

Prep



News

“If nothing else, value the truth”

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Burke’s Pastoral Letter and Catholic teaching

Alex Sciuto
Features/Photography Editor

On November 2, a mere thirteen days away, 95 seniors will have the chance to vote in their first election. Preparing for the election, seniors have many issues confronting them this November: pre-emptive war, abortion, health care, the economy, and diplomacy with nuclear-armed nations. Straightforward political commercials, attack ads, polemical talk-show pundits, prerecorded greetings from candidates asking for your support, and brochures chronicling the anti-American beliefs of both Democrats and Republicans bombard these new voters from all directions.

Five Intrinsic Evils

Add to this glut of information St. Louis Archbishop Raymond Burke’s pastoral letter “On Our Civic Responsibility for the Common Good.” The unprecedented pastoral letter, coming less than a month before elections, attempts to educate all Catholics, but especially those in St. Louis, on their obligations as Catholic voters.

The purpose of the pastoral letter according to theology chair Allen Boedeker, “is that Catholics recognize the foundational teaching of the church on the value of human life from conception to death.”

In the letter, which was released on Oct. 1, Burke defined abortion, human embryo intervention, euthanasia, human cloning, and homosexual marriage as intrinsically evil because, as the letter states, “There can never be justification for directly and deliberately taking the life of those who indeed are “the least” (Matthew 25:45).”

While the connection between abortion or euthanasia and the taking of human life is more obvious, homosexual marriage, human cloning, and embryo intervention are more vague.

“I was really surprised that the

archbishop chose to include (homosexual marriage) among his five must-pass issues, because there’s only an indirect connection to the others,” theology teacher Jim Linhares said. While the other four directly relate to the killing of a human life, homosexual marriage deals with the family, the institution that supports life.

Boedeker continued, “The reason that (Burke) is so vehemently teaching on traditional marriage is because marriage is by definition between a man and woman. To try to call any other union a marriage is a grave mistake, a false teaching. It goes directly contrary to what we believe God set up as the marriage covenant. It must be between two human beings of opposite gender because it’s only in that relationship that new life can in any way come about.”

For stem cell research and in vitro fertilization, Burke acknowledges that the actions may be, according to the letter,

“carried out for purposes legitimate in themselves, (but they) inevitably involve the killing of those embryos.”

Burke uses harsher rhetoric on human cloning, saying that cloning removes the sanctity from marriage and sex, while simultaneously transforming human beings into products manufactured by only human power without any spark of divinity.

Practicing Faith Through Voting

While Burke’s stance that the five above issues are intrinsically evil is by no means unprecedented or revolutionary in the Catholic Church, the second half of Burke’s letter, dealing with the practical ramifications of this Catholic belief, has caused a great deal of discussion and reflection here in St. Louis and in the United States.

Stemming from the intrinsic evilness of the acts, Archbishop Burke stated that these five issues must be the key issues for a Catholic voter in

N o v e m b e r .
According to Burke, every other issue—from health care to the environmental c a p i t a l punishment—rests on the assumption of respect for innocent life.

“Although war and capital punishment can

rarely be justified, they are not intrinsically evil; neither practice includes the direct intention of killing innocent human beings,” Burke wrote in the pastoral letter.

Heavily stressing the importance of respecting life, Burke stated that voting for a candidate because he or she supports
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Editor’s Note: This special mid-week issue of the Prep News is composed entirely of Features/Photography Editor Alex Sciuto’s feature on Archbishop Burke’s Pastoral Letter. The editors decided that the feature is important enough to necessitate its own issue in a separate distribution. We hope that you will take the time to read it in its entirety.

SEPARATION

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abortion or euthanasia is called formal cooperation, which is never morally permissible.

Linhares explained, “Formal cooperation is in a person’s intention, his willed end: if someone says, ‘Such and such a candidate supports abortion rights, (and) I support abortion rights, therefore I’m voting for such and such a candidate.’ Formal cooperation: it involves a consent. It involves an understanding of the aim,” Linhares said.

No bishop in the United States would disagree with Burke in his opposition to formal cooperation, according to Linhares.

The issue of voting becomes more complicated, however, when Burke moves into the concept of material cooperation. Burke wrote in his pastoral, “In certain circumstances, it is morally permissible for a Catholic to vote for a candidate who supports some immoral practices while opposing other immoral practices. Catholic moral teaching refers to actions of this sort as material cooperation.”

Material cooperation, according to Burke, is only morally permissible when certain conditions are met. The two key conditions are that there is no alternative candidate who supports the moral law in its entirety, and the voter must oppose the immoral practice the candidate partially supports.

While Burke mentions no candidates specifically, he mentions the abortion stances of both presidential contenders Senator John Kerry and President George W. Bush. Burke wrote, “A candidate may support procured abortion in a limited number of cases but be opposed to it otherwise. In such a case, the Catholic who recognizes the immorality of all procured abortions may rightly vote for this candidate over another, more unsuitable candidate in an effort to limit the circumstances in which procured abortions would be considered legal.”

Said Linhares, “I think (Burke) is (saying) in this letter that (a Catholic) may not vote for Kerry. ... I don’t see how you

can read this and not see that.”

According to theology teacher Jim Knapp, S.J., the Catholic is called to vote for “basically the lesser evil.”

While Bush supports abortion only for limited cases, “Kerry wants to promote and federally-fund stem cell research, which necessarily involves the destroying of an embryo,” Knapp said.

According to Boedeker, Burke believes that “the primary action would be to vote for the candidate which seems to most fully support the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning the preservation of human life.”

Knapp emphasized that Burke mentions no names in particular. “This letter is not saying, ‘Here’s what Bush thinks, and here’s what Kerry believes, and here’s Nader and the Libertarians.’ (Burke) is setting out the foundational teachings of the Church. ... It’s not the man, but the positions the man holds.”

Catholic Belief in a Supreme Conscience

Even though Burke’s pastoral plainly tells Catholics to vote for the more pro-life candidate, Linhares believes that Burke recognizes in the letter the supremacy of the human conscience. “Does Archbishop Burke understand that the person hearing it has their own conscientious decisions to make? Yes he does, he does understand that.”

Linhares refers back to Catholic doctrine. “It is the clear teaching of the Catholic Church that as long—and this is a huge disclaimer now—as long as you believe you have worked diligently to inform your conscience, and you have as a good servant of the church opened your heart and mind to its teaching and let yourself be shaped and formed by it and not resisted it, and nevertheless arrived in conscience at a conviction that you must act in such and such a way, you must act according to your conscience,” Linhares said.

Even though the conscience is supreme, the archbishop chose not to emphasize this in his pastoral letter.

Surmised Linhares, “The reason I think he chose to not talk about that was

because it’s a letter about informing your conscience, and if he were to say, ‘Of course it comes down to every Catholic’s conscience.’ People would hear, ‘Feel free to ignore everything I’m saying.’ What he wants to impress on Catholics is that this can’t be ignored. This is very tough. It is absolutely essential that you listen to your pastor tell you what he thinks,” Linhares said.

Linhares continued, “Does (Burke) understand that a Catholic could hear that, listen to Archbishop Burke, and then go into the voting booth and disagree with that. Yes, Archbishop Burke understands that. Does Archbishop Burke respect that? Yes he does. He doesn’t agree with it. He respects that that is the Catholic’s right. He’s telling them what he believes, and he’s not just another person, he’s an official local teacher of the Catholic Church, (and) he’s instructing them that they are breaking with their faith. They are sinning.”

Continued Linhares, “That means that (a) person could decide, ‘You know what, I kind of feel like I should vote with my archbishop. He’s thought about this, he’s my pastor, I’m a good servant of the church, I really could be wrong. And now as I view the whole thing, I think I should trust him and vote with my church. I’m not going to vote where I would have otherwise.’ He’s going vote with his conscience. Similarly a person could say, ‘I’ve listened to my Church, I understand what they’re saying, I even really respect it, however for me I could not vote for George Bush in conscience. I can’t do it, and I know my reasons, and I’ve thought about them. Therefore I’m going to vote for John Kerry.’ (The problem) is finally resolved in conscience.”

Knapp emphasized the importance of Catholic teaching informing conscience. “When a Catholic informs his or her conscience, one of the prime resources, sources for information and truth, is the teaching of the Church. The teaching of the church is 2000-plus years old ... to me that bears listening to,” Knapp said. “Take (the 2000-year history) and

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add to it God's promise to be with the Church and keep the Church on the right track. It would be a cold day in hell before I would presume that my little mind knew better than some of the greatest minds in all of human history. For me, personally, to say that I know better than (the church) would be arrogant."

A Church Divided

While Burke's pastoral clearly states that voting for a candidate who disagrees with the Church's stance on the five intrinsically evil acts is morally impermissible, there is no consensus on this issue for the entire American Catholic Church.

"This (voting issue) is difficult for Catholics because there does not seem to be consensus," Boedeker said.

Since 1975, before every presidential election, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has issued a statement summarizing Catholic teaching on public life and key moral teaching. In September 2003, the conference released their latest statement, "Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility."

The bishops listed three categories that should be moral priorities for Catholics in public life: "Protecting Human Life," "Protecting Family Life," and "Pursuing Social Justice."

In the category of "Protecting Human Life," the bishops listed abortion (including abortion for research purposes), euthanasia, cloning, assisted suicide, and the "intentional targeting of civilians in war or terrorist attacks" as actions which are always wrong.

The bishops addressed the issues of war, pre-emptive war, the death penalty, anti-personnel land mines, and biotechnology.

In May 2004, Colorado Springs Bishop Michael J. Sheridan, '63, stated in his own pastoral letter, "There is, however, one right that is 'inalienable,' and that is the RIGHT TO LIFE. This is the FIRST right. This is the right that grounds all

other human rights. This is the issue that trumps all other issues."

In his pastoral, Sheridan wrote that Catholics who vote for a candidate that stands for abortion, stem cell research, euthanasia, or same-sex marriage "place themselves outside full communion with the Church and so jeopardize their salvation." Because of this, these voters "may not receive Holy Communion until they have recanted their positions" and received the Sacrament of Penance.

In early June 2004, Cardinal Joseph

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Ratzinger sent a letter to Cardinal Theodore McCarrick and Bishop Wilton Gregory, president of the USCCB, stating that Ratzinger believed, "When a Catholic does not share a candidate's stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons."

While Ratzinger believes there can be circumstances where voting for a pro-choice candidate is not immoral, he emphasizes that all Catholics must be completely opposed to abortion and euthanasia.

After Ratzinger's letter, in June 2004, the USCCB issued another statement, "Catholics in Political Life," stating that the decision to give or deny Communion to Catholic politicians rested in the hands of individual bishops. The statement said, "Bishops can legitimately make different judgments on the most prudent course of pastoral action. Nevertheless, we (the bishops) all share an unequivocal commitment to protect human life and dignity and to preach the Gospel in difficult times." The statement also stated that, "All must examine their consciences as to their worthiness to receive the Body and Blood of our Lord."

Before this statement was released, according to the *Washington Times*, four bishops forbade pro-choice candidates from receiving Communion and 15 others suggested that pro-choice candidates not receive Communion. There are approximately 200 bishops in the United States.

Besides the bishop's statement, "Faithful Citizenship," many parishes are using Catholic Answers' "Voter's Guide for Serious Catholics." The voter's guide lists abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, and homosexual marriage as five non-negotiable intrinsically evil areas. "(In a situation) where every candidate endorses positions contrary to non-negotiable principles, choose the candidate likely to do the least harm," states the guide.

The guide also stresses trust in the teachings of the Church. "(Conscience) warns you when you are about to do something that you know is wrong. It does not itself determine what is right or wrong. ... A well-formed conscience never will contradict Catholic moral teaching. For that reason, if you are unsure where your conscience is leading you when at the ballot box, place your trust in the unwavering moral teachings of the Church."

The Church has indeed spent many years affirming the value of life. The discussion has been, according to Linhares,

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“always limited by our ability to perceive the world and what’s in the womb and think about its meaning. But for a good long long time the church has recognized that every conceived human being from embryo forward is absolutely unique and willed into the world by God, (and) therefore inviolable. ... You couldn’t find anything that’s closer to the core of our faith,” Linhares said. “The Catholic Church does not say the truth is subjective. It’s objective. But however objective the truth may be, all of us subjects out here have to come to an appreciation of it.”

Linhares thinks that technology has caused the Church in recent years place so much more emphasis on respect for human life. “Time is moving much much faster now. As technology has improved and our capacity to control and direct the future has increased, the stakes are getting a lot higher. We’re coming much closer to a time where human life can be bought and sold and managed as a product. The temptation is to regard human beings as products and not inviolable souls, and the spark of divinity is getting tougher and tougher. So what you see is the church drawing a stiffer and stiffer line around this saying, ‘No more. We’ve got to stop here and halt this, lest we become just products and not people.’”

Thoughts, Actions, Reactions

While neither the theology department nor the school has a specific policy concerning the teaching of seniors on this issue, 95 of whom can vote, individual teachers have plans to address the letter.

“We’re certainly not going to try and side-step (the letter),” theology chair Boedeker said. “The issue of homosexuality comes up (in my classes). (The letter) will add probably to the nuances of what I will deal with in class. Will I say to my guys, ‘Listen. John Kerry supports the legal status for same sex couples, therefore good Catholics may not vote for him’? No I won’t.”

Even though Linhares may not explicitly state Burke’s position, “it will

probably color the way things go in class.”

Said Knapp, “The students have been asking that we cover this. Even the ones who are not going to vote want to know what I think about things. I think some of (the curiosity) is just because it’s an interesting topic.”

Knapp said he would “take two or three days, after we return (from exams) to go through” the issues raised in the letter “very clearly.”

While Knapp will rely on the pastoral letter and the Catholic Answers’ “Voter’s Guide for Serious Catholics,” Theology teacher Rob Garavaglia used the USCCB statement, “Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility,” in helping his students examine the election before Issues Day. Garavaglia asked his students, “What moral issues are at play?” and asked them to make “a judgement (about) which of the candidates have a more favorable position in the light of the Church. ... I talked about how there are five issues that can never be justified, and secondly, these are the ideals and what if those conditions aren’t met, what do we do?”

While their pupils grapple with these complex and tough questions for their first vote, the faculty are also dealing with the same questions.

Said Boedeker, “(The faculty) are having great difficulty with trying to weigh the different values presented here. I don’t think anyone here denies the importance of human life in the womb. The problem I have with our present president is that he is anti-abortion in most cases, but I don’t believe you can call him pro-life. He has taken us into a war that was ill-advised to say the least, and I really think it’s a misnomer, a poor description to say that he’s pro-life. But in comparison to Mr. Kerry’s stance in allowing for and supporting abortion on demand, Bush is certainly more supportive of that basic right of life.”

The faculty vote on Issues Day adds another layer of complexity to the issue. “If the archbishop were to find that, 44 to 14, the St. Louis U. High faculty

voted for John Kerry, he would say to the faculty, ‘You should look at this, you did something if you’re a practicing Catholic you shouldn’t have done,’” Linhares said.

“There is something to be said that we have teachers who voted for Kerry in that mock election,” Boedeker said.

History teacher Jeffrey Harrison, S.J., in a reflection written for this article, worried that the “greatest obstacles standing in the way of (Catholic) attempts to end abortion is what many perceive as the disconnect between (the Catholic Church’s) words and actions.”

Wrote Harrison, “How do we overcome the perception that the Church is unaware of the tragic complexities that so often attend these decisions? How do we convince those who suspect that Church teaching is overly influenced by the peculiar bias of male celibacy?”

“I think if the Church announced that it would risk its tax-exempt status and speak out clearly and unequivocally in support of pro-life candidates, that this would give strength to the courage of our convictions. If the Church announced that it would re-direct the bulk of its resources, both human and financial, to eliminating the need for abortion by supporting those who would resort to it, not just through the time of birth, but throughout the life of the child until adulthood, would this not give eloquent witness to our belief that everything else pertaining to the common good issues from our commitment to end abortion?”

Knapp believes that “somebody’s got to articulate the (Catholic pro-life) position clearly. ... If a bishop is going to be a leader, a bishop has to be able to take a hard stand.”

Knapp continued, “The easiest target today for anybody when they want to criticize the church is to go back (to the Holocaust). The Church did not do enough during the second world war. That’s disputed, but when a man wants to speak forcefully about the evils in our own time, he’s criticized. I don’t think (Burke) can have it both ways. I would rather have a bishop who is not afraid to speak.”