

While All Faithful Citizenship Issues Important, Not All Are Equal

by

Most Reverend Richard G. Lennon

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In the document *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* the Catholic Bishops of our country stated that their purpose in presenting this teaching to the faithful was “to help Catholics form their consciences in accordance with God’s truth.” The bishops further taught that in making choices in political life every individual Catholic is called to do so “in light of a properly formed conscience.” I am pleased to have been a member of the Bishops’ Conference that presented this document to our Catholic people, and indeed to all people of good will.

As we fast approach Election Day 2008, I am concerned about many things that are being said about the teaching of the bishops. From listening to many good and sincere people who are preparing to fulfill their duty to vote as Catholics and citizens, I realize they are confused in light of what is being said by certain people. For example, we hear from some that the issues and concerns raised in *Faithful Citizenship* are all equally important as they all impact human life. This is not at all what *Faithful Citizenship* taught.

While all the issues presented in the teaching of *Faithful Citizenship* are significant, they are not all equally significant. To suggest that all of the issues are of equal value is not what the bishops taught, nor what the Catholic Church has taught and continues to teach. The Church teaches that “there are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with the love of God and neighbor.” This is taught because such actions go against the true good of persons; thus, “they must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned.” This is why our Catholic teaching has labeled such actions as intrinsically evil. Certainly, abortion and euthanasia, direct attacks on human life, stand out as intrinsically evil actions among other attacks on human life.

This teaching on intrinsically evil actions admits of no exception or compromise for it is rooted in the moral law which is the very heart of our Catholic belief. God has taught through Revelation that human life is to be protected and respected, for it is gift from God.

Faithful Citizenship goes on to speak about other issues that may enhance human life, which are important matters. However, we need to first recognize that these issues only matter if human life itself is a value of fundamental priority and is always protected. If human life is expendable, then these other issues really lose much of their significance. Second, we need to appreciate that Catholic teaching on these life-enhancing issues admits to the legitimacy of different approaches in addressing a particular issue or of realizing a desired outcome. For example, the Church teaches the value of striving for an immigration policy that is responsive to the current situation, acknowledges our history as a country accepting “new people”, and asserts our responsibility to be a welcoming people for those who suffer greatly. Having presented such a teaching on the dignity of life, the Bishops encourage all to add their contribution to the public discourse striving to find a just resolution to this issue that affects so many people.

As you can see, this teaching of the bishops on immigration like the other life-enhancing issues mentioned in *Faithful Citizenship* fundamentally differs from that on abortion and euthanasia. The teaching on abortion and euthanasia are based on “God’s truth” regarding the dignity and sacredness of all human life, whereas the other issues, relying upon the acceptance “God’s truth” on human life, then strive to build it up, to enhance its quality, and further justice and peace. The first group of issues is essential and foundational and can never be compromised. The second group depends upon that foundation being securely in place, so that all human life which is sacred may be protected.

It is my hope that these few words may help dispel confusion flowing from misrepresentations stating or implying that all issues noted in *Faithful Citizenship* are of equal value. As we all prepare for Election Day let us be guided by our Catholic faith and teaching which respects the inestimable value and dignity of every human life, for without Respect for Life, what is there left to respect?