerogative to determine what their children should learn about sexual morality since it’s at the core of their spiritual development and understanding of moral values. This parental prerogative is a prime instance of the principle of solidarity whereby “larger communities should take care not to usurp the family’s prerogatives or interfere in its life” (CCC 2209).

Sex education in schools normally allows an opt-out program for parents who want to reserve that instruction for themselves or who find the particular program objectionable. But mandatory sex education clearly violates the prerogative of Catholic parents who want to guide their children through these issues themselves.

Summary:

1. Parents-not the state-have the right to educate their children.
 2. Catholic parents have the right to have their children educated in a curriculum “consonant” with Catholic values.
 3. Governments should provide financial support to families for the education they desire for their children.
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14. Senior Issues

“Honouring older people involves a threefold duty: welcoming them, helping them and making good use of their qualities. In many places this happens almost spontaneously, as the result of long-standing custom. Elsewhere, and especially in the more economically advanced nations, there needs to be a reversal of the current trend, to ensure that elderly people can grow old with dignity, without having to fear that they will end up no longer counting for anything” (Pope John Paul II, “Letter to the Elderly,” 12).

Human life is a gift that must be protected and cherished. The dignity of the person is present at all stages of life, from birth through old age. It’s at these early and late stages, however, that people find themselves at their most vulnerable.

SOLIDARITY

The Church’s principle of solidarity calls on those who are strong to provide aid to those who are weak. This calls first of all for physical assistance but also includes the need of the elderly to remain in solidarity with the rest of society.

Unfortunately, the relationship between the young and the elderly has declined in recent years, most notably in the affluent nations. Those societies that stress efficiency and production often view the elderly as a hindrance, and sometimes a barrier, to progress. Once it becomes acceptable to marginalize the elderly, society opens itself to actions that never would have seemed possible.

The growing acceptance of euthanasia is proof that members of our society have lost sight of their solidarity with the elderly, as well as the dignity of older persons. “While in some cultures older people remain a part of the family with an important and active role, in others the elderly are regarded as a useless burden and are left to themselves. Here the temptation to resort to euthanasia can more easily arise” (Evangelium Vitae, 94).

SOCIAL SECURITY

The government demonstrates the solidarity of its people through state-sponsored programs that enable the young to provide for the elderly, disabled, and infirmed. In particular, Social Security supports traditional families by assisting mothers who leave the workforce and lose access to employee pension plans. In later life, these women receive benefit payments based on their husbands’ incomes. Social Security also protects the most vulnerable by giving larger relative benefit payments to low-income wage earners than to those in the higher income brackets.

Unfortunately, due to an imbalance between the number of workers who will contribute and the number of retirees who will receive benefits, Social Security will soon be under-funded. Several remedies have been suggested, such as changing the contribution/benefit levels, increasing the eligibility age

for retirees, or investing the pooled social security funds in bonds or equities. The Church understands that such reform is necessary, but any solution must provide adequate protection for the poor and not overburden those who contribute to the income pool.

MEDICARE

Since 1965, the government has provided federally administered health insurance to senior citizens through its Medicare program. Prior to that time, only half of senior citizens had health insurance and many were classified as living in poverty. Today, Medicare covers more than 39 million seniors and disabled Americans.

And the program benefits continue to grow. Last year, the Congress added expanded Medicare to help seniors pay for their prescription drugs. In addition, the government created a Health Savings Account that would allow senior citizens to save money, in tax-free interest accounts, to pay for out-of-pocket health care expenses.

PERSONAL SUPPORT

Nonetheless, human beings need more than just material sustenance. While financial aid is critical to pay for basic physical needs, people also require emotional support. No government program can fill this need, although support for faith-based social services can help. The elderly need to know that they are respected and admired by their fellow men and women. They must be free to express their distinct views on issues, as well as provide perspective on social and cultural development. At the same time, the young must acknowledge the valuable role that the elderly can play in their society.

Summary:

1. The Church's principle of solidarity calls on the young to provide aid to seniors.
 2. State-sponsored programs, like Social Security and Medicare, are acts of solidarity.
 3. Seniors should also receive personal support from the community and mediating institutions in society.
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ECONOMIC ISSUES

15. Business

“A business cannot be considered only as a ‘society of capital goods’; it is also a ‘society of persons’ in which people participate in different ways and with specific responsibilities, whether they supply the necessary capital for the company’s activities or take part in such activities through their labour” (Centesimus Annus, 43).

The well-being of our families, communities, and nation depends on the success of business and industry to create wealth. The greater the growth of industry, the more stable our society becomes: “Another name for peace is development. Just as there is a collective responsibility for avoiding war, so too there is a collective responsibility for promoting development” (Centesimus Annus, 52).

ECONOMIC FOUNDATION

Businesses and industries create the wealth that provides financial support for their workers, both blue and white collar, and their families through earned wages, medical benefits, life insurance, disability, and pension plans. Without these wages and benefits, most workers would be unable to obtain the necessary goods of life. They would also be unable to support the present levels of government services and programs through the payment of taxes. The quality of life for all citizens, regardless of their income brackets, is thus proportionate to the success of their nation’s business and industry. It is therefore in the interest of every citizen that the economic sector grows and prospers.

MARKET ECONOMY

Government, as a promoter of the common good, has an obligation to ensure that social and economic conditions promote business development. More often than not, as argued in the John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991), this can best be achieved by allowing market forces to act freely. As shown by the decline of communism, the state does not generally make the best allocations of capital when it is the sole decision-maker.

GOVERNMENT REGULATION

The more regulations imposed by government, the less room is left for entrepreneurial enterprise and creative decision-making. According to the principle of subsidiarity, corporate executives and managers should be allowed to control their own economic development, within the boundaries of law and morality.

At the same time, in accordance with the principle of solidarity, the government has a responsibility to protect the weak and vulnerable from excesses or unethical behavior. Government also has a duty to protect the rights of workers by ensuring decent working conditions, establishing fair wages, and holding corporate leaders accountable for breaking the laws governing corporate behavior.

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Too much regulation creates an environment in which owners and managers no longer think of what is responsible but what is compliant. As demonstrated in recent corporate scandals, executives may act within the legal boundaries of regulations but still be ethically wrong. More regulations are not the solution. Corporate innovation, responsibility, and self-imposed standards with appropriate penalties are the keys to success.

Accountability is thus a social partnership between the private sector and the government. Private industry professionals and associations play an important role in setting appropriate standards for particular professions, businesses, and industries. Legislative and executive bodies also must set standards for responsible conduct through the passage and enforcement of appropriate laws to protect society as a whole from abuses.

SMALL BUSINESS

Often referred to as the backbone of the U.S. economy, small businesses account for 99 percent of employers and, with the recent movement of formerly American factories and jobs offshore, now create between 60 and 75 percent of net new jobs annually.

Pope Leo XIII wrote, “The law, therefore, should favor ownership, and its policy should be to induce as many as possible of the people to become owners” (*Rerum Novarum*, 46). However, small businesses face many economic challenges, including the need for sufficient capital to finance growth, rising health care and other benefit costs, expensive and inefficient regulation by several layers of government, and taxation.

Summary:

1. Work is matter of human dignity and necessary to the common good.
 2. Government should create the conditions that support the business and industry development.
 3. Corporate responsibility is critical for helping maintain economic success.
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16. Taxation

“In a system of taxation based on justice and equity it is fundamental that the burdens be proportioned to the capacity of the people contributing” (Mater et Magistra, 132).

Every citizen has a moral obligation to contribute to the common good. In financial terms, this responsibility is carried out primarily through a person’s labor and the wealth it creates. But a citizen also contributes through the payment of taxes, which are used to fund the cost of government.

PRINCIPLE OF TAXATION

Just like a corporation or a family, the government needs a steady stream of revenue in order to operate. In the United States, personal and corporate income taxes represent the largest source of revenue for the government. In addition, citizens contribute by paying taxes on consumer items (e.g., sales tax). The taxpayers, therefore, provide most of the funding for all areas of government, from transportation to public safety and the military.

How this tax burden is allocated is a matter of prudential judgment. Taxes that are adjusted to income levels are designed to place more of the burden on the wealthy. However, some argue that this policy penalizes those who are successful and may actually deter others who would otherwise work to earn more. In response, some have suggested a flat tax, in which all citizens pay the same tax rate, or a consumption tax, based upon what an individual spends.

How the combination of progressive and regressive taxes is balanced is a source of much discussion. Regardless of the solution, taxation policy should not become a weapon in class warfare. Citizens should work together to create a solution that is fair to all sides. The common good should be the goal of any taxation policy, not the interests of one particular class.

LIVING WAGES

A just tax system is one that is based on a citizen’s ability to pay. In supporting their nation and communities, taxpayers should not find themselves unable to provide for their own families or maintain their businesses. Workers should earn enough money to pay their taxes and still take home a “living wage.” Traditional families should also be encouraged. This means that a husband working full-time should be able to support his wife and children at home.

Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Many mothers are forced to leave their children in order to earn second incomes because of the amount of tax the fathers must pay out of their incomes. This economic pressure adds to the stress and emotional cost to parents and their children. This is why the USCCB has supported family-friendly tax legislation, such as tax credits for children and direct rebates to low-income families with dependents. The Conference has also supported adjustments that would reduce the “marriage penalty” by increasing the qualifying amount for married workers.

SUPPORTING THE FAMILY

Another way in which tax policy can be used to support families is by opening private schools to those who are unsatisfied with public school options provided by government. Families who are fed up with the content of subjects in the classroom, are opposed to the increasing liberalization of school policies, and wish to exert more control over their children's educations are looking beyond public schools. Unfortunately, the tuitions at private schools are often beyond their budgets.

One way in which the government can help provide financial support to these parents is through the tax system. For example, one proposal is to increase the availability and value of private school scholarships by offering tax breaks to those individuals and corporations who make contributions. Another proposal would give families a tax refund if their children enroll in non-public schools.

CORPORATE POLICIES

Large corporations, small businesses, and other institutions that employ workers also have a significant impact on family stability, as well as on society as a whole. In addition to paying worker's wages, corporations provide financial support for the common good by paying federal and state income taxes. These taxes represent another major source of revenue for the government.

To sustain the corporations and businesses that provide employment and financial support, the government should ensure that corporate taxes are low enough for both large and small companies to operate at optimal levels. "Governments must provide regulations and a system of taxation which encourage firms to preserve the environment, employ disadvantaged workers, and create jobs in depressed areas. Managers and stockholders should not be torn between their responsibilities to their organizations and their responsibilities toward society as a whole" (USCCB, Economic Justice for All, 118).

Summary:

1. Taxes should be fairly based upon one's ability to pay.
 2. Tax policy should not penalize marriage or the raising of children.
 3. Corporate taxes should not threaten the capacity to create and sustain jobs.
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SOCIAL ISSUES

17. Poverty

“...those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere” (*Libertatis Conscientia*, 68).

This “preferential option for the poor” challenges Catholics to make a special effort to help those in poverty. How this is translated into public policy is a matter for prudential judgment. But it’s clear from other aspects of the Church’s social teaching that Catholics must be careful not to undermine any person’s right to self-determination and autonomy as has been witnessed some forms of the welfare assistance.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

The principle of social justice combines the notion that persons are responsible for exercising their freedom to obtain the goods of life and that these goods are proportionate to their inherent dignity. But there are some who cannot obtain these goods without assistance. One of the most contentious issues in modern politics is the question of what and how much should be provided by the community or the state.

Catholic social teaching does not justify the growth of a federal welfare state. A wealthy state that provides for the less fortunate is to be preferred to the socialist state where everyone is equally poor. The goal of Catholic social teaching is to provide the conditions for persons to obtain the goods appropriate to the dignity of their existence.

WELFARE POLICY

One area in which the government can most appropriately weed out the roots of poverty is through a sound fiscal policy. At a minimum, the Church advocates regulated income levels and working conditions that promote self-respect and self-sufficiency: “The amount a worker receives must be sufficient, in proportion to available funds, to allow him and his family a standard of living consistent with human dignity” (*Pacem in Terris*, 20).

The federal government should also enact legislation that motivates the unemployed to move from the welfare lines to the workforce. We should not embrace policies that encourage the unemployed to become dependent on the government, thereby losing their incentives to become self-sufficient.

HOMELESSNESS

Those who are poor face the agonizing battle of spreading their meager

incomes among the basic necessities, housing being the most expensive of all. Many who are poor literally have no home to call their own. They become dependent on the generosity of friends, relatives, charities, government programs and the Catholic Church, which is the non-governmental leader in providing housing and shelter to the poor.

This assistance is certainly necessary in the short-term. But the more lasting solution is one that empowers people to provide their own security and stability. Unfortunately, a whole class of workers is unable to do this because they lack the necessary education and training.

EDUCATION

The poor cannot advance in this technological age if they don't acquire education. Unfortunately, public schools in low-income areas operate at lower standards than those in more affluent neighborhoods. Social justice requires that this inequality be overcome, whether through school vouchers, state-sponsored tutors, or other forms of training.

Social programs are not the only solution. More immediate and permanent solutions can be found by applying the principle of subsidiarity. Individuals and communities must meet the challenge and help those who want to work acquire the knowledge and skills needed to secure higher paying jobs.

THE FAMILY

First, however, there is a demoralizing condition within the country that must be overcome. The decline of the traditional two-parent family is the primary cause of poverty. As more people have delayed marriage and the trend of unmarried cohabitation has increased, the number of children born out of wedlock has grown. The rise of divorce has also contributed to the growth of single-parent households.

The Church has always stressed the importance of traditional family structures in protecting the welfare of children. However, this is not a situation that can be resolved with government intervention. Society itself, in the purest sense of solidarity and subsidiarity, must decide what type of culture it wants to promote and act accordingly.

Summary:

1. The preferential option for the poor requires that authorities first provide assistance to the poor and oppressed.
 2. The poor must have access to the education and job training necessary to compete in today's job market.
 3. Strong families that remain intact keep their members from falling into poverty.
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18. Health Care

“Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good. Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance” (CCC 2288).

The number of uninsured in our country continues to be a major problem. As Catholics, we are called to respect the dignity of people by defending their basic right to health care. The principle of subsidiarity teaches that government must become involved when there is a problem that cannot be solved at the local level.

Appropriately, recent national political debates have featured much discussion on health care, including the controversial idea of universal health insurance.

CARE OF THE SICK

Throughout this country’s history, Catholic hospitals—622 as of 2002—have steadfastly fulfilled the moral obligation to care for the sick. But faith-based medical services, along with publicly funded hospitals and clinics are strained to take care of the uninsured.

Insured patients are also financially strained to meet the rising costs of health care. Most rely on their employee benefit plans, which are less expensive than private insurance policies. However, the costs are still high and some companies are scaling back their benefit programs. Other companies and professions do not offer any benefits at all.

Some politicians argue that the federal government should provide basic health care coverage for those who cannot afford private insurance and do not work in sectors that provide medical benefits. Two of the government’s attempts to fill this void are Medicare and Medicaid.

MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

Medicare is a federally administered health insurance program that covers persons over the age of 65, qualified persons with disabilities, and those with End-Stage Renal Disease.

In 2003, the Congress modified the existing Medicare program to include prescription drug coverage, strengthen preventative benefits, and provide financial assistance to persons with low income.

Medicaid, which is funded at both the federal and state levels, is a health care program that targets low-income families. The primary beneficiaries are children, pregnant women, low-income families with minors, the disabled, and the elderly.

Medicare and Medicaid are significant federal contributions to health care

coverage. Yet, even with these programs, too many are left without any form of health insurance.

CONSCIENCE PROTECTION

Another health care issue that has surfaced is that of conscience protections. Following the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, Congress protected the rights of health organizations and providers to refuse to perform abortions under the conscientious objection principle. Today, this question is returning with a vengeance.

In recent years, “reproductive rights” advocates have pushed for expanded health care coverage that would force all employee health plans to include contraception and “emergency contraception.” The Catholic health care ministry is based on the protection of life and preservation of the dignity of people. Procedures that are contrary to this mission (abortion, euthanasia, and contraception) cannot be provided by Catholic hospitals or supported by Catholic health care plans.

CHARITIES AND AID ORGANIZATIONS

Catholic Charities has also been attacked. In a 2004 landmark case, the California Supreme Court ruled that Catholic Charities of California, a network of independent and local organizations, must provide contraceptive coverage to its employees. The basis for the Court’s decision was that the group did not fall under the category of “religious employer.” Given this, it is doubtful that any non-profit organization would qualify as “religious.” The California Supreme Court has thus created a precedent that has dire implications for the future of Catholic hospitals, universities, schools, businesses, and other Church-based organizations.

Catholic aid organizations have also been threatened in the global arena. Through its international financing agency, USAID, the U.S. government has sanctioned the distribution of voluntary sterilization and contraception by international aid agencies. In addition, depending on the host country, these agencies are free to educate people on new contraceptive methods, including those that are abortifacient. This is the climate in which Catholic aid groups must compete for funding and government contracts.

Summary:

1. Health care needs should be met by a combination of personal and corporate insurance, philanthropy, and government programs.
 2. Catholic health care organizations must be free to perform their work with clear consciences.
 3. Abstinence and fidelity should be the foundation of sexually-transmitted disease education and prevention.
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19. Religious Liberty

“This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that...no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits” (Dignitatis Humanae, 2).

Because they are created by God, human beings have an intrinsic dignity. Their desire to practice religion is an expression of their dignity and must be considered a fundamental human right. Since religious belief is not uniform, the duty to respect religious liberty requires tolerance and respect for pluralism.

The state must govern in a manner that allows full religious expression according to the dictates of the particular faith.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

The goal of religious liberty is twofold: freedom of religious expression and suppression of those individuals or groups who would impose their beliefs on others. Protection of the common good can take precedence over an individual's right to religious expression. Therefore, religious liberty does not protect those who promote violent demonstrations of faith or call people to commit violent acts.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

The issue that most people identify with religious liberty—the display of religious symbols—is the easiest to resolve. The founding of America was rooted in Judeo-Christian teachings that were incorporated into our legal system and fundamental democratic charter and documents. In this regard, the distinct influence of the Ten Commandments cannot be ignored.

In the interest of respecting the complementary principles of religious tolerance and respect for historic traditions, the Ten Commandments have long been posted in our public places. Likewise, Christmas manger scenes should be allowed in public places along with menorahs or other symbols that show respect for religious traditions. Recently the “under God” phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance has come under attack, signifying the intent of secularizers to remove any symbol or mention of religion from the public arena.

RISE OF SECULARISM

During the past 35 years, government authorities have implicitly established secularism as an official state religion. Secularism has taken many forms: the removal of voluntary religious instruction in public schools; the banning of voluntary private prayer in public schools; employment discrimination against those who openly practice their faith; the promotion of an atheist “ethos”; and mandatory contraceptive coverage in health plans. “It is therefore difficult...to accept a position that gives only atheism the right of citizenship in public and

social life, while believers are, as though by principle, barely tolerated or are treated as second-class citizens” (Redemptor Hominis, 17).

CHARACTER EDUCATION

State-sponsored secularism in public education has created a culture marked by youth disillusionment, immorality, self-abuse, and violence. Alarmed by these developments, public education authorities have abandoned secularism in favor of a non-theistic ethical religion called “character education.”

Through the public funding of such an ethical religion to the exclusion of theistic religious moral education, government authorities have usurped the role of parents as the primary educators of their children. “Parents...have the right to determine, in accordance with their own religious beliefs, the kind of religious education that their children are to receive” (Dignitatis Humanae, 5).

FAITH-BASED INITIATIVES

For the first 125 years of the American experience, government authorities relied upon the charitable work performed by faith-based organizations. It is only in more recent years that government social service and education agencies have withheld financial support.

This is discriminatory. Secular organizations and faith-based organizations should play on a level playing field in competing for government funds. However, faith-based organizations that accept government funding must not be forced to sacrifice their religious liberties. A Catholic maternity center that receives a government grant must not be required to hire an abortion advocate.

Finally, there has been considerable debate among political candidates about discussions of religious faith in political speech. For a Catholic perspective, the discussion of law and public policy-which directly impact social justice and the common good-requires the fundamental view of human life. Topics like the purpose of families, marriage, sexuality, education, and religion are a necessary part of providing a rationale for a political agenda. To employ a kind of “heckler’s veto” of religious speech is contrary both to religious liberty and to religious traditions that have informed the American founding.

Summary:

1. Religious expression is a human right that should be recognized by the state.
 2. States that enforce secularism in social services and education are violating religious liberty.
 3. Political debate naturally involved religious concepts since law and public policy directly affects the common good.
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20. Immigration

“Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country; and, where there are just reasons for it, the right to emigrate to other countries and take up residence there” (Pacem in Terris, 25).

Persons emigrate from one country to another for a variety of reasons. It may be for reasons of stark persecution, the desire to escape poverty, or to seek greater opportunity. The Church views immigration as a right that should be recognized by every nation. That right is rooted in the belief that each person should have access to the basic goods that constitute the universal common good.

The willingness for one country to accept persons across the borders and offer them a home is emblematic of the unity of the human family and an act of human solidarity.

As the Catholic bishops of Mexico and the United States have collectively stated, “The Church recognizes that all the goods of the earth belong to all people. When persons cannot find employment in their country of origin to support themselves and their families, they have a right to find work elsewhere in order to survive. Sovereign nations should provide ways to accommodate this right” (USCCB and Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, *Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope*, 35).

FEAR OF IMMIGRANTS

Some political leaders have spared no effort to restrict-and, in some cases, end-legal immigration to the United States. They argue that new immigrants do not assimilate to the American way of life and pose a threat to the jobs of U.S. citizens.

Some immigrants may just need time to adjust to American life and culture. In fact, a period of living in ethnic communities may be what immigrants need to prepare for mainstream society. Given the core of Catholic social teaching, any political candidate who impedes this process or betrays a hostile attitude toward immigrants would be found wanting.

SHARING PROSPERITY

The prosperity of the United States is not only attractive, according to the Catechism it places a special obligation on its citizens and elected representatives: “The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin” (CCC 2241).

The Church recognizes that a country has the right to monitor and set reasonable limits on immigration, especially now when the threat of terrorist infiltration raises concerns about immigrants from the Middle East. The United States may also protect its cultural patrimony, which some immigrants

to America do not share. But citizens should not fall into nationalist rhetoric that would reject most immigrants both now and in the future.

However much Catholics remember the Irish, German, Italian, Polish, Hungarian, and other Eastern European immigrants, they still do not recognize the importance of the Hispanic dimension of the American Church. Thirty-nine percent of Catholics in the United States are Hispanic, and 71 percent of the growth among U.S. Catholics since 1960 has been Hispanic.

UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANTS

Immigration policy directly impacts the present and future of the Church while reflecting indirectly its American heritage. The impact of the post-9-11 political environment should not become a reason for not meeting the quota of legal immigration. It should also not deter policy makers from addressing the legal status and problems of millions of undocumented immigrants, most of whom are Hispanic Catholics, who are paying taxes, creating wealth, and playing a necessary role in the labor force.

The issue of immigration extends beyond the question of who and how many to welcome into our country. It includes the protection of immigrant workers from exploitation, the promotion of family reunification, the rights to return to homeland, the access to public benefits and citizenship, the full protection of the law, and the development of a legalization program to undocumented immigrants.

Summary:

1. A nation should seek to accommodate the immigrant who for just reasons seeks greater access to the basic goods of life.
2. Political leaders and citizens should recognize the reality of human interdependence that crosses all borders and all national identities.
3. The immigrant is a person who deserves the same protection of law and social benefits afforded to citizens.

21. The Environment

“Man, who discovers his capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his own work, forgets that this is always based on God’s prior and original gift of the things that are. Man thinks that he can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which man can indeed develop but must not betray” (Centesimus Annus, 37).

Man’s relationship with the environment is subject to various principles of Catholic social teaching, such as solidarity and prudence, and the preferential

option for the poor. The Church does not think environmental issues can be resolved through economic or scientific means alone-the underlying moral and cultural causes must be addressed if changes are to become permanent.

STEWARDSHIP ROLE

Since creation, the Church teaches, men and women have been made the stewards of this world. Despite this authority, we do not have an unfettered rule over the environment. Our control is subject to the same restrictions that are imposed on governing bodies: Just as governments serve to protect the common good, so too must we recognize our solidarity with nature.

Prudence requires that nations and their leaders apply intelligence when making decisions that affect the environment. Unfortunately, some are more concerned with meeting their economic and consumer goals than in responsibly carrying out their stewardship roles. As a result, the common good has been threatened from an array of environmental issues, including pollution and nuclear waste.

Although environmental conditions have improved in recent years, there is still the need for vigilance, especially in developing countries. The primary victims of environmental problems, such as pollution, are often the most vulnerable.

As a matter of solidarity, the international community must provide assistance. The developed nations of the world have experience in creating efficient and ecologically sound technologies. By sharing their knowledge, affluent nations could help their less developed neighbors build effective industries, promote economic growth, and foster prosperity.

CONSUMERISM

Arguably the more significant factor in the environmental crises has been the rise of consumerism and over-consumption: "In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become a part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few" (Pope John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis*, III.13).

The Church teaches that our desire for material goods, shaped from the world's natural resources, should never surpass our concern for the common good. Yet affluent nations, the chief perpetrators, have been slow to change their excessive consumerism.

One prime example of this reluctance is the West's continued dependence on oil. More than thirty years after the gas shortages of the 1970s, government leaders are still discussing incentives and strategies to move to alternative energy sources. Although numerous automotive technologies have been developed to lower the U.S. consumption of oil, auto manufacturers and the buying public have been slow to adapt.

POPULATION CONTROL

Rather than addressing issues of protecting natural resources or curbing consumerism, the affluent nations tend to focus more on reducing third-world birth rates. Foreign aid packages that are sent to Africa from USAID and other federally-funded relief organizations often contain materials directed towards population control, i.e., contraception and voluntary sterilization. Even if these initiatives were successful, the impact on the environment would not be nearly as significant as reduced consumption. The sheer number of people is not the problem. Some of the most densely populated areas of the world are both affluent and ecologically secure.

In truth, the leaders of the developed world have taken steps to curb their excessive consumerism. But men and women, the natural stewards of all creation, must continue to focus their creativity on more responsible development: “Even as humanity’s mistakes are at the root of earth’s travail today, human talents and invention can and must assist in its rebirth and contribute to human development.” (USCCB, *Renewing the Earth*, IV.B)

Summary:

1. From Creation, human beings are given special responsibility as stewards of the earth.
 2. As part of its duty to the common good, the government should prevent unnecessary harm to natural resources.
 3. Government should also use creative and technological skill, in concert with global cooperation, to reverse existing environmental damage.
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