

THE U.S. BISHOPS AND TRUMP ON CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Even should the alliance between the U.S. bishops and Trump should succeed, and Trump is reelected and abortion banned, to what extent will the full range of the Catholic Church's teaching on moral and social issues have any influence in a United States led by Donald Trump? In his statements, his actions, and in his policies this president has already indicated that he is opposed to almost all of the social justice objectives that the U.S. bishops' support in their 2020 voting guide document. It is clear that, if Trump is re-elected, the new judges he appoints will not only support his position on abortion, but also render decisions that favor his views and his policies on the other social justice issues about which the bishops are concerned. This could have disastrous consequences for the Catholic Church's effort to influence the moral and social direction of the United States. Intrinsic to the Catholic teaching on the dignity and respect for human life is the basic equality of all human persons. Examining some of the other moral and social issues that the bishops address in their voting guide document will show how unrealistic it is for them to expect that this president will support their moral vision and adopt their recommendations for implementing it.

In their voting guide document, the bishops clearly state that the Catholic teaching on the dignity of life calls for Catholics to oppose racism.¹ All forms of discrimination whether based on race, religion, sex, ethnicity, disabling conditions, or age are condemned. Racist behavior is listed as an intrinsically evil act.² Society, the bishops state, has an obligation to work to overcome the injustice of racism, and all forms of discrimination through the pursuit of such policies as protecting voting rights, supporting good policing, and ensuring equal education and employment for all minorities.³

Before and after his election President Trump has encouraged racism and attempted to politically benefit from it. He has quietly accepted the support of racist groups like the white nationalists, white supremacists, and neo-Nazis. The president's statements, his stereotyping of minorities, and public policies have constantly stoked the fires of racism in the United States. His handling of the killing of George Floyd by four policemen in Minnesota demonstrates that he has little compassion for the plight of blacks in the United States. He responded as the law and order president. His major response to the protests against the murder of George Floyd and racism in the United States was the threat of violence. In a tweet on May 29, 2020 the president called the protesters thugs and warned that, "when the looting starts, the shooting starts." On a June 1st conference call with the U.S. governors he said, "You have to dominate. If you don't dominate – you're wasting your time." On that same day, he threatened to bring in the U.S. Military against the anti-racist's demonstrators. Later in June on the 28th he shared a video of some of his supporters shouting, "white power" and called them "great people." On Wednesday, July 1, he called Black Lives Matter a symbol of hate. More recently he has come out in support of the Confederate flag. What is the likelihood that this man will support the Catholic teaching on the condemnation of all forms of racism?

Another important moral and social concern of the bishops' is the plight of immigrants and refugees. In the words of the U.S. bishops, "The Gospel mandate to 'welcome the stranger' requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking."⁴ To address the problems faced by immigrants the bishops support policies like comprehensive immigration reform which includes legalization and a path to citizenship, a work program with worker protections and just wages, family reunification

policies, and access to legal protections. It is evident to anyone paying attention that this president has already demonstrated by his words and policies that he is opposed to all of the bishop's recommendations on immigration. He wants to build a wall to exclude people that don't look and think like him. This is the man who called Mexican immigrants criminals and rapists and told some black and brown women members of Congress that they should go back to the countries from which they came. Is it realistic to expect this man will ever support the moral and social concerns of Catholic teaching on immigration?

Another issue central to the Catholic moral and social teaching is the concern for and care for the environment. In their document the bishops state that "we have a duty to care for God's creation."⁵ Citing Pope Francis, the bishops state, "We have a duty to care for God's creation, or as Pope Francis refers to it in *Laudato Si'*, 'our common home.' We show our respect for the Creator by our stewardship of God's creation because 'every creature is...the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world.'"⁶ The U.S. bishops call for all Catholics to support what Pope Francis calls an "ecological conversion."⁷ Such a conversion, again quoting Francis, "can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God 'as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable' (Rom 12:1)."⁸ In the 2020 voting guide document the U.S. bishops recommend some concrete steps that should be taken by society to protect the environment. These include effective initiatives for energy conservation and the development of alternate, renewable, and clean-energy resources.⁹ The bishops urge the United States to take the initiative in "contributing to the sustainable development of poorer nations and promoting greater justice in sharing the burden of environmental blight, neglect, and recovery."¹⁰

It should be overwhelmingly clear to the U.S. bishops that President Trump is not their ally in their moral and social teaching that calls for cleaning up the environment. Not only does this president deny that there is a crisis, all of his statements and policies since his 2016 election demonstrate that he is opposed to protecting the environment. During his 2016 campaign he called global warming a hoax and rejected the science on which it is based, calling it weather. One of the first things he did when he was elected president was to pull the United States out of the Paris Climate Agreement. His policies on the environment during his tenure as president have been an unending series of executive orders cutting back environmental regulations on the fossil fuel industries, power plants, auto emissions, and businesses. Most recently on June 4, 2020 he signed another executive order on the environment waiving the requirements of the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Acts, and the National Environmental Policy Act. On what grounds can the U.S. bishops expect that this man will support their moral and social teachings on the environment and their concern to protect our common home?

Addressing the issue of poverty, the U.S. bishops state that a special emphasis must be given to the Church's preferential option for the poor. While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, a basic moral test for any society is how it treats those who are most vulnerable.¹¹ To alleviate poverty in the United States the bishops recommend that social and economic policies support the creation of jobs, decent working conditions, just wages. equal pay for women and the right to form unions.¹² They support welfare policies that “reduce **poverty** and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training, and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and transportation.”¹³ They support affordable and accessible health care as a means of protecting human life and meeting the needs of the poor.¹⁴ “Health care coverage remains an urgent national priority.”¹⁵

Underlying all of these concerns for the poor, as well as all the vulnerable in our society, is the need for an economic system that serves the dignity of the human person and the common good. Drawing upon the words of Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium*, the bishops state that a “growth in justice” requires more than economic growth; it requires a better distribution of income and an integration of the poor into the economic system.¹⁶

It is clear that President Trump does not share the U.S. bishops’ concern for the poor and neither does he support their moral vision for alleviating it. In its 2020 budget proposal the Trump administration recommended cuts to food stamps, Medicaid, housing assistance, and other welfare programs. His record on health care is equally dismal. One of the first things he did when he took office was to attempt to repeal the Affordable Health Care Act which provided health care insurance for millions of people in this country who had previously been uninsured. After that attempt failed the president continued to attempt to dismantle the program through defunding and law suits. As yet, there have been no proposals from his administration to reform or improve the health care system in the United States. Health care does not appear to be one of Trump’s priorities. His economic philosophy is based upon increasing the wealth of the rich through massive tax cuts and deregulation, while simultaneously slashing social and benefit programs. It is basically the classical trickle-down economics which hardly ever trickles anything down. Through his economic policies he has redistributed the wealth in favor of the rich at the expense of the middle class and the poor. On what grounds can the U.S. bishops expect that this man will support their moral vision on poverty and their recommendations to alleviate it?

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¹ U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United State* (Washington, DC: 2020

digital edition, hereafter cited FC. www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf

² FC, no. 42.

³ FC, no. 85.

⁴ FC, no. 81.

⁵ FC, no 51.

⁶ FC, no. 51, Francis' quote is from *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, Encyclical Letter (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015), no. 77, hereafter cited *LS*.

⁷ FC, no. 51, *LS*, no. 219.

⁸ FC, no. 51, *LS*, no. 220.

⁹ FC, no. 86.

¹⁰ FC, no. 86.

¹¹ FC, no. 53.

¹² FC, no. 53.

¹³ FC, no. 75.

¹⁴ FC, no. 80.

¹⁵ FC, no. 80.

¹⁶ FC, no. 50, see Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, The Joy of the Gospel*, Apostolic Exhortation (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2013, no. 204).