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"Trump Policies and Practices from the Perspective of Catholic Social Teaching" STEPHEN POPE

Good afternoon. This is actually my third time with the honor of speaking to the Elephants, because I remember the second time Bishop Gumbleton said this is the second time. And I made the most idiotic comment ever made in public or in private, almost. I'm glad my wife's not here to check that, when I said to the Elephants group that I thought the culture wars were almost over, I thought we're all done with this silliness and we're all going to agree to be tolerant; and we have important things to get done; and stop bickering and fighting. Lo and behold, we're back, vengeance culture wars.

So, I'm free to make mistakes here because I know that I'll recover and it is very nice to be here. And the good thing is I say, very few that are actually interesting. So, you'll forget all of it; and that the good thing is that you'll never get sick of me if I keep coming back, because you won't remember a thing that I've said. So, the task assigned to me is to talk about Trump policies and practices from the perspective of Catholic Social Teaching.; and I just see Catholic Social Justice here. But I do talk about justice because I think justice is central to Catholic Social Teaching. So, it'll work.

Outline of presentation

- Introduction and caveats
- Four moral principles of CST
- Justice and mercy in CST
- CST and Trump administration policies and practices: foreign aid and immigration
- CST and JD Vance's attempt to justify Trump administration policies and practices

- Concluding challenges.

What I'd like to do in the next hour is talk about little introduction and caveats and the key four moral principles of Catholic social teaching; and there, specifically focus on justice and mercy as essential, because I think you can't just talk about justice in Catholic Social Teaching. You have to talk about mercy and they're interdependent. Mercy is the tenderness in the heart. But, if you don't have mercy, without justice, you have sentimentalism. So, we need both. And then I'll talk about Catholic Social Teaching and Trump administration policies and practices.

We could be here for a year and talk about this topic. So, I'm going to focus on immigration and cut to foreign aid as a window into, I think, a problem that runs throughout these policies and practices, which is, I, think I would say, fundamentally, there is no sense of the dignity of the human person. That's why, I think, if I'm going to say the core of the core; that's it. And then, we'll talk about specifically J.D. Vance, who's a Catholic convert and sees a Catholic justification for these Trump administration practices and policies. So, I want to focus on the justification. It makes it a little more interesting.

I think my worry about this talk is it's going to be boring because I'm preaching to the choir; and I feel like when I come to the Elephants, I feel like you are my people and what I in the back of my mind the first thing I think is baby boomers of the world unite - I wish my wife were here to enjoy this, because she's one of us - and then some concluding challenges.

Essential questions

How should we morally evaluate the policies and practices of the Trump administration in light of Catholic Social Teachings?

This moral evaluation should help us think concretely about what we should do in our own lives to better live the values of the Gospel in these very difficult times. This is a challenge posed both to our personal consciences and to us as a community of faith.

So, the questions are: the first question I want to ask, that came up in the prayer, which I think beautifully fits into what I'm going to try to talk about, is how do we as Catholics best approximate fidelity to the Gospel in our own context, in the situation we face ourselves with, or we're faced with, and this leads to two sub questions.

Secondly, what do we think is going on today? What is going on today? That's a descriptive question. How do we interpret the signs of the times in

light of the gospel brought up today? Fr. Tom Lumpkin in his introduction, talked about beginning of the task of being a Christian today and a Church today.

Thirdly, how should we respond to what's going on? How do we respond? What do we do? It's not enough to just sit back and evaluate, but what do we do given the situation? And they say, I think Catholic Social Teaching provide a framework of Christian and human standards". You don't have to be Christian to think Catholic social teaching has a lot to say. In fact, many of my students that are raised with nothing say, "I really like Catholic Social Teaching. I like the norms. I like the standards. I like the way they care about people. I just don't like the Church because they don't live up to it."

And I don't say that to blame the hierarchy, although they've got their share. I think we all need to live up to the standards; and we all have to duty, to testify to those values by the way we lead our lives. So, I'm not trying to throw stones at the clergy at all.

So, it gives us a framework of standards that can help us answer two questions:

1. How should we morally evaluate the policies and teaching practices of the Trump administration in light of Catholic Social Teaching?
2. What do we do about that? Okay,?

Caveat

So, my caveat is: I'm just a Catholic moral theologian rather than a policy analyst, or a political scientist, let alone a pundit. I'm just a guy who teaches religion, basically; but I do care a lot about social justice. A lot of things in my life have reinforced that from the time I was a young high school kid at Bellarmine High School, a Jesuit school, in San Jose, where the seeds were really uh laid for me and were watered at Gonzaga, and by my friendships and my work at Boston College; but I want to say that even though I'm not a pundit, or something an expert, the challenges we face are too important to be left to the experts. These are things we should all be thinking about. My goal here is to help us think through together how the values and standards of Catholic Social Teaching help us interpret, evaluate, and respond to the Trump administration's policies and practices. This reflection is not meant to take sides in a partisan political contest between Republicans and Democrats. Plenty of people are doing that. And criticism of the Republicans doesn't mean I endorse what the Democrats propose as an alternative. And I think this is a prophetic task. And that the prophetic task is: we have to call a spade a spade and look at what is the predominant form of I would say, injustice in our society right now.

How should we morally evaluate the policies and practices of the Trump Administration in light of Catholic Social Teachings?

So, I've been asked to focus on administration's policies and practices rather than denounce the personal moral flaws of Donald Trump and his close allies. Go to Instagram if you want to see plenty of that. You don't need me for that. But this is not a clear-cut task because the policies and practices of the administration really reflect the values and worldview of Donald Trump and the MAGA movement. You can't just peel them apart as if they're not related.

So, I'm very skeptical of people that say, "I don't like him, but I like his policies." I think that's an abstraction, i.e., a form of mental gymnastics. So, the topic is vast. Lastly, my last caveat: the topic is vast; my treatment will have to be somewhat superficial, given the time we have. There's a lot to say; and I can't say most of it; and there's a lot you could say, and I hope in the Q&A we can surface some of the things that I have to buzz by, because I'm kind of flying at 40,000 ft. I Don't have time to get into all the details; but we can go into what you want to go into.

So, the basic idea, the first thing I want to think about is: what's what does Catholicism, Catholic Social Teaching, have to do with the public world that we're in? And this is really going back to the distinction Fr. Tom Lumpkin made between Christianity, about saving your soul, which I called the theology of geography. It's a change of location versus; Christianity is about transforming the world, the Spirit transforming the world; and we're on board with the Spirit.

So, I think if you take transforming the world a significant part of our religious identity not a sideshow for politics on the that's not relevant but central to the Gospel, Jesus says, "I come to bring life and bring it abundantly." He doesn't say, "I came to give you an exit strategy." He says, "I bring life and bring it abundantly."

I think there are four things that Catholic Social Teaching can do, and in them, and plays a role of religion in public moral discourse; how we talk together as a society, not only as a Church but with people that are not, excuse me, sharing our faith commitments.

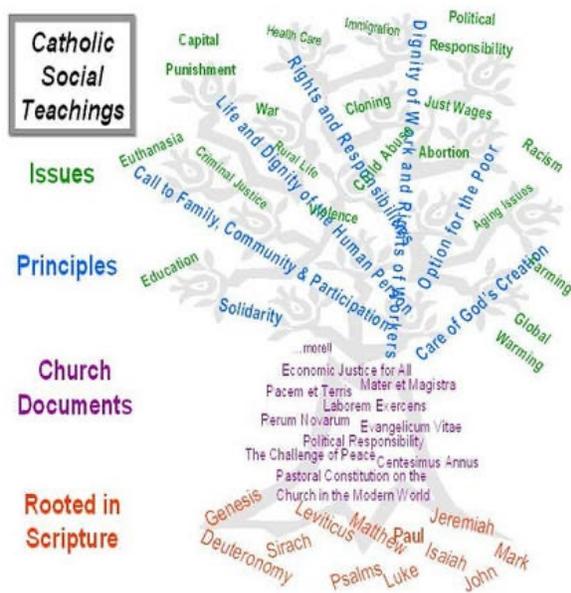
1. Catholic Social Teaching can help form consciences. Sometimes you hear the job is to form consciences. It really means that bishops and priests are forming the consciences of the lay people. But I think we're getting to the point where we're realizing, actually, lay people help to form the consciences of priests and bishops, especially the priests that are part of this kind of community, and Bishop Gumbleton, because they realize we're all learning and teaching. There aren't learners in

one thing and teachers are another, i.e., learners are one and teachers are another, one above the other. But there's a lot to figure out and it's not easy.

2. So, to form conscience, to deliberate together as Catholics about the common good. One of the things I'm sad about with many parishes is they're communities of discourse. They're not places where people actually talk in an extended way about what really matters.
3. Catholic social teaching can help us deliberate with all people of goodwill about matters of law and public policy on grounds that they can accept by means of dialogue, listening, appeal to the human good; that they can recognize the concrete evidence of what actually helps people and hurts people, what policies actually work, and what policies don't work. And then, to use reason to argue together. Let's sit and argue together about what's the best way we can live as a community. And then, finally, to shape public consensus while knowing that sometimes the Church, or we as Christians, have to defend values that the wider society does not find persuasive, e.g., on capital punishment, or on the recourse to the use of lethal violence in war. The Catholic assumption, and this is very going way back to St. Augustine, and certainly Thomas Aquinas.

After him, is that people are generally intelligent enough, amendable to reason and willing to do what's right when properly informed. But here we have a major challenge of course, because of increased polarization, cultural alienation, negative partisanship, where you hate the other the other one more than you like your own candidate, and animosity within the country poses a challenge to the assumption that voters are open to being presented with good reasons and solid evidence. And the very exhibit A for this is the denial of climate science. Many other forms as well. Election denial is another example. There's no evidence there was a stolen election whatsoever. But people persist. Millions and millions of people persist in insisting that the election was stolen in 2020.

The Church enters into public discourse with a collection of many particular norms, virtues, themes, ideals, goals—It looks like a tree that needs to be trimmed. How are they related to one another? Is there a coherence to the tradition of CST? Are some more important than others?



So, what we have here is, we have this big cluster. This is a list of all the different documents from the Church, Catholic Social Teaching; and then, the scriptural roots. It reminds me of a tree that really needs you, a hedge climber, or really needs a weed whacker, because how do these go together? It looks like a mess. It looks like spaghetti on your plate that got shifted on the train or something.

Four Moral Principles of Catholic Social Teachings

So, I think we can boil this down to four key principles and this has been common about the last 30 years to say these are the primary four principles:

- First, human dignity is the intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ. And that dignity is intrinsic rather than earned. It's given gratuitously by a God who loves us rather than something that we have to perform to get. It's for all people. It's universal. Not given to some groups and not others. And it's equal in every person. Every person has equal dignity, which runs exactly against the way our society. And it's equal in every person. Every person has equal dignity, which runs exactly against the way our society thinks about what dignity is. The senator has more dignity than the person that's cleaning the toilets. the wealthy person in a in a you know a CEO of a corporation has more dignity than the immigrant who's working in the kitchen 12 hours a day to feed her family and in God's eyes they have the same exact dignity and we have trouble getting that through our thick head because we live in a very competitive society where there's a lot of people are driven to show that they have worth by what they can accomplish. I think that's the most important principle
- Number two, solidarity; and the rest are really unfolding from dignity. Solidarity refers to the virtue of enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods. If everybody has dignity, then everybody belongs. And if everybody belongs, everybody should be living a good life.

- Thirdly, subsidiarity is the coordination of society's activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities. In other words, people should be the ones who are the engines, the agency of their own communities rather than having it done for them. The ideal of subsidiaries, people do for themselves and the community provides the resources that help them do for themselves when they can, if they can.
- And fourthly, the common good is the totality of social conditions, allowing persons to achieve their communal and individual fulfillment.

Now, it's important to see, critically important I say, that these principles all have to go together and they're all interdependent. And if you just take one out, you distort it. So, each principle has certain strengths but also certain liabilities when taken in isolation from the others. And I have examples of where this can go wrong. Here is General Pinochet, the dictator from Chile. Then there's a flag of the Nazis, who were the Croatian militia that supported the Nazis, that were really Nazis in Croatia, during World War II. And then Joseph Tito, a Slovenian Catholic dictator, who was very big on solidarity but not very big on individual dignity. So, the common good without recognition of the dignity of every person becomes either fascism or communism. Solidarity without recognition of the dignity of others becomes exclusive in-group bias or xenophobia. Subsidiarity without the larger common good becomes myopic, parochial, exclusive and closed in on itself.

So, each must be interpreted in light of the others. For example, we cannot understand human dignity unless we also see that our dignity is upheld and strengthened by community. In what follows, I will suggest that attempts to use Catholicism to support a Trump administration policies and practices either ignore Catholic Social Teaching altogether or interpret them very selectively. So that's kind of the thread I want to kind of have you keep in mind as I go through.

Justice and Mercy in Catholic Social Teachings

So, in Catholic Social Teaching, the fundamental notion of justice comes from the Bible. And this justice has right relationships; that's fundamental relationship, not individual rights. Rights are derivative of relationships and supportive of relationships. And in the Catholic tradition, true peace is based on right relationships.

We hear peace is based on justice. If you don't have justice, whatever peace you think you're creating isn't going to last. It's not really peace. And this is rooted in the Catholic tradition In the Bible with Paul's metaphor, that

we're all parts in one. We're all different parts of one body. This organic metaphor stresses three kinds of relationships:

- Parts must be in right relationships to each other. Mom and dad have to be in right relationship with each other. Parts must be in right relationship to the whole. Mom and dad and the kids have to be in right relationship to the family. And then thirdly, the whole must be in right relationship to every member, so that the family has to be in right relationship to all the individuals in that family rather than suppress some or help some at the expense of others; pay attention to some and not others. You see what havoc that runs in families when that happens over a long period of time. Social justice concerns how all three forms of justice, as Paul puts it, “Social justice concerns how all three forms of justice must ensure justice to the least advantaged members of the community. If one of the kids has an ear infection, that's the attention you're going to get. And that's why God made that kid scream like a banshee or evolution or both. but you pay attention to the one who's hurting. It doesn't mean you don't love the others just as much, but it means that's the urgent need that you have to address. Caring about people who are victims of racist injustice doesn't mean you don't care about other people. Bless you. But it does mean that they need your attention right now, given the crisis situation that we're looking at.
- So, solidarity and compassion are the marks of social justice in the Catholic tradition. As Paul puts it, “if one member suffers, all suffer together with it. If one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.” Isn't that a beautiful line from Paul. “If one member suffers, all suffer.” So, think about this: How can we not suffer when our brothers and sisters in inner city Detroit aren't getting rehab beds to help them with their addiction recovery? How can we not suffer when people in prison are in there under very harsh conditions that are unfair and destructive of their well-being? So, justice, solidarity, and compassion demand that we respect the human rights of everyone, especially those most deprived of their rights.

And this is reaffirmed many times in Church teachings. I want to stress that what's distinctive of Catholic Social Teaching from the beginning is a recognition that justice isn't just a virtue of individuals or communities. It's also a virtue of institutions, and that evil can be perpetrated by institutions run by good people who do not know what they're doing is hurting people by the way that they run their institutions. So, Benedict XVI says, “It is necessary not only to relieve the grievous needs, but to go to their roots proposing measures that will give social and political economic structures a more equitable and solidaristic configuration. And by this he's talking about the preferential option for the poor.

Now, it would be no fun not to note at least that there are some voices in the Catholic Church and elsewhere in Christianity that are strongly opposed to social justice or at least very skeptical of it. One of the milder versions of this skepticism is from Bishop Robert Barron. You may have heard of him. And his worry is not that social justice is bankrupt or illegitimate, but that it crowds out more important religious concerns. So, his view is, "Let's not focus so much on social justice. Let's get back to saving souls." So, here's his worry. And I read this as a college professor for 37 years, dealing with students from all over the map, including those that are very fired up, as I said, by Catholic Social Teaching. And they're working in the soup kitchens, and they're working in prison ministry and just fantastic people. Most of them would have been priests or nuns if they were in the 1950s. But it's not and they're not. So, he says he complains that young people today applaud that the Church advocates for justice even as they profess little or no belief in God, Jesus resurrection, the Bible as an inspired text, or life after death. I would argue that this disconnect is at least in part a result of the hyper stress that we have placed on social justice in the years following the Council.

I wish I had time to respond to this because I think he's got it backwards. I think that the witness to social justice is actually what makes young people think, "Hey, you know, the church isn't all that bad. I hate what they say about gays. I hate the way they treat women." But you know, the Church isn't all that bad. I hate what they say about gays. I hate the way they treat women." But you know, if they can do that in the inner city, if they can be with refugees in Uganda, maybe they got something going." But Barron's worry is that if you talk a lot about social justice, you're not talking about faith. And I think that's an odd dichotomy.

Now, a little more harsh, Glenn Beck, you heard him, I guess, from the moans. He says, "I beg you, look for the word social justice or economic justice on your church website. If you find it, run as fast as you can. Social justice and economic justice, they are code words." And he means code words for people that are either Nazis or communists. He says that later on his editor said, "No, no, no. He doesn't really mean that. What he means is he's all in favor of charity but doesn't want justice." Again, you're dichotomizing, right? That's taking you in the wrong direction because for him, charity is about individual action. Justice is about sometimes redistributing wealth from the many, those who have, to those who don't have. That's what he hates.

So, we get Mike Pence, an evangelical: Christian Social justice is merely secular. He says, "The church is here to be a force for bringing people to Christ, preaching the Gospel, saving souls. I miss the first days of the Church." It's like he was a 2,000-year old guy. "I miss those first days of the Church where the priority was just to preach the Gospel. The purest, most

honest form of Christianity, simple witnessing. We didn't care for building schools or hospitals then just ensuring people had an eternity with God after this life." I guess he didn't read the whole Bible, because Acts chapter 2 and Acts chapter 4 said people brought whatever they had to the community, and they took from whatever they needed. It didn't say they a building that they've set up and a franchise in order to deliver food because people actually were sharing with each other. But that actually led to Catholic institutions like hospitals.

So that you need institutions in which people can give from what they have to support the hospitals, and they can take what they need when they need medical care.

Lastly, J.D. Vance, who I'm going to talk about a little bit more, refers to social justice as a radical left form of bias and cheating that gives self-styled, oppressed groups priority over the rights of hardworking Americans. I won't comment on that. I don't need to with your with your rumblings, murmuring in the desert that Moses talked about. So, love is the basis of both mercy and justice. So, love is the basis of both mercy and justice. Mercy is love; justice is giving to those for whom something is due, what is due to them.

And Francis, you know, the main theme of his pontificate really, I would say, is mercy, mercy, compassion, tenderness. He couldn't say enough of that. And I, as I age, I just turned 77, I am more and more convinced that Elon Musk could not be more wrong when he says, "What's really wrong with the United States is we have too much empathy." I don't think we've scratched the surface on empathy or on compassion, but that mercy has to give rise to institutional commitment.

So, these are the two feet of love in action, or the foot is the foot of social justice and the foot of charitable works; and one should not be pitted against the other. We you just read a really nice litany of all the different kind of ways we think about human rights, political rights, economic rights and these rights in the Catholic tradition since John XXIII died in 1963, wrote beautiful encyclical material, "Rights is the key to justice in a society." And I think that was picked up in Vatican II and developed by the fathers of Vatican II. And in Paul VI, you have this notion of integral human development. So, integral human development includes the right to life, freedom, the necessities of life such as food, water, clothing, shelter, medicine, and the goods that facilitate leading a full life such as education, culture, employment, medical, dental, and mental health care and property.

So, the Catholic integral human development means we're not aiming at just survival, although that has to be a start. But what is it? How do we organize our

communities so that everyone has a chance to live a truly flourishing, dignified life so they can look get up in the mirror and look at themselves and say, "I like the life I live and I'm proud of the person that I am." And how many people can't say that? Many, many millions of people can't say that.

So, here's on one slide, what I think is the essential, social ethical vision of contemporary Catholic social teaching. By contemporary, I mean since 1960, since Pope John XXIII, Catholic social teaching has strongly supported broadly liberal democratic political principles combined with broadly social welfare market economic policies. When I say liberal here, I don't mean Teddy Kennedy or AOC. I mean John Locke, James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, that classical sense of liberal, emphasizing the freedom society. The best society is the one that leaves us most secure but also most free to live the lives we would like to live.

Catholic Social Teaching judges this broad political economic framework as generally more in keeping with the values of the Gospel than the alternatives. Properly interpreted human dignity is best promoted in one political arrangements that allow citizens freely to determine directly or indirectly the laws and policies under which they must live. And two: economic arrangements that enable them freely to participate in the economic life of their society when making decisions about the production and distribution of goods and services. The key word is participation. To be participants, you have to be empowered. And to be empowered, you have to have a context, a condition, a community, a framework that allows you to develop your talents and energy and agency.

Because individualism runs the risk of determining the common good, undermining the common good. This western ideal requires a strong commitment to social welfare measures that both enable people to enjoy a decent standard of living. A safety net under which that a safety net that catches everyone and doesn't let people drop through huge holes and that facilitates their ability to act as agents in their own lives.

Competition and free markets can be very useful elements of economic systems, but market forces do not regularly meet the needs of millions of people in this country, let alone in the world and they do not automatically produce distributive justice, justice in distribution of goods and services. If the private sector does not provide opportunities that enable people to meet their basic needs, then the state must intervene. This is Catholic Social Teaching. This is an important element of the principle of subsidiarity. The solution to a problem must be found at the most appropriate level. If the market doesn't solve the problem, we have to use human institutions to solve the problem as much as needed, but not but not more than needed. This also exemplifies solidarity laws and policies that reflect that we are one

society, one people and that no one should be discarded. You recognize that as a big theme from Pope Francis, that we people are not to be thrown away like our used egg cartons and orange juice cartons.

I think today, this is my emphasis, but I can't we can't go into this here because I'm I want to get back to the Trump stuff. But today's severe economic inequality and extreme wealth concentration violate all four principles of Catholic Social Teaching. The richest 1% now owns one-third of all U.S. wealth, while the middle class is shrinking and low-income households are stuck.

So, Catholic Social Teaching here emphasizes the importance of prudence, the virtue of practical wisdom, practical decision-making, that sound principles and moral concern, which is what you get from Catholic Social Teaching, confer neither practical skill nor technical expertise. So, Catholic Social Teaching can't give us a blueprint of what we should do in our society in Detroit in 2025 or Boston 2025. That's what we have to do. Take the principles and think how can we implement them here given our constraints and our opportunities.

So, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Church wisely points out that the Church does not wish to exercise political power. That wasn't always the case. I just came from Ireland, believe me, or eliminate the freedom of opinion among Catholics regarding contingent questions. What's the best way to get people employed? Those are contingent questions. Instead, it intends, as is its proper function, to instruct and illuminate the consciences of the faithful, particularly those involved in political life, so that their actions may always serve the integral promotion of the human person and common good.

So, in other words, there's lots of room for disagreement about policy and that involves empirical matters and forecasting and statistical models and all that stuff has to be debated and it's a kind of go through trial-and-error experiences, and so forth. But what the Church is saying here is, we have these principles that really are inviolable, and we have to think about how we implement them; and are we thinking about juggling these four principles. If we have a way of dealing with these problems in which one of the one or two of the balls is dropped, we're making a big mistake. We got to go back and gather them up and see how can we do it better.

So, I want to look now. We talked about justice. We talked about social justice, right relationships. We talked about human rights; and I quoted J.D. Vance as against social justice because he says that, I think actually he's defending a kind of social justice; but I would call it nationalistic social justice. Here's what I mean. So, Vance converted to Catholicism in 2019 and describes himself as having been influenced by Catholic Social Teaching. He focuses on overcoming the injustice done to members of the

working class whom he considers real Americans., i.e., working-class low-income people. He came out of Appalachia. He wrote the Hillbilly Allergy to talk about the immense suffering his family went through: addiction, violence, domestic abuse, you name it. It's a litany of great suffering. Vance's approach though is, I got up and out rather than this is the result of structural injustices, that it becomes a morality tale of his heroic overcoming of the odds rather than an understanding that there are many people that don't have the breaks that he got to get out, that don't have his intelligence to go to Yale law school, for example.

Catholic Social Teachings and Trump Policies and Practices

So, here are some points where I think worth considering that Catholic Social Teaching agrees with Vance that every member of the working class deserves a real opportunity to lead a stable life to have access to a productive life, sustaining employment to enjoy a rich family life, and to live in a safe healthy life in healthy safe communities.

Catholic Social Teaching does not in principle rule out reasonable tariffs and tax incentives that encourage the revitalization of domestic manufacturing. Note: I put the emphasis on reasonable there. Thirdly, Catholic social teaching is positively sympathetic to Vance's desire to raise the minimum wage, to increase opportunities for workforce training and apprenticeship, and to pass pro-family tax incentives, especially the child tax credit that can help working families.

So far so good. But Catholic Social Teaching is highly critical of the administration and his own depiction of undocumented immigrants as criminal invaders who are poisoning our blood. That's not his language. That's Trump's. But he supports it. The cruel methods of mass deportation now practiced by ICE and the severe cutback of slots available to asylum seekers. These are people who are refugees, fleeing their homes to save their lives and the lives of their family. Cut back of slots available to asylum seekers from 125,000 in 2025 to 7,500 for next year. And of those, Trump is saying he's going to include 7,000 African whites who he says are subjected to genocide in South Africa.

So, let me pan out now that I've given you a little bit. I've tried to be fair to Trump, to Vance, and Trump implicitly. I'm trying to be fair, but honest about the gap which I want to talk about now. So, Catholic Social Teaching and the Trump administration: the big picture to put a lot of discussion into a few words. A lot of potential discussion. I think the Trump administration policies are undermining classical liberal norms in that it is repeatedly eroding respect for the rule of law. For example, by trying to prosecute political enemies, curtailing the exercise of voting rights, dismantling democratic accountability, firing ombudsman, special inspectors, weakening the separation of powers and the system of checks

and balances, curtailing First Amendment rights, etc. I think this is the biggest problem; and Vance's defense of it is also a big problem. The Trump administration is also at odds with Catholic Social Teaching in significantly dismantling the social welfare safety net. It's pretty clear that the Trump administration wants to undo the great society of Lyndon Johnson; and I would even say, he wants to undo the New Deal.

And we see this dismantling of the social welfare net safety net in the reduction in this attempt to reduce access to SNAP to Medicaid and to and now we that we did not, the Democrats did not, get the ability to have Congress authorize subsidies for the Affordable Care Act. That's going to leave a lot of people without medical care, millions of people. The US bishops have been largely silent in the face of the administration's erosion of the fundamental principles of our liberal constitutional democracy. Critical contrast can also be drawn between Catholic Social Teaching and policies and practices found throughout the executive branch. For example, in the departments of war, energy, health and human services, education, justice, including the FBI, etc.

So, I'm going to focus just on three things: the insurrection, cut in foreign aid, and then immigration.

- So, the Trump administration's response to the January 6th insurrection violates the essential values underlying Catholic Social Teaching.
 - First, truth is violated by election denial, which played a major role in provoking the mob to attack the capital, attack the capital.
 - Secondly, freedom is violated by aggression toward critics of the administration.
 - Thirdly, justice is violating by in many ways by pardoning rioters who violently storm the capital and attack police officers.
 - Fourth, authentic love of the country is violated by hate filled right-wing nationalism that regards fellow Americans who oppose them as implacable enemies.
- The second thing that I want to take a look at very briefly, is the elimination of US Aid Humanitarian and Development Assistance. This is personal to me for several reasons. One of which is that my daughter-in-law works for PEPAR, President Bush's great program on the prevention of transmission of HIV in Africa that experts say probably saved at this point at least 26 million lives nonpartisan agreement that it was effective across the board empirically shown to be effective and my cousin besides my daughter-in-law; but my cousin also worked for PEPAR. She was laid off. My daughter-in-law is furloughed. But last summer, I spent a month in Uganda working with Jesuit refugee service with ten students and a colleague. I saw an incredible amount of good work done by Jesuit Refugee Service in

Uganda from refugees from all over East Africa, Dominica, especially the Democratic Republic of Congo. And I saw the Jesuit Refugee Service save people's lives by getting them medicine for diabetes, hypertension, giving them medicine for measles, or inoculations for measles, mumps, and rubella. I mean, the work they were doing was incredible. And when the USCID stopped, the Jesuit Refugee Service had to fire 70% of their staff. And the refugees that were going there every day for it, for literacy training, to basic medical care, to rental assistance. They're all gone, and they have nowhere else to go. They're on the streets of Kampala. And I met mothers who had walked 2,000 miles with their children, sexually abused on the way in front of their children. If you can just imagine the horrors who now have nowhere to go. So, I feel this is a horrible thing. It's an issue of justice.

The bottom line of this is that the Trump administration has called for rescinding nearly \$9.4 billion in previously appropriated funds. Congress dedicated those funds; and the Trump administration wants them rescinded. Approximately 8.3 billion of this amount was designed for foreign assistance programs. Foreign assistance means emergency aid, clean water. This is for people that got hit get hit by a natural disaster, or for clean water because they don't have any portable water. But also, long-term development, economic development assistance, so that they can learn to be self-sustaining in farming.

Mostly 85% of US Aid Humanitarian and Development Assistance programs have been eliminated with the remaining programs. A fairly weak version of PEPAR folded into the State Department. The cuts have disrupted or ended global health programs and led to consequences such as an increase in deaths from diseases like cholera and HIV AIDS. In response to this, Marco Rubio said, "No children are dying on my watch."

David Brooks in response to Rubio's comment in May of 2025 said this, according to the Boston University folks. I'm from Boston College, so we don't usually quote Boston University, but in this case, according to the Boston University folks, so far, 55,000 adults have died of AIDS in the four months since Trump was elected. 6,000 children are dead because of what DOGE did. That's just PEPAR, the HIV. You add them all up, that's 300,000 dead, and we're four months in. Now, accumulate that over Now, accumulate that over four years, and the number of dead grows very high. Think how devastated we were at 911 when 3,000 died. 3,000 Americans died. We're talking here about 300,000. And this is just the start.

- The last is immigration. So, immigration is the major flash point between the American bishops and the Vatican and the American administration. You all know this. You've read the paper. I'm very

touched by these words of an auxiliary bishop of Washington DC, Aio Manhuan Ayala. And the headline of the story was U.S. Catholic bishops decry Trump's immigration raids upending church life. The way that the immigration policies are enforced these days are not only destabilizing the life of particular immigrant, but whole families, businesses, the life of children, whole communities and neighborhoods. Their whole communities in LA. When you go out in the middle of the day, you won't see anybody out. People are afraid to leave their homes. They're afraid to go to work. So, the bishop says, "What I'm seeing is in people's eyes is pain and deep confusion. Where do we go from here if we're not welcome?" Notice the use of the word "we." Where do we go? For me, it's very personal, "Because I was a stranger and you welcomed me." He crossed the US border illegally in 1990 after leaving his native El Salvador during the country's civil war. Now a U.S. citizen, he became the first Salvadoran bishop in the United States.

The president says he's enforcing these policies to make our cities safer. But I want to see for whom what he's saying, if immigrants, if people are afraid of interacting with law enforcement with police reporting crimes. Obviously, they're going to become targets of crimes. I want to point out that these protests come not only from bishops and there are some very heroic outspoken bishops. There are many who are not, but also from religious organizations like Maryknoll, religious orders, like the Jesuits, Sisters of Mercy I'm sure the Dominican Sisters of Cincinnati have been at it. They've got that creativity and concern, by lay organizations like the Catholic Worker and Catholic schools and universities. So, a lot of Catholics and I don't think that we should think the bishops have a monopoly on being witnesses to justice. They have a role to play, but it's not the only one.

And of course, Pope Leo has been very critical. But he's decrying Trump's inhumane treatment of migrants. How did you receive the foreigner? Did you receive him and welcome him or not? I think there's a deep reflection that needs to be made about what is happening. Remember what's going on. It's the first question. His comments come as the Trump administration; this is the newspaper article. "Trump administration is working to deport an estimated 13 million illegal immigrants," equating to 4% of the U.S. population. Pope Leo contends that the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (ICE) is largely targeting people who have lived for years and years, but never caused trouble, never cause problems. On the contrary, they've positively contributed to our society.

Just like Pope Francis, Pope Leo is not mincing his words when he criticizes the Trump administration's immigration policy. He is Pope Francis; called Trump's administration policies not Christian. And just last month, Pope Leo accused the administration of inhuman treatment

of migrants. In October, he met with two bishops from El Paso. He says, "The Church cannot remain silent. You stand with me; and I stand with you." Or in this case, he rides on the donkey. But I think so much of life is where, what your experience has been. The views you have, the values you have are all about where you stand and what you've seen in your life and the stories you've heard and the people that you love. and his view of immigration is coming out of loving the people in Peru and not the affluent people. God bless them, but the people living from day-to-day, hand-to-mouth, not knowing when they go to bed at night, where are they going to get their daily bread from? But I would say on every one of these points, you have a tension or contradiction between Catholic Social Teaching and what the administration's practices and policies are when it comes to immigration. I'll call a special attention. So, one is border enforcement and morality. The remain in Mexico policy was done, also by Biden.

And I was at the border two years ago in March and I crossed from McAllen, Texas into Reynosa, Mexico and the towns on that border are controlled by the cartels; and there are two refugee camps that, if the residents stay in there they're safe; but if they take one step outside, they get kidnapped, and very often murdered, or women sold into sex trafficking. It's one of the most horrible things I've ever seen. U.S. policy mandates if you're applying for asylum; you have to stay in Mexico. Now, they won't even allow that. So, I don't know what.

But you've heard about the rapid deportation, people being deported to El Salvador and deported to South Sudan. The one that's probably the most disturbing is the deportation of 247 Venezuelans to a notorious prison in El Salvador where we don't have any information. They can't contact families and 75% of the people surveyed had no criminal record whatsoever. Half of them were in the country legally. So, I think the cruelty is pretty amazing. What do the bishops actually say about immigration?

I'm just going to give you three lines.

- Number one, and this is drawing from this tradition of Catholic Social Teaching. People have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their family members. I gather almost everyone in this room came from families that migrated because their families were trying to make a living. Some have migrated because they had to flee for their lives.
- Number two, every country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration. you're applying for asylum; you have to stay in Mexico. Now, they won't even allow that. So, um I don't know what people there are going to do.

But you've heard about the rapid deportation, people being deported to El Salvador and deported to South Sudan. The one that's probably the most disturbing is the deportation of 247 Venezuelans to a notorious prison in El Salvador where we don't have any information. They can't contact families and 75% of the people surveyed had no criminal record whatsoever. Half of them were in the country legally. So, I think the cruelty is pretty amazing. What do the bishops actually say about immigration?

- So, border regulation and treatment of undocumented immigrants. ICE essentially treats undocumented immigrants as undeserving of rights or services. Many, many, cases have been documented of people who have been snatched up, put in camps and not given food or water for 24 hours. not given access to a shower for two weeks, forced to sleep on concrete floors with no blankets. Conditions that, if imagine any of us going through, I'd probably last a day.

In contrast, and I would say, very sharp contrast, Catholic Social Teaching insists that every person, no matter what they've done, has basic human rights, and is entitled to have an ability to meet their basic human needs: food, shelter, clothing, education, and healthcare. God promises that our judgment will be based on our treatment of the most vulnerable. And a government cannot excuse inhumane treatment of certain persons by claiming that their lack of legal status deprives them of the rights given to them by their creator. A special category of migrants who are refugees who had to flee. And there's international and United States law requires the government to give people asylum hearings when they appeal, when they apply for refugee status. The administration is now just ignoring that law. What it's doing is illegal.

Pope Benedict captures, I think, a Catholic approach to our response to refugees. Asylum seekers who fled from persecution, violence, and situations that put their life at risk, stand in need, in need of our understanding and welcome, of respect for their human dignity and rights, as well as awareness of their duties. Their suffering pleads with individual states and the international community to adopt attitudes of reciprocal acceptance, overcoming fears and avoiding forms of discrimination and to make provisions for concrete solidarity also through appropriate structures of hospitality and resettlement programs. All this entails mutual help between the suffering regions and those which already for years have accepted a large number of fleeing people as well as a greater sharing of responsibility among states.

Catholic Social Teachings and J.D. Vance's Attempt to Justify Trump Administration's Policies and Practices

So, we've looked at immigration, the cutting off of international aid. And Vance makes the argument that these are very Christian policies. In January 2025, Vance offered a Christian defense of the Trump administration's immigration policy and plan mass deportations. But his reasoning also applied to the to the Trump administration's elimination of USID. In a in an interview with Scott Hannity, he says, "As an American leader, but also just as an American citizen, your compassion belongs first to your fellow citizens. That doesn't mean you hate people from outside of your own borders. But there's this old school concept, and I think it's a very Christian concept by the way, that you love your family and then you love your neighbor and then you love your community and then you love your fellow citizens in your own country and then after that you can focus and prioritize the rest of the world."

This provoked a firestorm of protest by religious, journalists, bishops, theologians, including myself. I wrote an article in America about this along with 100,000 other people, because it's so obviously unchristian. Jesus didn't go up to the guy on the on the road, you know, the good Samaritan didn't go up on the guy on the road and say, "Hey, are you one of me, one of my group? Because you're not a fellow citizen. I got a long list of priorities, buddy. You're at the bottom." So, Pope Francis writes in a letter to the American bishops, "Christian love is not a concentric expansion of interests that little by little extend to other persons and groups. The true order of remorse, the order of love that must be promoted is that which we discover by meditating constantly on the parable of the good Samaritan. That is by meditating on the love that builds fraternity open to all without exception. A person is a person is a person. The color of their skin, the language they speak, the gender, that's important, but it's not the essential point.

Their proximity to you is not the essential point. The Catholic order of love is open, not contractive. Like the heart, when you're a healthy person, your heart opens up to other people. When you're driven by fear, your heart closes down. And a lot of this fear underlying Vance's position, I think, is stoked by social media and conservative talk TV. They terrify people. We have in John the saying, "Perfect love casts out fear," but perfect fear casts out love. So, it's contra; it's open, not contractive. It's inclusive, not exclusive. It is incompatible with set sentiments like one said by J.D. Vance, "I don't really care what happens to Ukraine one way or the other." That's 40 million people who are targeted by the Russian military.

So, what I point out here is the selective nature of Vance's form of political Catholicism. He speaks, interestingly I think, of his move into Catholicism as a political conversion. I always thought it was about Jesus. Isn't that the guy who says, "Come follow me," not the Republican party or the Democratic Party or any other party? He draws from older CST themes about the right to life of the unborn, the centrality of the

family, and the dignity of work. This is Leo the 13th, 1891 until Pius XI in 1930. That's the social teaching he's drawing from. And we say, "Wait, excuse me." But those guys kept talking. The Church kept learning. It kept creatively growing. But he ignores the subsequent Catholic Social Teachings treatment of the broader meaning of the right to life. "The right to life doesn't end at birth. It goes from womb to tomb," as Cardinal Dearden liked to say. The principle of solidarity and the option for the poor that John Paul II, no liberal guy, made central to his preaching, the complex and changing nature of families and their pastoral care. Families aren't mom, dad, the kids in a white picket fence anymore. Maybe 30% of families, at best. The Church has to respond to families as they actually exist in the world. And finally, the Church's consistent teaching, which I already stressed, but it's always worth repeating, that the category neighbor includes every human being, both in-group members and outgroup members and not just fellow citizens.

Concluding Challenges

So, I'm going to get a few more points in, then I'll give you a break and you can come up for air or whatever you're doing. So, I think what we see and you all have seen in the videos, Instagram, news clips, they're horrifying, of the way ISIS is treating people. Honestly, it doesn't feel like our country anymore. These guys show up in Balaclavas. I'm in Boston. We had a student that wrote an op-ed piece in the tough student newspaper. She was here with a student visa legally in the country at one of the top colleges in the country. They came up in a van. Four guys get out of the van. They put a hood on her and dragged her into the van, and then drove off, not even wearing uniforms. What is this? The mafia? What is this?

So, I think we have gross violations of human dignity being perpetrated by our government. And you could talk about as objectification, as humiliation, which people who have been released from. I say it's a ritual of humiliation from the minute they touch you, of degradation and of dehumanization. And this is a story in the bottom of a lady who they're going to deport; and she's terrified and her daughter's terrified, and they just found her in a building.

Now, here's a challenge. Can Catholic Social Teaching be relevant to this? Or are these just nice ideas floating up in the sky of theologians and bishops and a few DRRE somewhere talking about nice, topics for kids in high schools to write essays on. But does it really make a difference? Can it make a difference? First of all, I do think Catholic Social Teachings gives us a language for protesting and witnessing. Protest is important if it's intelligent and if it's intelligible. Just going out and screaming at the ocean doesn't help anybody. But how do you protest in a way that's heard, that's dignified, that's articulate.

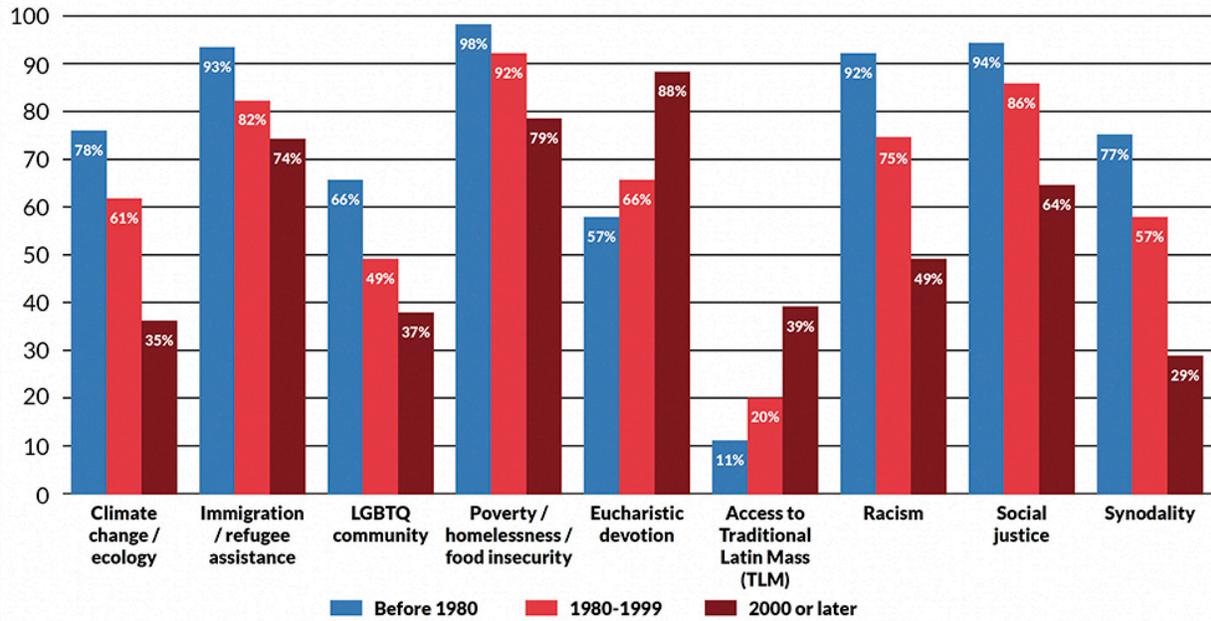
So, one fundamental problem is we have a lack of education about Catholic Social Teachings that most Catholics know almost nothing about it. They seem to reduce Catholic morality to the ban on abortion, ban on sex outside of marriage, and ban on gay marriage. When I teach college students, that's what they think Catholicism means for morality. And they're very happy to know there's a whole lot more on that mountain than this little valley. But they're shocked. In fact, I had one student say I gave a lecture on love as a center of Catholic ethics; and she says, "Does the bishop know you think this? You're teaching this in Boston College? Like, does art the archbishop know about this? Like, would Boston College be okay if you knew this?" I said, "I'm really going with Jesus on this, but I think they're okay."

Now, sociologically, political and cultural identity is often, and I would say, usually more important than a person's religious identity; that people identify with religion X because it aligns with their political allegiance, their sense of what people they belong to believe. Group think is endemic to the way human beings operate as moral agents. In our culture, young people often find out that when someone is a churchgoer, whether Protestant or Catholic, they automatically assume that means he or she is Republican and conservative or conservative. Although I think that's not that word conservative doesn't work anymore, because you conserve what's good. You don't bulldoze it. But they think it means small government, strong military, restrictive immigration, climate skepticism, anti-woke, pro- prayer and schools, abortion ban, patriarchal marriage and family, etc.

When they do know something about Catholic teaching, Catholic clergy and laity are deeply divided within and between themselves, that's another challenge. And I think even here religious and political identity shapes what aspects of Catholic teaching and the Gospel they really think matters. And in many ways, it would be worthwhile exploring, but I think it's true. We really have competing views of who Jesus is and the kind of community he founded and wants us to be part of. Somebody was just telling me that a pastor came into a church here some time ago and took down the sign, "All Are Welcome." What kind of Jesus are you thinking of? The Pharisees and scribes criticized him for dining with tax collectors and sinners. Shouldn't we have that on the side of the church? "Come here if you're a tax collector and a sinner. Free food for tax collectors and sinners." Come on!

Not even Catholic clergy agree:

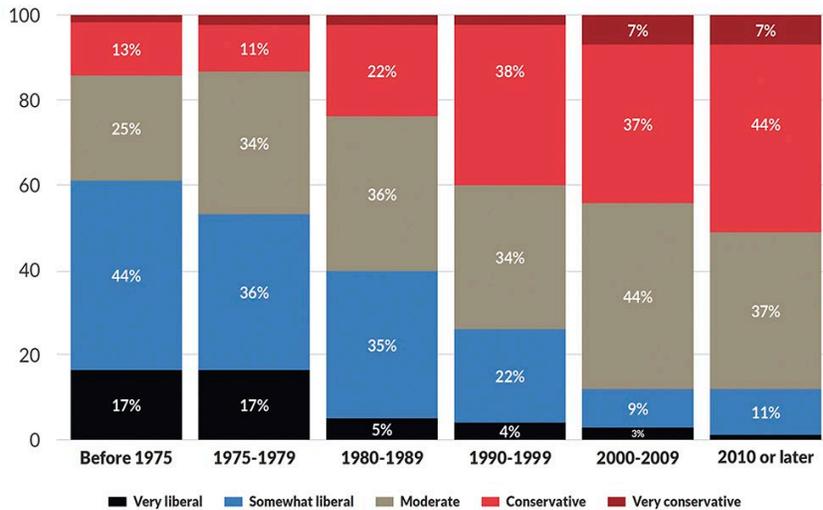
Figure 12: Variation in priorities by ordination cohort



Campaign contributions by Catholic clergy in Illinois 2021-2025



Figure 16: Politics by Cohort



Contributions by Catholic clergy 21 to 25 evenly split between donations to Democrats and donations to Republicans; absolutely even. On the top of that, politics by cohort. And you can see how much the red grows as the years go on.

When I was a kid, we had a kid 22 years old. I had this mug that said, "Don't trust anyone over 30." Now the mug is: don't trust anyone under 30. But the right is especially interesting. This column here is a variation by priorities. And you can see that the blue are the people, the good guys ordained before 1980, where their priorities are poverty, racism, social justice and they're along with Francis on synodality. If you do the other extreme 2000 and afterwards you can see the priorities are very weak on climate change, still with immigration and refugees. That's a plus. poverty and homelessness still important but look at Eucharistic devotion is very high spikes access traditional Latin Mass. It's the highest with that cohort group. Now I don't think Eucharistic adoration and social justice have to be competing. If you have the right kind of eucharistic piety, you believe that Eucharist is about God sharing; and we're supposed to share ourselves with others. That came up in one of the prayers. But in fact, often Eucharistic adoration and Latin Mass go with very individualistic piety. They kind of see theology or faith as the stairway to heaven, back to that issue that Fr. Tom Lumpkin brought up.

So, what are we supposed to do? I should really start here, but I have much more to say about what's wrong than what I can say we should do. But polarization divides the world into good people like us and bad people like them. You like that one? This is fundamentally offensive to the Gospel, and we must resist the temptation. I feel it in myself. I'm sure you feel it in yourself that we have to resist this temptation to create good people, bad people, extra solidarity. It destroys love.

A lot of families are split because of the Trump thing. They can't talk to each other, and they refuse to talk to each other and have split permanently. very sad. So, I think one thing we have to do is recognize our many similarities to the people we disagree with about these issues. We are part of the same human family and equally loved by God. And keep in mind that Jesus especially detested self-righteousness and it is very easy because the evil here is so palpable. It's so obvious.

Conclusion

So, I think we have to always keep in mind the bedrock moral conviction that every person is sacred and that our task is to always look for the good in people from whom we are tempted to feel alienated. There is good in every human being. And the people that support the Trump administration in very large numbers, who feel left out, who feel they're completely stuck, who feel looked down upon by the elites and left out by economic globalization are not wrong. A lot of people feel contempt for the working class, for low-income people. So, we have to make sure always to remember we're all part of the same human family and to have empathy for people even if their political views for us are radically different, even if their moral views are radically different. I think to do this is not an individual task that we need to create, sustain and participate in communities of inclusive solidarity. I think the Elephants can be this and I think you can have parish study groups. I think you can get involved in popular local movements to try to do something practical. So, getting actively involved in some concrete local project that works against the policies and practices we find objectionable. More importantly, working for policies and practices that we think are just; it's not just the negative. It's the positive we have to stress.

I find one great outlet for this is faith-based community organizing like you used to have the Detroit Regional Interfaith Voice for Equity. I just found from Bill O'Brien that that's now defunct. But there are other movements like that in parishes that can be ways, cells of support and encouragement, because times are very discouraging right now.

So, we must struggle against the institutions and policies while always treating our opponents with respect and compassion and never regarding them as implacable enemies. And we need to continue to cultivate lives of faith, hope and charity and especially to be hopeful. Hope is a virtue, and virtues are not easy. Anybody can be shallowly optimistic. Hope is a theological virtue that says we believe grace ultimately will overcome sin; and that the light will never be overcome by the darkness.

Thank you very much. (Applause)

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