

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 8TH OF 8

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”
- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 13

Since participation in political life is a moral obligation, Catholics need to form their conscience with the mind and heart of the Church on issues of consequence. This outline is the eighth of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This eighth outline will provide an overview of the issue of the environment.

Environment

As Catholic Christians, we are tremendously blessed to receive from God our Father the gift of this earth, what Pope Francis has called our ‘common home.’ Thus, from the first man, Adam, down to our day, we are called to work, revere and protect the great gift of our environment. Therefore, as our ‘common home’ is received as gift, protecting our environment is not ‘optional to the Christian experience.’ As Pope Francis remarked in *Laudato Si*:

Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. (Pope Francis, Laudato Si, 257)

To live out our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork it is essential that we have an adequate anthropology to appreciate the importance of our ecology. In other words, if we more deeply appreciate the human person, and the human relationships we engage in, the better our relationship can be with nature and creation. Again, quoting Pope Francis:

When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. (LS, 117)

There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature without a renewal of humanity itself. There can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology. When the human person is considered as simply one being among others, the product of chance or physical determinism, then “our overall sense of responsibility wanes”. (LS, 118)

The human person, the crown of God’s creation, must then be respected, cherished and loved if we are to in turn respect and cherish our environment. When we fail to respect the human person, we fail to respect our environment:

If the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity, we cannot presume to heal our relationship with nature and the environment without healing all fundamental human relationships. Christian thought sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures; it thus inculcates esteem for each person and respect for others. (LS, 119)

Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? “If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away”. (LS, 120)

In summation, when we vote as Catholics approaching the issue of the environment, we recognize that our care for creation flows from the centrality of the dignity of the human person. Because God has made us in his image and likeness, the environment in which he has deposited us is a great gift to help us flourish and create a culture of life and love. When we fail to see God in each other, we fail to see the gift God has given us in our ‘common home’: A home that we must protect, cultivate and revere for future generations and for the common good of all.

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