CLEAR CONSCIENCE

A CATHOLIC GUIDE TO VOTING

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Foreword

I'm not sure I even knew what the word *jurisprudence* meant as I sat in my first class with Professor Charlie Rice at Notre Dame. If I did, I know I didn't understand it.

Today, I look back on that class and still draw much inner strength from it. At a critical time in my life, it set my moral compass. I still see Professor Rice in my mind's eye: chiseled facial features, Marine hair-cut, standing strong and exhibiting an unusual degree of inner confidence and peace. Professor Charlie Rice was larger than life.

The most important lesson I learned from him was the first precept of natural law: "Good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided."

This book seeks to help each of us seek good and avoid evil.

It is timely. The world seems to be coming apart at the seams—COVID-19, racial unrest, economic uncertainty, all under a growing loss of faith. Domestically, we are blessed to live in the greatest and most free nation on earth. And yet everything is politicized, and hurtful exchanges of words pit friends, colleagues, and brothers and sisters against one another.

Perhaps, there has never been a more critical time in our lives to exercise our political freedom to vote; but perhaps there has also never been a more confusing period.

The stakes are high—the future of our children and our children's children.

So how do we vote? Is there a way to rationally measure the issues and candidates to ensure that we really are seeking good and avoiding evil?

Clear Conscience: A Catholic Guide to Voting helps us answer those important questions and guides us as we approach local, state, and national elections. It begins with a primer on the meaning of politics and the law. It draws on Scripture, natural law, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and papal teachings, such as the words of St. John Paul II. It not only provides a foundation for us to stand on as we cast our ballots—that is, a foundation that brings our faith, our patriotism, our morals, and our sense of fairness and justice together; it also builds on that foundation to provide specific guidance on contemporary issues, bridging our will to do good with the best policies to accomplish it.

This book helps us navigate the most contentious, confusing, and perilous issues of the day, such as the erosion of patriotism and the nuclear family. It analyzes and provides concrete guidance to issues such as immigration, poverty, guns, and the environment. And of course, it provides the principles that undergird our Catholic Faith's non-negotiable position on life issues.

What this book does not do is tell you who to vote for or against, and what issues and policies you should or should not support. Indeed, my favorite chapter is Chapter Eight, "Prudential Judgment." It starts off with the imperative that Catholics can never promote anything that violates the inherent dignity of the human person—and then quickly moves to the theme of the chapter—that the Church "leaves the majority of policy questions up to our sound judgment."

If, as I suspect, you thirst for authenticity and congruency and sacredness in your life, how you vote plays a significant

role in fulfilling that quest. As faithful Catholics, we have a duty to exercise our right to vote in ways that harmonize faith and reason. We have a responsibility to our families and the future of our country to seek good and avoid evil. This book will help you tremendously in that endeavor.

Kevin Cieply
President and Dean
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Introduction

This book does not tell you who to vote for or what position to take on each complex political issue that candidates and pundits debate every election season.

And as it happens, neither does the Catholic Church.

As you will discover in the following chapters, the Church is not a political party, and its teachings are not a political platform. The Church has authority in political matters, but only when politics invades its turf.

That turf is in the realm of the eternal. The unchanging truths about the dignity of mankind and the meaning of human life.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR POLITICS

Outside of those teachings, the Catholic Church leaves us free to discern what is best in our political environment and even to arrive at diverse political conclusions on all but just a few immutable "life" issues.

This is why no Catholic priest or bishop can order us to do or not to do anything based on our convictions about certain political issues, such as how best to address climate change. This is also why Catholics do not need permission from our spiritual leaders before we take action to defend our religious liberty when we feel it is under threat. The Church's leaders can offer opinions on such specific political questions, of course,

but their authority on such issues lies in the validity of their reasoned arguments, just like any other Catholic. Otherwise, no community initiative on many important issues could be undertaken without Catholics first obtaining permission from their pastor or bishop of each diocese.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), however, is clear in this regard:

> It is not the role of the Pastors of the Church to intervene directly in the political structuring and organization of social life. This task is part of the vocation of *the lay faithful, acting on their own initiative with their fellow citizens*. Social action can assume various concrete forms. It should always have the common good in view and be in conformity with the message of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. It is the role of the laity "to animate temporal realities with Christian commitment, by which they show that they are witnesses and agents of peace and justice." (CCC 2442, emphasis added)

As any priest will tell you, the Church *needs* Catholics "in the pews" to act independently in the realm of politics.

In practical terms, given the hierarchical nature of the Church, much of the necessary agility to act with urgency when needed would be lost if Catholics needed to obtain clerical permission before acting as they prudentially discern they should in the political sphere.

As the *Catechism* states,

> Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth. … Their activity in ecclesial communities is

> so necessary that, for the most part, *the apostolate of the pastors cannot be fully effective without it*. (CCC 900, emphasis added)

ACTING WITH A CLEAR CONSCIENCE

The responsibility of Catholics, then, regarding political life is certainly great. By the same token, though, taking a direct hand in the "political structuring and organization of social life" means that we had better know what we are doing.

After all, the policies we promote and the candidates for whom we vote can have enormous effects in the lives of many. Going about politics haphazardly would amount to being careless with our neighbors' lives. We need to approach politics and voting with a *clear conscience.* The only way to do this is by obtaining a *clear understanding* of the unwavering truths the Christian faith teaches about human beings and society.

In **Chapter One**, we will discuss the Church's embrace of the best of Greco-Roman political thought. We will see that human reason is a legitimate and God-given means of discovering what is best for us and our neighbors—and that politics is not some frivolous human invention; rather, it is as natural to us as the loving bond between members of a family. Finally, we will present the true purpose of politics—which is to make us "happy." (Amazing, but true.)

In **Chapter Two**, we will discover how the Church inherited and perfected the political principles of the Old Testament. God's revelation to his Chosen People gives us everything human reason has to offer and more. We will see how sin poses a primordial threat to our fulfillment and happiness, which is why God gave us eternal laws to free us.

Chapter Three presents the "political miracle" of Jesus. The Church he founded adopted and "Christianized" the best of ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman culture and shared it with

the entire world. The result? The invention of the notion of inherent human rights, a world in which governments are held accountable for how they treat God's children.

Chapter Four introduces the concept of natural law, which is the law that God wrote into the fabric of all of created reality. We cannot violate the natural law without serious consequences, any more than we can violate the law of gravity by "flying" out of a second-story window without suffering serious injuries. In this chapter, we will also discuss "positivism," the theory that political leaders can ignore natural law whenever they see fit. Positivism, in one form or another, is responsible for some of the worst atrocities in human history—atrocities that highlight the importance of Catholics like you speaking up boldly on behalf of the natural law.

In **Chapter Five**, we see why the Church has always embraced patriotism as a Christian virtue. Patriotism, though, can be twisted into a chauvinistic and unthinking national pride or a cringing obedience to the whims of demagogic leaders. True patriotism is based in nature. Just as we are called to honor our parents and our families, we owe our nation a special honor—because it is *our* nation.

In **Chapter Six**, we discuss the pitfalls of political power. When human beings have a great deal of power, they have a tendency to abuse it and end up hurting others. Historically, even leaders of the Church were overcome by this temptation when they found themselves with temporal and military power over lands and regions. We know that *might* does not make *right*. In fact, it is more likely to make us wrong.

Chapter Seven presents a thorough analysis of what a government owes its citizens, and what we as citizens owe our government. We have a place in our political environment, and if we abandon our role, we can expect the government to begin to fail or, just as bad, try to take over the role we

abdicated. Big government is not equipped to do well what we, our families, and our community are meant to do.

On a similar note, **Chapter Eight** helps us see the moral questions that we, as Christian citizens, must figure out for ourselves. The Church leaves many political issues in the realm of "prudential judgment"—that is, the realm of personal conscience. This means that we must be all the more serious about thinking clearly and conscientiously about our media consumption, our public witness, and our vote.

Starting with **Chapter Nine**, we will begin a Catholic "guided tour" of specific political issues, the first being war. Then, in **Chapters Ten through Sixteen**, we will proceed through a discussion of guns, poverty, immigration, racial injustice, the environment, human life, and human sexuality—and the implications each of these topics has on our political involvement.

Finally, in the **Epilogue**, we will discuss the immeasurable importance of religious liberty. In fact, without religious liberty, nothing in this book amounts to anything.

WHY EVERY CATHOLIC SHOULD READ THIS BOOK

As Americans and Catholics, we are blessed with a great political heritage.

We take for granted that all human beings have dignity and worth. We believe that torture, enslavement, and oppression are unacceptable. We accept that even the lowliest among us have rights—and that it is immoral to violate those rights. We even believe that violations of such rights should be illegal.

We may think these ideas are obvious or even cliché. Actually, they are *brilliant.* Throughout world history—and even in some places today—relatively few nations have known and embraced these principles and put them into practice.

Sadly, when it comes to world politics, abuse and corruption are more the norm than the exception—a fact that should make us see our own political order as all the more precious. What is more, our political heritage has been hard won. It has been carefully distilled by ingenious, courageous, and holy people over the course of millennia.

Think of our political heritage as a family heirloom, lovingly maintained by countless generations of our forebears. They polished it, kept it safe, and defended it from burglars. Many sacrificed their lives for it to ensure that we would possess it. It is now up to us to take ownership of this legacy—and hand it down intact to future generations.

A first step is simply to learn and understand the political legacy we enjoy today.

PART ONE
PRINCIPLES

CHAPTERS 1 - 7 ARE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS FREE PREVIEW

CHAPTER EIGHT
Prudential Judgment

Just as the American founders insisted on "self-evident" truths and "unalienable" rights, the Church insists that some moral principles are absolute in the world of politics. No Catholic can publicly oppose certain principles without falling outside the parameters of what it is to be a Christian. When it comes to politics, the teachings of the Church do not allow any room for Catholics to promote direct violations of the inherent dignity of the human person.

That said, the Church has no binding teachings about political questions that do not hinge on absolute principles. Rather, it leaves the majority of policy questions up to our sound judgment. These policy questions are matters of "prudential judgment"; that is, it is up to us to apply the moral principles of our Faith when we make these decisions.

CONSCIENCE

The Church teaches that each person has a duty to follow the dictates of his or her conscience. As the *Catechism* teaches,

> Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey. Its voice, ever calling him to love and

> to do what is good and to avoid evil, sounds in his heart at the right moment. … For man has in his heart a law inscribed by God. … His conscience is man's most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God whose voice echoes in his depths. (CCC 1776)

Here, the Church references the clear teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33), and "I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts" (Hebrews 8:10).

CONSCIENCE AND THE NATURAL LAW

As we discussed earlier, the natural law is inscribed in every human heart and mind by God. This law is knowable by all human beings, whether or not they have encountered the revealed law of God in Sacred Scripture. This is why natural law is the basis of all the Catholic Church's teachings regarding politics and why it is the measuring rod of all legitimate governance.

While the natural law holds sway over politics, the *Catechism* also teaches that it is deeply personal to each of us and ought to be the basis of every moral decision. So natural law's authority spans the spectrum from politics to personal morality.

CONSCIENCE AND DISCERNMENT

The Church teaches that each of us has a duty to deliberately and carefully "inform" our conscience based on the natural law and the teachings of the Church.

> Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of

> conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.
>
> The education of the conscience is a lifelong task. From the earliest years, it awakens the child to the knowledge and practice of the interior law recognized by conscience. Prudent education teaches virtue; it prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency, born of human weakness and faults. The education of the conscience guarantees freedom and engenders peace of heart. (CCC 1783-1784)

Conscience, though, has limits when it comes to politics. A well-formed conscience cannot endorse thoroughly unconscionable evils. The Church holds that practices that are fundamental violations of the dignity of the human person and the natural moral law—such as abortion, euthanasia, and sex trafficking—cannot be accepted based on a "judgment of conscience." To accept such objectively immoral practices would demonstrate that a person has an "ill-formed" or "erroneous" conscience.

As the *Catechism* explains, a person might have an "erroneous conscience" due to "ignorance of Christ and his Gospel, bad example given by others, enslavement to one's passions, assertion of a mistaken notion of autonomy of conscience, rejection of the Church's authority and her teaching, [or] lack of conversion and of charity" (CCC 1792).

POLITICAL TOLERATION OF VICE

The Church teaches that certain actions—abortion, fornication, drunkenness, use of illicit drugs, and homosexual acts—are gravely evil. Does the Church, though, require every Catholic to promote legislation against such evils? By

extension, should the Church condemn political parties that fail to support laws against them?

The answer has been alluded to previously. Here, prudential judgment comes into play. The free conscience of the individual can inform their political decisions on such questions. But this generous attitude on the part of the Church toward individual Catholics is paralleled in Catholic political thinking more generally.

Catholics who have a deep commitment to the Faith may be surprised to learn that there is a strong strain in the tradition of Catholic thought favoring the legal toleration of personal vices, for reasons explained more fully below. Laws rightly forbid vicious acts that harm others, like murder and theft, but leave growth in virtue to the individual. If Catholics were to claim the right to use political means to enact legislation against every vice, we would forfeit our right to object when others seek to impose laws favoring an incorrect understanding of "vice." Another way to put it is that we would fall into a sort of positivism, whereby we would be granting the state the right to determine what is good and what is evil for everyone, and the authority to force people to violate their conscience. This has been done throughout history. Communist totalitarian regimes believed that what promoted the good of the state was a virtue, which they made mandatory by law, while anything contrary to the good of the state was considered a vice and made illegal.

Political toleration is not merely a historically proven pattern but also a time-honored, traditional Catholic view. St. Thomas Aquinas states that "many things are permissible to men not perfect in virtue, which would be intolerable in a virtuous man."[44] He continues, "Human law is framed for a community of men the majority of whom are not men of perfect virtue."[45] Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that the purpose of human law

is to "lead men to virtue." However, he insists that the law must do this "not suddenly, but gradually." Virtue must be freely chosen. It cannot be developed by force.

> Wherefore [the law] does not lay upon the multitude of imperfect men the burdens of those who are already virtuous, viz. that they should abstain from all evil. Otherwise these imperfect [men], being unable to bear such precepts, *would break out into yet greater evils* … the precepts are despised, and those men, from contempt, *break into evils worse still*.[46]

This does not mean that Catholics should cease to call evil out for what it is or stop trying to persuade people who are committing grave sins to repent. In fact, Aquinas encourages Catholics to keep in mind that even sinful behavior that is legal will, in the long run, be punished by God. He quotes St. Augustine on this point.

> "The law which is framed for the government of states, allows and leaves unpunished many things *that are punished by Divine providence*. Nor, if this law does not attempt to do everything, is this a reason why it should be blamed for what it does." Wherefore, too, human law does not prohibit everything that is forbidden by the natural law.[47]

In other words, Aquinas wisely suggests that we cannot enact laws based simply on what the Church teaches is sinful—that is, by outlawing all sins through the legal authority of the state. But if we do not legislate by the simple standard of morality, then what standard should we follow?

Aquinas replies that the state ought to use the law—and with it the threat of criminal charges and incarceration—only against those vices that are likely to cause harm to others.

> And so human laws do not prohibit all the vices from which virtuous men abstain, but only the more

> grievous ones, from which it is possible for the greater part of the community to abstain; and especially those which do harm to others, without the prohibition of which human society could not be maintained.[48]

PRUDENCE

It goes without saying that Aquinas' argument here should not be construed as an endorsement of personal vice. Aquinas' concern, in keeping with the Catholic teaching on subsidiarity, is that a higher authority (a government) ought not to interfere with the free conscience of the individual. While sinful actions are always harmful, insofar as they wound our relationship with God, some actions cause harm to the life, liberty, or property of others. It is these latter actions that can be criminalized without violating a person's conscience.

As with any other moral action, a Catholic must approach political action in a way that obeys his or her conscience. That includes everything from voting and activism to sharing advocacy materials with friends or choosing a platform and campaign strategies when running for office.

The necessary element that connects our conscience to our actions is the virtue of prudence, "the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it."[49]

> Prudence is "right reason in action," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. … It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. … With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases without error and overcome doubts about the good to achieve and the evil to avoid. (CCC 1806)

While a properly educated conscience keeps us in mind of what is right in general, prudence is what tells us what to do in particular circumstances. It tells us how to do the right thing, but also how to do it in the right way, in the right place, at the right time, with the right people, and for the right reasons.

In conformity with natural law, your conscience ought to dictate first and foremost that you deal justly with God and your neighbor. As a Christian, you also understand this means you must *love* God and your neighbor. In your everyday decisions, however, including political decisions, there are often many equally valid ways for you to go about that duty. This is where prudence comes in.

CHURCH TEACHING AND PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENT

Let's look at an everyday example of prudence in action.

A friend, Amanda, needs your help. Her car has broken down. As an act of love for your neighbor, you could choose to give Amanda a ride, pay her taxi fare, or ask your sister Jan to pick her up.

Of course, you are free to choose between any of these alternatives. Provided your motive is just and charitable, any of these choices is objectively moral, based on natural law and the teachings of the Church. In other words, each option is an allowable "prudential judgment."

However, maybe you should not give Amanda a ride because doing so will make you late for a lunch meeting. Maybe you should not ask Jan to give her a ride because Jan is a bad driver and might frighten Amanda by driving too fast. Calling Amanda a cab might be the best option.

But one cannot claim that natural law or the teachings of the Church *require* you to call Amanda a cab or that not doing so makes you a "bad Catholic." Why? Because this choice is

simply a matter of *prudential judgment*. It is not a morally binding issue.

Moral decisions in politics, of course—such as legalizing prostitution or drug use—come with higher stakes. To look at a historical example, most Americans now agree that it was imprudent to pass an amendment to the Constitution forbidding the production, sale, and consumption of alcohol, thus ushering in Prohibition. In the end, this legal restriction only served to encourage criminal conspiracies, unsavory speakeasies, and the formation of murderous crime syndicates.

Let's imagine it is 1918 during the debate regarding enacting the Eighteenth Amendment. As a Catholic, how can you effectively argue against its adoption? One cannot argue that there is a morally binding Catholic teaching against the consumption of alcohol. There isn't, because the use of alcohol is a matter of prudential judgment. In this case, you believe that the prudential judgment in favor of Prohibition is simply wrong.

If you want to convince people that Prohibition is a bad course of action, you can only do so by arguing reasonably against it. You need to present compelling arguments based on reason and evidence. For instance, you can argue that Prohibition would result in negative consequences, such as the creation of a violent black market, gang-induced deaths, a lower quality of life for Americans who drink moderately, a loss of comradery and trust in communities, and a drop in public confidence in public authority. But what you cannot do is state that the Church forbids the sale and consumption of alcohol, because it does not. This is a matter of prudential judgment, not Church teaching.

From the perspective of history, we know that, despite the noble intentions of the Prohibition movement, the effort was largely an unmitigated disaster. As historian Michael Lerner points out, "On average, 1,000 Americans died every year during

Prohibition from the effects of drinking tainted [black market] liquor … [and] the corrupt Prohibition agent or local cop undermined public trust in law enforcement for the duration of the era … [and] the growth of the illegal liquor trade under Prohibition made criminals of millions of Americans."[50]

The Church offers invaluable insights—broad, natural law principles—that can and should be brought to bear on issues such as these. But when it comes to applying those principles to most particular political issues, we are required to use the same means as everyone else to make the case for the common good in keeping with our consciences—reason, rhetoric, evidence, and such. In other words, we must use prudential judgment, making every effort to argue reasonably and convincingly.

There are many policy questions that allow for a variety of options, none of which is definitively commanded or condemned by the Church. In the following chapters, we will examine several of these issues. We will consider which of them are matters of prudential judgment, and which are not. And we will keep in mind the great responsibility Catholics bear—a responsibility to advocate for the common good of our nation, outdoing our neighbors in both love and reason.

PART TWO
ISSUES

CHAPTER NINE

Just War

One of the most revered contributions of Catholic thought is the "just war" doctrine. This teaching is universally respected and used by world leaders and their advisors. The just war theory outlines the relevant factors that responsible parties must weigh before they consider launching any military action.

The *Catechism* begins its explanation of the just war doctrine noting that any just war must begin as a *defense* against an *aggressor*. In paragraph 2309, the *Catechism* then notes the four essential criteria for military action to be just:

- "The damage inflicted by the aggressor … must be lasting, grave, and certain."
- "All other means of putting an end to [the conflict] must have been shown to be impractical or ineffective."
- The defender must have "serious prospects of success."
- "The use of arms must not produce evils and disorders graver than the evil to be eliminated."

The *Catechism* adds, "The evaluation of these conditions for moral legitimacy belongs to the *prudential judgment* of those

CONTINUE READING “JUST WAR” BY PURCHASING THE BOOK!

MORE CHAPTER PREVIEWS INCLUDED BELOW

CHAPTER 10 NOT INCLUDED IN THIS PREVIEW

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Poverty

There are many morally licit policy positions about how best to serve the poor and relieve poverty among our fellow citizens. Catholics of good will may disagree on various policies designed to help the poor and needy. For example, you and I are free to decide whether we favor a $7 minimum wage, a $15 dollar minimum wage, or no minimum wage at all. We are even free to decide whether the federal government needs to provide a "social safety net" at all.

These are matters of prudential judgment. It is incumbent on each of us to make our decision on such matters using reason and evidence. We cannot simply point to a verse in Scripture or a paragraph in the *Catechism* as a definitive endorsement of our particular position.

This is because Scripture and the teachings of the Church simply provide fundamental moral principles. While these principles are objective truth and must be accepted and obeyed by Catholics as a matter of faith, they are not detailed policy prescriptions. The Catholic Church is not a political party but a divine institution whose mission is to sanctify us (i.e., make us holy) through God's grace and guide us to salvation in Christ.

With regard to poverty, here are some of the fundamental moral principles the Church provides for making prudential judgments regarding public policy:

- All economic activity must be conducted for the sake of the human person, made in the image and likeness of God.
- It is immoral to deny our fellow human beings the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing.
- In our efforts to aid the poor, we must not commit injustices such as theft, which includes the unjust appropriation of private property by the state as well as unjust forms of taxation.[59]

THE ECONOMY IS FOR HUMAN BEINGS

When it comes to economic issues, the Church wisely recommends that we never lose sight of a simple truth—all of these affairs should be conducted for the common good of human beings. The true state of a nation's economy needs to be measured by the welfare of its people. As the *Catechism* notes,

> Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his acts … [an economy must] provide for the needs of human beings … [and is] ordered first of all to the service of persons, of the whole man, and of the entire human community. (CCC 2423, 2426)

Thus, the Church rejects any ideology or political philosophy that treats the good of the economy (i.e., growth, profits, and power) as an end in itself, without reference to the human beings whom it is meant to serve.

> A theory that makes profit the exclusive norm and ultimate end of economic activity is morally unacceptable. The disordered desire for money cannot

> but produce perverse effects. It is one of the causes of the many conflicts which disturb the social order. … A system "that subordinates the basic rights of individuals and of groups to the collective organization of production" is contrary to human dignity. Every practice that reduces persons to nothing more than a means of profit enslaves man, leads to idolizing money, and contributes to the spread of atheism. "You cannot serve God and mammon." (CCC 2424)

Therefore, the Church rejects any totalitarian ideology that puts the economic good of the state above individual human rights and dignity, such as communism. Such political systems are built on a lie that human beings have no purpose beyond the achievement of material, temporal ends.

This same critique, however, applies to an excessive, ideological capitalism as well. The *Catechism* continues,

> The Church … has likewise refused to accept, in the practice of "capitalism," individualism and the absolute primacy of the law of the marketplace over human labor.
>
> Regulating the economy solely by centralized planning perverts the basis of social bonds; regulating it solely by the law of the marketplace fails social justice, for "there are many human needs which cannot be satisfied by the market." Reasonable regulation of the marketplace and economic initiatives, in keeping with a just hierarchy of values and a view to the common good, is to be commended. (CCC 2425)

As to how "reasonable regulation" should be pursued, we can turn to the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity, which we outlined earlier when we talked about guarding against corrupt government power.

When the *Catechism* speaks about state regulation of the market, it emphasizes the principle of solidarity, which calls us

to ensure that our fellow human beings are treated with dignity as our equals before God. The principle of subsidiarity is also helpful here. Subsidiarity, discussed earlier, holds that when social functions can be performed well locally, they should remain local. It is "opposed to all forms of collectivism" and "sets limits for state intervention. It aims at harmonizing the relationships between individuals and societies" (CCC 1885).

THE VALUE OF WORK

Pope Benedict XVI's observation that *reciprocity*, the capacity of each of us to give something to others, is at the heart of what it means to be human. The *Catechism* clearly has this principle in mind when it insists that "work is a duty" (CCC 2427) and denounces "work poorly done" as "morally illicit" (CCC 2409).

The notion of reciprocity is central to the Church teachings about poverty and work. The fact that the economy exists for human persons frees us from enslavement to purely economic pursuits. But it also places a great responsibility on us, since man is the "author" of work and not only its "beneficiary" (CCC 2428).

> Hence work is a duty: "If any one will not work, let him not eat." Work honors the Creator's gifts and the talents received from him. It can also be redemptive. By enduring the hardship of work in union with Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth and the one crucified on Calvary, man collaborates in a certain fashion with the Son of God in his redemptive work. He shows himself to be a disciple of Christ by carrying the cross, daily, in the work he is called to accomplish. Work can be a means of sanctification and a way of animating earthly realities with the Spirit of Christ. (CCC 2427)

We are the economy. Rich or poor, we each have a duty to care for the common good. If we are prosperous, we cannot simply leave it to the "economy" to bring about prosperity for others. Conversely, if we are struggling, we cannot "clock

out" and leave the hard work of providing for ourselves and our families to others or to the state.

In work, the *Catechism* states, "the person exercises and fulfills in part the potential inscribed in his nature. The primordial value of labor stems from man himself, its author and its beneficiary. Work is for man, not man for work." From that principle, another follows: "Everyone should be able to draw from work the means of providing for his life and that of his family, and of serving the human community" (CCC 2428).

THE FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS OF THE POOR

This brings us to the moral imperative of the just wage. "A *just wage* is the legitimate fruit of work," the *Catechism* states (CCC 2434, original emphasis). In determining what a just wage might be, the particular circumstances of the person must be considered—his or her needs and contribution to the work being done and the capacity of the business itself.

> Remuneration for work should guarantee man the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family on the material, social, cultural and spiritual level, taking into account the role and the productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good. (CCC 2434)

Here the *Catechism* adds, "Agreement between the parties is not sufficient to justify morally the amount to be received in wages" (CCC 2434). This is an important qualification. Given desperate enough circumstances, a person might feel compelled to submit to accepting an unjust wage rather than no wage at all.

THE UNIVERSAL DESTINATION OF GOODS

As Christians, it is our duty to ensure that basic, life-sustaining goods are available to every human being. This is the thinking behind what the Church calls the "universal destination of

goods" because "the goods of creation are destined for the entire human race" (CCC 2452).

According to this principle, the necessities of human life cannot be withheld from any human person. The inherent dignity of every person is not earned but given by God in the very act of his or her creation. Respect for the universal destination of goods, however, goes hand in hand with the right to private property.

> In the beginning God entrusted the earth and its resources to the common stewardship of mankind to take care of them, master them by labor, and enjoy their fruits. The goods of creation are destined for the whole human race. However, the earth is divided up among men to assure the security of their lives, endangered by poverty and threatened by violence. The appropriation of property [i.e., the possession of private property] is legitimate for guaranteeing the freedom and dignity of persons and for helping each of them to meet his basic needs and the needs of those in his charge. It should allow for a natural solidarity to develop between men. (CCC 2402)

BASIC NECESSITIES ARE A MATTER OF JUSTICE, NOT CHARITY

Quoting St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory the Great, and Vatican II, among others, the *Catechism* teaches that we owe all people the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing.

> Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs. The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity. When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice. (CCC 2446)

When we are capable of helping those in need, our assistance is not merely an act of charity or mercy. It is a duty of justice. We *owe* to those in need whatever we are reasonably able to give them. Similarly, St. Thomas Aquinas argues that it would not be sinful for a starving man to steal a loaf of bread. Not only would this "theft" be just, but it also would not be "theft" at all.[60]

> If the need be so manifest and urgent, that it is evident that the present need must be remedied by whatever means be at hand … then it is lawful for a man to succor his own need by means of another's property, by taking it either openly or secretly: nor is this properly speaking theft or robbery.[61]

This is a truly remarkable aspect of the Catholic Faith! Those in need are due what they need from those who are reasonably able to help them. And if such aid is not given, they have the right to procure it themselves. This in no way contradicts the seventh commandment, "You shall not steal." The *Catechism* explains that this commandment forbids "unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods."

> It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods *and* respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity. (CCC 2401, emphasis added)

While it is wrong to steal another's property, and it is wrong to refuse to work for what one needs, it is also wrong for those who have property to deny it to those who are in desperate need. The violation of either of these two applications of the seventh commandment leads to social breakdown.

PRIVATE PROPERTY AND THE ROLE OF THE STATE

The Church presents Catholic social teaching in terms of persuasion. It does not seek to dictate the minutiae of public policy. By extension, neither does it call for governments to micromanage social justice in their societies or nations.

As the *Catechism* states,

> The Church makes a moral judgment about economic and social matters, "when the fundamental rights of the person or the salvation of souls requires it" ... The Church is concerned with the temporal aspects of the common good because they are ordered to the sovereign Good, our ultimate end. She strives to inspire right attitudes with respect to earthly goods and in socio-economic relationships. (CCC 2420)

Note that the Church aims to *inspire* justice in the socioeconomic relationship between individuals and communities—not to *compel* justice through government-managed economies. When describing the role of the state, the Church projects a moderate series of duties, most concerning the prevention of serious violations of human dignity:

> The *responsibility of the state*. "Economic activity, especially the activity of a market economy, cannot be conducted in an institutional, juridical, or political vacuum. On the contrary, it presupposes sure guarantees of individual freedom and private property, as well as a stable currency and efficient public services. Hence the principal task of the state is to guarantee this security, so that those who work and produce can enjoy the fruits of their labors and thus feel encouraged to work efficiently and honestly. ... Another task of the state is that of overseeing and directing the exercise of human rights in the economic sector. However, primary responsibility in this area belongs not to the state but to individuals

> and to the various groups and associations which make up society." (CCC 2431, original emphasis)

CARE FOR THE POOR: A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

The *Catechism* contains several paragraphs that directly address the Christian duty to have a "preferential love" for the poor. That is, we are called in a special way to love the poor. It is our tendency to give greater honor and respect to those who are wealthy. We avoid this tendency by making a concerted effort to love the poor first. These passages confront each of us *personally*—and they reiterate the clear words of Jesus himself against those who fail to serve those in need materially and spiritually.

Rarely did Jesus speak as passionately as when he spoke of the abuse and neglect of the poor, whose misery he "willingly took … upon himself and identified himself with" (CCC 2448). Christians heed these words particularly in the corporal works of mercy, which "consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead" (CCC 2447).

Finally, regarding the public policy and legislation in serving the poor, it should be noted that the Church speaks *unconditionally* about fundamental moral principles involved (e.g., it is unjust to defraud laborers of their pay) but *conditionally* of the application of those principles (e.g., withholding a wage *can*, as CCC 2434 states, "be a grave injustice").

When the *Catechism* uses such language, it is a signal that we are entering the realm of prudential judgment—which requires sincere and careful discernment on our part, based on the fundamental moral principles taught by the Church.

CHAPTER TWELVE
Immigration

Regarding the migration of persons from one country to another, the Church affirms the simultaneous truths that people have a right to immigrate and also that nations can regulate such immigration. Understanding that two principles can come into conflict, the *Catechism* presents each as *conditional* rather than *absolute*—in other words, immigration becomes a matter of prudential judgment.

As with all matters of prudential judgment, debates about immigration are subject to reasoned arguments rather than definitive doctrinal teachings of the Church. Nonetheless, it is helpful to consider recent papal pronouncements regarding immigration and the safeguarding of human rights.

THE *CATECHISM* AND IMMIGRATION

In recent decades, debates about the United States' immigration policy have featured prominently among influential Catholics. It might be surprising, then, how little definitive Church teaching exists on this contentious issue.

The *Catechism* presents a brief discussion of the issue of national borders, taking care to warn us against violating the

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CHAPTERS 13 AND 14 NOT INCLUDED IN THIS PREVIEW

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Life Issues

Since every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, any deliberate killing of an innocent human being is a grave objective evil, forbidden by the fifth commandment.

ABORTION

From the earliest days of the Church, Christians have been outspokenly opposed to abortion, which was practiced throughout the Roman Empire during the first centuries AD. Early Christian writers had plenty of occasions to mention it.

Therefore, the *Catechism* cites St. Barnabas, Tertullian, and the *Didache,* a first-century catechetical document, when it states,

> Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law:
>
> "You shall not kill the embryo by abortion and shall not cause the newborn to perish."
>
> "God, the Lord of life, has entrusted to men the noble mission of safeguarding life, and men must carry it out in a manner worthy of themselves. Life must be

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EPILOGUE

Religious Liberty for the Sake of All

Religious liberty, the free exercise of religion, is a necessity without which we cannot effectively do our duty to God and neighbor. All of the treasures of Catholic wisdom pertaining to public life are meant not only for us, but for the world. In choosing to follow Christ, we choose to obey the God-man who commands us to change the world, and the lives of our neighbors, for the better.

Liberty is the key that unlocks the door to that great adventure.

In its passages on religious liberty, the *Catechism* teaches us that all men "are bound to seek the truth, especially in what concerns God and his Church, and to embrace it and hold on to it as they come to know it" (CCC 2104).

This is what we have sought to do—to assist in that search—throughout the chapters of this book.

Since *all* men are called to that effort, and not just us, it doesn't "contradict a 'sincere respect' for different religions which frequently 'reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men'" (CCC 2104).

"By constantly evangelizing men," we are meant to enable them "to infuse the Christian spirit into the mentality and mores, laws and structures of the communities" in which we reside, whether or not we live to see them formally enter the Church:

> The social duty of Christians is to respect and awaken in each man the love of the true and the good. It requires them to make known the worship of the one true religion which subsists in the Catholic and apostolic Church. Christians are called to be the light of the world. Thus, the Church shows forth the kingship of Christ over all creation and in particular over human societies. (CCC 2105)

Religious liberty, though, is not about gaining a prominent place in society for Catholics. Rather, it is about changing the world to reflect the truth, the order of things as they were created to be, infused with the happiness that is only achieved when creatures come face to face with what they are made for—glory.

Religious liberty represents the universal call of God to human beings. He calls out to all people—calls them to himself. As Christians, we have the great mission of answering that call by echoing it to all around us who may have grown deaf to it because of humankind's fallen, sinful nature. We are meant to bring to our world the generosity, the providence, the love-unto-death that Our Lord offers to all mankind.

As we read in the letter to Diognetus, God sent his Son as a messenger, not as a despot:

> Was it then, as one might conceive, for the purpose of exercising tyranny, or of inspiring fear and terror? By no means, but under the influence of clemency and meekness. As a king sends his son, who is also a king, so sent He Him; as God He sent Him; as to men He sent Him; as a Savior He sent Him, and as seeking to persuade, not to compel us.[132]

We are meant to approach our neighbors with a similar attitude. "Nobody may be forced to act against his convictions," the *Catechism* tells us, "nor is anyone to be restrained from acting in accordance with his conscience in religious matters in private or in public, alone or in association with others, within due limits":

> This right [to religious liberty] is based on the very nature of the human person, whose dignity enables him freely to assent to the divine truth which transcends the temporal order. For this reason it "continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it." (CCC 2106)

In other words, advocating for our own liberty as Catholics is incompatible with a desire for the suppression of others' liberty. Their right to seek the truth and, in conscience, follow it isn't based on whether they are Christian but on the fact that they are human—a fact which we as Christians are forbidden to question.

Finally, this universal acceptance of the humanity of our neighbors forms the basis of virtually all the moral tenets we must bring to bear in public life.

Voting is a vital way in which we participate in public life. It is one of our fundamental political rights (and obligations), hard-won by the generations that came before us.

FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS, WE MUST BE FREE

Think about it. It is Christians more than anyone else who hold the moral truths that make civilization flourish. Even practically speaking, it was overwhelmingly Christians and those they managed to persuade who led the successful effort to abolish American slavery. Today, it is Christians who lead the way in advocating for the unborn child.

Now imagine if Christians were suddenly removed from the public equation because of the suppression of our religious

freedom. Who then would speak for the oppressed and the abandoned?

Christ made us responsible for the common good, and especially for the least of our brethren, who live under the most clear and present threats to their dignity. It is by acting on that responsibility publicly that we gather allies in the service and defense of our fellow men—whether or not those allies join us immediately in the communion of the Catholic Faith.

That is why it is not an option for Christians to give up religious liberty. It is not some possession of ours which we can discard at will, and it would not be a simple, private act of self-denial to exchange our religious freedom for oppression.

On the other hand, we do not owe our religious liberty to ourselves, nor any of the riches of our faith. We owe it all to God, and to the neighbors he sent us to serve.

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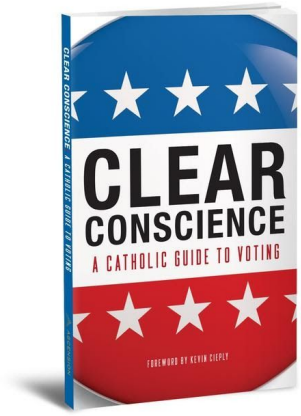

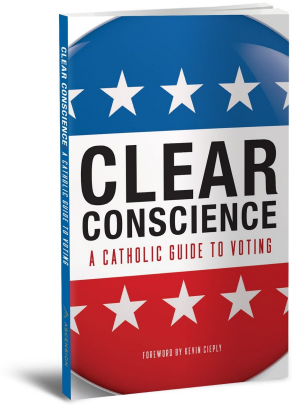

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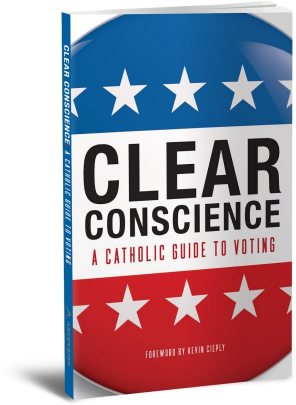

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