

Forming consciences for faithful citizenship



Archbishop
Alfred C.
HUGHES

Most of you are aware that the bishops have released a document entitled "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship." It is intended to help Catholics to form a responsible conscience, informed by the Church's teaching and related to the practical issues that face us in our society today. It is not intended to be a voter's guide. The Catholic Church eschews a partisan stance. There is no party today and one would be hard put to find a candidate who embraces all of the positions that a well-formed conscience should espouse.

The Catholic Church teach-

es that it is important for every Catholic to become involved in elections, including registering and voting. This obligation also extends to participation in the political process. We need to inform our elected officials and those who are running for office about the positions that are important to us.

Most of all, we have a responsibility to ensure that we have well-informed consciences. The conscience is that practical judgment which God has given to us to help us come to know the truth and to help make decisions about how best to apply truth in the circumstances of life.

Some acts are always wrong. We call them intrinsically evil. They directly and intentionally violate fundamental laws of human nature. For instance, it is not legitimate to participate and/or support attacks on innocent human life. The obvious case is abortion, which ends the lives of more than a million children each year. But it also includes human cloning and the destruction of human embryos in scientific research. Other attacks on

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human life include torture, genocide, terrorism, the targeting of non-combatants in acts of war, and even the violation of human dignity in racism. These are always wrong. We cannot lend our support to them.

The issue of war is always very difficult. There is a moral decision involved in engaging in war. There are further moral decisions regarding the way in which a war is prosecuted. The United States Catholic Bishops raised serious moral questions about the decision to go to war in Iraq. We now call for a "responsible transition" that includes a commitment to ending the fighting as soon as possible, while recognizing our responsibility to the people of Iraq.

We also must be deeply concerned about the undermining of marriage and family at work in our society. This is no time to redefine the institution of marriage or to devalue it. Marriage is not simply a relationship of convenience

nor is it a way to legalize immoral behavior.

The bishops of the U.S. have joined the Holy Father in recommending the abolition of the death penalty. The Church teaches that the state has the authority to put a particularly heinous criminal to death who continues to be a serious threat to society and when there is no other means to protect society from further harm. Since in the U.S. and in most developed countries there is the alternate means of life imprisonment without parole, we recommend the abolition of the death penalty.

The bishops have also taken a great interest in the immigration challenge we face today. We recognize that every nation has a responsibility to control its own borders and to protect citizens from people who want to do harm to a country. It is also important that the laws enacted regarding the regulation of immigration are appropriately enforced. But much of the immigration policy that guided us in the past has been severely reinterpreted in this post-September

11, 2001 period. We need a broad-based and fair reform of our immigration policy. We need a policy that provides a way for a temporary worker program with worker protections because of our need for immigrant workers; is family-friendly; offers adequate provision for due process; and welcomes refugees fleeing persecution or exploitation in their own countries. And we must address the root causes of migration. We are out of time for simplistic solutions. We need a well-thought out and comprehensive immigration policy reform.

Let us always distinguish carefully between the more important issues and those that are of lesser importance. We need to keep in mind that we can never explicitly support something intrinsically evil. In classifying candidates, we must search for party and candidate positions that help us best to develop a sound public policy in our country. God grant us the wisdom to know and the courage to do what a well-formed human conscience enables us to recognize as responsible.

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ARCHBISHOP ALFRED C. HUGHES
Publisher and President

MSGR. CROSBY W. KERN
Moderator

PETER P. FINNEY JR.
Executive Editor and General Manager
OFFICE
1000 Howard Ave. • Suite 400
New Orleans, LA 70113

MAIL
P.O. Box 53247 • New Orleans, LA 70153
504-596-3035 • FAX: 504-596-3020

General E-Mail:
clarionherald@clarionherald.org
www.clarionherald.org

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Political responsibility forum looks at conscience



Peter
FINNEY JR
CLARION HERALD

If abortion truly is the electrified third rail of American politics – touch it only at your peril – there was much to applaud at a political responsibility forum hosted by Loyola University on Oct. 1.

The panel of experts included Cardinal Theodore McCarrick, the former Archbishop of Washington, and John Carr, a driving force behind the U.S. bishops' updated election-year document, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," that clearly lays out the moral principles Catholics should consider in determining for whom they will vote.

The document does not parse words. The protection of human life and the preservation of human dignity are bedrock principles that Catholics must consider in forming

their consciences, which then should spur them to take concrete action in service to the common good.

Thirty-five years after Roe vs. Wade, abortion kills – and divides. Carr noted that in Washington, D.C., "more unborn children are destroyed before they are born than are given birth." Citing one example of a chilling circle of violence, Carr noted that "the state of Florida is going to kill the person who killed a doctor who was killing unborn children to teach us that killing is wrong."

And, he added, "I don't think it's working. ... Our bishops have said a nation which abandons its old, destroys its young and relies on violence and vengeance is in terrible moral trouble."

The Loyola forum also occasioned some serious head-scratching. Brian Bromberger, dean of the Loyola College of Law, suggested that while it is perfectly acceptable for the church to "exhort the faithful to observe certain codes of behavior," he opposes bringing religious beliefs into the

political forum because those beliefs cannot form the basis for "rational argument."

Bromberger was raised as an orthodox Jew, and even though he is "less than orthodox" in his current observance, he says he still does not eat bacon.

So, the Catholic Church's opposition to abortion – the direct taking of innocent human life – is simply another "religious belief," morally equivalent to a religious prescription against eating pork?

Cardinal McCarrick replied forcefully that this was not simply a Catholic point of view but a position that flows from "the natural law."

Adrian Dominican Sister Jamie Phelps, director of Xavier University's Institute for Black Catholic Studies and a member of Barack Obama's Catholic National Advisory Council, expressed her opposition to abortion but said the issue was "complex."

Cardinal McCarrick said it was simple. "Unless you are alive you can't have human rights," he said. "You take that

right away and then no other right is present."

Sister Phelps said she was studying both parties' platforms. The Democratic platform reads: "The Democratic Party strongly and unequivocally supports Roe v. Wade and a woman's right to choose a safe and legal abortion, regardless of ability to pay, and we oppose any and all efforts to weaken or undermine that right."

This year's Democratic abortion platform is even more restrictive than the one in 1992 when Bill Clinton ran on a promise to make abortion "safe, legal and rare." Obama also has promised to sign the federal Freedom of Choice Act into law, which would eviscerate all state laws regulating abortion.

As a Catholic "advisor" to Obama, Sister Phelps is in a unique position to challenge him on his abortion position. Hers could be a prophetic voice for change. Instead, she was vague about that challenge.

Peter Finney Jr. can be reached at pfinney@clarionherald.org.