



THE DIOCESE OF ROCKVILLE CENTRE  
**Office of Human Life,  
Family and Bioethics**



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## *A Bit of Bioethics*

### **ON VOTING: PRUDENTIAL JUDGMENT AND THE “NON-NEGOTIABLES” TO DELIBERATE BEFORE VOTING**

*“While Americans presume that the Constitution guarantees their rights, in practice our rights survive or disappear based on how firmly we defend them.”—Archbishop Charles J. Chaput*

- **Vote with a properly formed conscience**
- **Distinguish principle from policy**
- **Understand the role of prudential judgment and proportionate reasons**
- **Know your moral duty to protect the fundamental right to life, from which all other rights flow**

Although voting is, itself, not a bioethical issue, the candidates whom we elect hold positions that represent how they will govern, legislate and rule during their terms of office. These laws, policies, orders, and judgments will involve some very serious bioethical issues, and therefore, it is a worthwhile endeavor to review our moral duty in the voting booth. That entails the imperative to identify the most critical issues, know the candidates' views on them, and understand how a faithful Catholic should proceed in determining the candidate worthy of his or her vote. This is important for candidates of every branch of government and at every level, for most higher seats of office are filled with people who have served in lower positions.

#### **Vote with a properly formed conscience**

First, we all have a moral duty to exercise our right to vote, but we also have a moral responsibility to vote with a properly formed conscience.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, **conscience** is a rational judgment that determines an act to be right or wrong. It is the application of our uniquely human gift of reason which derives from **natural law**. Natural law is the innate understanding of right and wrong that any reasonable person knows without special instruction. It is “written on our hearts” by God when He created each of us. (see Romans 2:15)

A well-formed conscience leads to good judgments because it is based on objective Truth which is universally valid and unchanging for all people at all times. We form our consciences properly when we continuously study the Word of God, follow the authoritative teaching of the Church, practice the virtues, and pray for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to fill our souls. (See our June Newsletter for more guidance on proper conscience formation.)

## Distinguish principle from policy

When it comes to elections, every election cycle has a different array of prominent issues under scrutiny – some are perennial issues and others are new topics driven by current events. It is very important, though, to distinguish the moral principles held by candidates from the policies they promote.

A *principle* is the fundamental basis forming a system of belief; it is foundational to guiding a course of action.<sup>2</sup> A *policy* is the course of action in the conduct of public affairs; it is driven by the beliefs, skills and experience of those involved in its formulation.<sup>3</sup> Principles are at the foundation of all policies.

Since principles are so rudimentary, we generally do not deviate from them without a sense of compromise because they define us (or the individual or entity which holds them). On the other hand, there can be more than one policy designed to address a problem, and any one policy can be subject to change in the context of different circumstances, skills or resources, etc. without our core values (principles) being necessarily challenged. Since the moral good must be pursued for a society to flourish, there is no negotiating on those truths which are self-evident and written on our hearts (the natural law). These are our moral principles, those essential values that are the underpinnings of a flourishing society, and they are not negotiable. Accepting these moral principles, leads to good policy. Rejecting these moral principles leads to bad policy. Faithful Catholics will hold the same moral principles but they are free to differ in the policies they support.

Hence, when candidates' policies are based on acceptance of the same moral principle, the political issue at stake is a difference in policy (the approach to a problem) and we can call this political issue a **negotiable** issue; we are free to support either candidate's policy based on prudential judgment (see below). When the policy put forth by one or more candidates is based on a rejected moral principle, at stake is not so much the policy as the moral principle from which a good policy would be derived. Since we cannot compromise our deeply held moral principles—we cannot support or favor a moral evil—these political issues are called **non-negotiables**. (Note that when all candidates reject a moral principle, we cannot support policies of moral evil. However, we may vote to limit moral evil by casting our vote, albeit reluctantly, for the less egregious position.)

Indeed, while the Church teaches with binding authority on the basic moral principles (non-negotiables), she leaves us substantial latitude to determine specific policy solutions (negotiables).<sup>4</sup> The non-negotiable moral principles include the right to life, the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage, religious freedom, etc. Negotiable issues include economic policy, foreign affairs, healthcare, immigration, the environment, etc.

As an example, Catholic social teaching provides us with the moral principle that we have a special obligation to the poor and vulnerable.<sup>5</sup> All faithful Catholics accept and obey this moral principle. If someone rejected that moral principle (i.e. endorsed selfishness), we would be bound to disagree, for we could not compromise on the principle of solidarity with the poor. This is a simple, straightforward tenet of our faith. However, there may be a number of reasonable (and more complex) policies posed to combat economic injustice—we might say, there is one destination and many ways to get there. After a rigorous evaluation of the subject and using great prudence, a conscientious Catholic may choose (as a simplistic example) to support a policy to increase the minimum wage, while another conscientious Catholic prefers a policy of tax reduction to address economic injustice. Both policies are morally legitimate and plausible, but neither has *prima facie* superiority. Nevertheless, either may be proposed to achieve a common moral good, i.e. raising the welfare of the poor and vulnerable in this hypothetical situation. So, it is possible that faithful Catholics may disagree in the actual application (the negotiables) of Church teaching, but they both continue to share the same moral principle (the non-negotiables) undergirding both policy approaches.

Beware of imposters. When a policy or program will deny basic human rights, this indicates an underlying rejection of a moral principle and we should not support it. For example, Socialism may be put forth as a

policy response to address economic disparity, but if we go beyond the superficial claim for equality, we will realize it does not share or emanate from the same moral principles put forth by Catholic social teaching. Socialistic policies are based on principles aimed at material well-being alone and dictated by the State. In contrast, the basis of economic justice for the Catholic Church is established on our responsibility as a society to enhance the dignity of the human person and protect human rights for the common good through a balance of solidarity and subsidiarity. (Solidarity recognizes our equal human dignity and demands a sharing of both spiritual and material goods; subsidiarity says needs are addressed best at the most local and personal level reasonable.<sup>6</sup>) The moral principles at the foundation of Socialism and Catholic social teaching on care of the poor, solidarity, subsidiarity, etc. are incompatible, and indeed this is a non-negotiable issue (i.e. a true Catholic cannot be a true Socialist<sup>7</sup>).

### **Understand the role of prudential judgment**

When there are competing policies that arise as a response to address a shared moral principle, the Church does not prescribe or favor a certain course of action, but rather, permits individuals to use prudential judgment in choosing a policy to support. **Prudential judgment** is not a personal opinion, but rather a decision made through the exercise of prudence. Prudence is the intellectual virtue through which we choose the right means towards good ends, i.e. knowing rightly what we should do and what we should avoid.<sup>8</sup> This involves three steps:<sup>9</sup>

- 1) Study the issue and consult trustworthy opinions
- 2) Analyze and judge the issue, ordered towards God
- 3) Decide your course of action and accept responsibility for the consequences

By using our individual intellect and reason to understand and deliberate on an issue for which there is no binding moral teaching and for which there are multiple options of approach, we can arrive at a prudential judgment which *may differ validly from the conclusion at which an equally scrupulous Catholic arrives*. Our main goal is to choose policies that do good and avoid evil (and if evil cannot be avoided altogether, to limit it to the extent we are able).

### **Evaluate proportionate reasons correctly**

As reviewed previously (July Newsletter), an intrinsic evil is an act that of itself (regardless of its intention or circumstances), is always morally unacceptable because it opposes natural law and God's plan for us—such acts are without exception "incapable of being ordered' to God, because they radically contradict the good of the person made in his image."<sup>10</sup> Not only must we avoid committing intrinsically evil acts ourselves, but also, we ought not assist others to commit intrinsically evil acts by our cooperation, including an endorsement by our vote. Intrinsically evil acts include abortion, euthanasia, cloning, same-sex marriage, human trafficking, prejudice, etc. Political positions or party platforms regarding these issues are all non-negotiable because they bear on moral principles such as the right to life, the dignity of the human person, the sanctity of marriage, etc.

**It is clear that we must not vote in a way that would promote intrinsic evil.** Cardinal Ratzinger wrote:

A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation with evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate's permissive stance on abortion or euthanasia. When a Catholic does not share the candidate's stance in favor of abortion or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, if we vote for a candidate *because* he supports an intrinsic evil, this is *formal cooperation* and never morally permissible. If we are opposed to a candidate's support of an intrinsic evil, but we vote for him despite this (because we prefer his views on other issues), this is *remote mediate material cooperation*. Most often it is not morally permissible. However, it *may be* morally permissible in rare instances, but **only** if there are *proportionate reasons*. In this, you must fully understand what proportionate reasons are.

Often, there is a morally good (or neutral) action that has as an unintended but foreseen bad "side effect." Can you still perform the good act? The answer *may be* yes, but only if it is also true that 1) there are no better options 2) the bad side effect is not the cause that brings about the good effect intended 3) the expected bad side effect is not intended but merely would be tolerated and 4) there is *proportionate reason*, i.e. the unintended bad side effect is no greater (in gravity, magnitude, probability) than that of the good effect.

Let's illustrate how this works. Suppose there is a pill to make you superhero-strong (the good effect), but it also is known to make you ugly (the bad effect). Should you take the pill? In this case, becoming ugly would not make you stronger (it is not the means by which you would become stronger), and certainly you would not intend to become ugly—but you might be willing to tolerate it. Assuming there are no other options (this is a hypothetical example after all), you would be left with the decision on whether the ugliness is worth the strength (i.e. is the unintended bad effect proportionate to the intended good effect?). This would be very personal, but involves no obvious moral imperative to reject taking the pill because ugliness does not unequivocally outweigh the benefit of strength. This effect would be considered proportionate reason to some people and so they might choose to take the pill and accept the consequences while others may disagree.

On the other hand, if the unintended but foreseen bad side effect of the pill were a severe heart attack which could lead to death, increased strength compared to a likely heart attack would be objectionable to most people. Why? Because they are *not* proportionate reasons. Most people would assess that suffering a severe heart attack with life threatening consequences is not on a comparable scale to getting stronger, even superhero-strong. Therefore, it is not a proportionate reason to take the strength-building pill. This is known as the principle of double effect, but the relevant point here is that, faced with these circumstances (an intended action or policy with a good effect associated with an unintended but foreseen bad effect), we are called to weigh whether the good and bad effects are proportionate or not.

We can conclude that **proportionate reasons** are those reasons which are equally grave in comparison—a real life example would be comparing the *life* of the mother to the *life* of the baby in determining whether a treatment could be pursued. Sometimes people erroneously equate reasons that are not commensurate in gravity (they are disproportionate reasons), e.g. justifying abortion by comparing the *life* of the baby to a college *scholarship* which could secure future earning potential. Not only is abortion an intrinsically evil act which cannot be pursued, but also these reasons can never be proportionate, because the gift of life always outweighs what could be considered a quality of life issue. Remember, one can have no quality of life, or any other right for that matter, without life itself!

So, back to Cardinal Ratzinger's comment, a proportionate reason to justify voting for a candidate who supports abortion must be very, very serious—on par with the gravity of abortion. And frankly, in 2020, there are none.

### **Recognize abortion is the preeminent issue**

There has been significant debate about political issues this election cycle (healthcare and racism, for example) in relation to abortion and which issues may influence our vote most. When it comes to comparing politicians' views on the moral principles, **all abuses of human dignity are intrinsically evil, but attacks on human life must be viewed as the most egregious violation because *the right to life is the most fundamental human right and the source of all other human rights.***<sup>12</sup>

Archbishop Naumann has written, “The U.S. bishops have reaffirmed that ‘the threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.’<sup>13</sup> While they did warn us not to ‘dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty, and the death penalty,’ they did give priority to upholding and defending our brothers’ and sisters’ most basic right—to live.”<sup>14</sup>

To be certain, our votes are not cast on one issue alone. But, a candidate’s support of a single intrinsic evil could be sufficient to exclude him or her from our voting consideration.<sup>15</sup> Just as we would disqualify from our vote an otherwise perfect candidate who endorsed a return to slavery, we should be no less discerning when it comes to support for the most egregious attack on human rights of this time: abortion.

Why, though, is abortion the *pre-eminent* issue of this time?

- 1.) **Gravity:** Abortion is the deliberate act of taking an innocent human life which is intrinsically evil. Life cannot be restored once taken. This inalienable right is a non-negotiable moral principle and it is the most fundamental because one has no other rights if he has no life. Other affronts to human dignity are grave but they may be rectified and may still allow other rights to be enjoyed. This is not possible when life is destroyed, and most especially, when it is taken from the most innocent and vulnerable—those not yet born.
- 2.) **Magnitude:** The number of abortions performed every year in the U.S. exceeds any other cause of death. According to the CDC, heart disease was the leading cause of death in 2017 with 647,457 recorded in the U.S. There were 19,107 homicides and 47,173 suicides.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, **862,320 abortions** were reported in the U.S. (and this does not reflect all abortions).<sup>17</sup>

Well over **60 million human lives have been lost to abortion** since 1973 in the U.S. alone. In comparison, death penalty executions in the U.S. since 1976 number 1,526.<sup>18</sup> American soldiers killed in all American wars through 1991 is under 1.2 million.<sup>19</sup> And fewer than 3,000 deaths by physician assisted suicide have been reported in the U.S. in states where it is legal (from 1998 to 2017).<sup>20</sup> By far, even among the life issues, abortion demands our attention because the numbers of human lives lost is unrivalled.

Through our post-abortion healing ministry we know, too, that there is significant untold grief and emotional suffering experienced by mothers, fathers and others affected by abortion. ***Please refer to Project Rachel resources on our website if you or someone you know is suffering from the real pain abortion causes.***

- 3.) **Current danger:** Abortion is not a hypothetical threat to human life and the common good. It is a grave reality now. We need not conjecture or debate what might happen in the same way we would speculate on the possibility of nuclear war or the impact of climate change. Rather, we have the statistics already—and they are not good.

In 2020, there are no other issues that threaten human dignity, human life, and the common good more profoundly than abortion and so, even in the context of other serious and large-looming political issues regarding non-negotiable moral principles, abortion is unquestionably the preeminent priority.

### **Know your moral duties when voting**

Procured abortion is an intrinsic evil because it is the direct, intentional killing of innocent human life which can never be justified. **The moral principle acknowledging the right to life is a non-negotiable.**<sup>21</sup>

If a candidate supports abortion and I vote for him *because* he supports abortion “rights” this is never morally licit, and I am cooperating formally in the evil of abortion.

Instead, suppose I oppose abortion and both candidates support abortion, but one candidate endorses partial birth abortion (essentially, the baby is killed during childbirth) while the other candidate wants to limit abortion to exceptional cases (rape and incest). I may vote for the latter candidate on the grounds that **such a vote is not to choose the evil of abortion, but rather to limit the evil of abortion when there is no other alternative**. I may also choose to vote for neither candidate.

Similarly, if both candidates support abortion to the same degree, and one also supports euthanasia, limiting evil would dictate a vote for the candidate supporting only abortion and not euthanasia also.

On the other hand, if one candidate supports abortion but campaigns on a morally good economic policy which I view favorably while the other candidate opposes abortion and endorses a morally good economic policy I dislike, the non-negotiable moral principle of the right to life (opposition to abortion) would have to take priority in directing my vote with a well-formed conscience. Here, a vote to support my preferred economic policy (a good) is associated with support for abortion which I oppose and cannot support (abortion would be an unintended but foreseen bad consequence). Hence, we would invoke the principle of double effect discussed earlier. My vote based on the economic healthcare policy is a moral good. I do not intend to support abortion although I see it as an unintended consequence of my vote. Although abortion support by the candidate itself does not bring about the economic policy he or she endorses, I still cannot vote for this candidate because there is not proportionate reason. You see, ultimately, abortion is a non-negotiable issue that destroys life. Economic policy is a negotiable policy issue that might make life better in quality, but it is not directly life threatening. Life vs. economics. Economic policy is not sufficient justification to vote against life, even indirectly—it is not a proportionate reason. As a faithful Catholic, I may not support this abortion-supporting candidate, no matter how good my intentions or his economic policy.

Unfortunately, this last example is a common scenario. When the taking of human life is at stake, no political position on health care, immigration, etc. can be considered proportionate in gravity—the latter are issues of prudential judgment for which a myriad of positions may be morally licit and do not involve the direct taking of human life as their primary goal. Moreover, no grouping of negotiable policy issues can be proportionate justification to override a candidate’s position that violates a non-negotiable moral principle, particularly the most fundamental right to life.

In summary, our voting duty is to promote a government that upholds the right to life and dignity of the human person, protects our rights to life and religious liberty, promotes the family which is the building block of society, and pursues the common good. Because abortion is the preeminent issue, one

- Should never vote for a candidate *because* he supports abortion.
- Should not vote for a candidate who supports abortion if there is a candidate who opposes abortion, so long as the objective evidence continues to show there is no other offense to human dignity and the common good as serious as abortion (in gravity, magnitude and actual experience).
- May vote for a candidate to limit the evil of abortion (i.e. when there is no candidate who opposes abortion and one candidate supports abortion to a lesser degree or opposes other attacks on life and human dignity).
- Should not prioritize policy issues over issues of moral principle, in particular the moral principle of the fundamental right to life.

Most of the time, the issues under contentious debate are disagreements on policy, not moral principles. However, there are always at least a few non-negotiable issues that are prominent during every campaign, and

these may vary. However, the life issues are paramount, and as explained above, most especially, the right to life of the unborn. Nevertheless, it is important to study the candidates' positions for ourselves and not rely on biased media sources that may misrepresent a candidate's real position. Reviewing a candidate's words and actions, past political record, and adherence to his or her party platform are important ways we can determine how to cast our vote.

Finally, it must be emphasized that we cannot separate our spiritual lives and our secular experience as two parallel existences; the Christian conscience and one's political life must be morally coherent.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, it is inconsistent and wrong to separate elements of our Catholic faith at the expense of the whole of Catholic doctrine to forward a particular agenda. However, in keeping with this idea of totality, it is also not permissible "to vote for a political program or an individual law which contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals."<sup>23</sup> **Life comes first. Always.**

"The right to health, to home, to work, to culture is false and illusory if the *right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination."<sup>24</sup> --Pope St. John Paul II

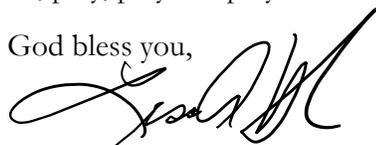
## WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

November 3, 2020, Election Day, is fast approaching. To properly execute our civic responsibility, we must not rush into the voting booth uninformed. There is still time to do your due diligence.

- Identify the critical issues, especially those that hinge on moral principles (the non-negotiables)
- Know/research the views of the candidates (support for an intrinsically evil position generally disqualifies a candidate from your vote). Knowing the party platform can be helpful, but one must remain cautious not to assume every candidate adheres to every point of the party platform.
- Use prudential judgment to discern particulars when necessary.
- Remember the consequences of our moral acts, including voting, are not limited to the next four years alone but extend to our Eternal Reward. In the end, that's all that matters.

So, pray, pray and pray. Then cast your ballot and pray some more!

God bless you,



Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church with modifications from the Editio Typica*, 2nd edition Washington, D.C.: USCCB Publishing, 1997, 2240.

<sup>2</sup> Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, vol 2. Oxford University Press Oxford 2007 p2349

<sup>3</sup> OED, p. 2268

<sup>4</sup> Cardinal Ratzinger Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life, (November 21, 2002) §3

[http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_20021124\\_politica\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20021124_politica_en.html)

<sup>5</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," Washington, D.C., 1986, §16

<sup>6</sup> *Catholic Catechism*, 1939-1948

<sup>7</sup> Pope Pius XI, Encyclical on Reconstruction of the Social Order *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), §120.

[http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html)

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- <sup>8</sup> Austin Fagothey, *Right and Reason: Ethics Based on the Teachings of Aristotle & St. Thomas Aquinas* (Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books, 1959), 232.
- <sup>9</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium on Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, (April 2, 2004). §547. [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html)
- <sup>10</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical on the Splendor of Truth *Veritatis splendor* (August 6, 1993), §80 [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html) (accessed October 8, 2020)
- <sup>11</sup> Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, Memorandum “Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion: General Principles” July 2004. <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/worthiness-to-receive-holy-communion-general-principles-2153> (accessed September 22, 2020).
- <sup>12</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical on The Gospel of Life *Evangelium vitae* (March 25, 1995) §72. [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html)
- <sup>13</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship” digital edition 2020. p. 6. <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-introductory-letter> (accessed Sept. 18, 2020)
- <sup>14</sup> Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann, Letter “Priorities at the Polls” Excerpted from Respect Life Program, copyright © 2020, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C. All rights reserved. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/rfp-20-priorities-at-the-polls-bulletin-insert.pdf>
- <sup>15</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, Part II of II: Making Moral Choices and Applying Our Principles” Washington, D.C. 2016 accessed October 14, 2020, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/The-Challenge-of-Forming-Consciences-for-Faithful-Citizenship-Part-2.pdf>
- <sup>16</sup> Melonie Heron, “Deaths: Leading Causes for 2017” *National Vital Statistics Reports* 68, no. 6 (June 24, 2019): 9, 12 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, [https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68\\_06-508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr68/nvsr68_06-508.pdf)
- <sup>17</sup> Rachel Jones, Elizabeth Witwer and Jenna Jerman. “Abortion Incidence and Service Availability in the United States, 2017” *Guttmacher Institute*, September 2019, 7, [https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report\\_pdf/abortion-incidence-service-availability-us-2017.pdf](https://www.guttmacher.org/sites/default/files/report_pdf/abortion-incidence-service-availability-us-2017.pdf)
- <sup>18</sup> “Executions by State and Region Since 1976,” Death Penalty Information Center, accessed October 13, 2020, <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/executions/executions-overview/number-of-executions-by-state-and-region-since-1976>
- <sup>19</sup> “America’s Wars,” Office of Public Affairs, Department of Veterans Affairs, last modified November 2019, [https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs\\_americas\\_wars.pdf](https://www.va.gov/opa/publications/factsheets/fs_americas_wars.pdf)
- <sup>20</sup> “State-by-State Physician-Assisted Suicide Statistics,” ProCon.org, last modified January 28, 2019, <https://euthanasia.procon.org/state-by-state-physician-assisted-suicide-statistics/>.
- <sup>21</sup> The “right to health, to home, to work, to culture is false and illusory if the *right to life*, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.” Pope John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World *Christifideles Laici* (December 30, 1988). §38. [http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_exh\\_30121988\\_christifideles-laici.html](http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici.html)
- <sup>22</sup> Ratzinger, “Political Life,” 6.
- <sup>23</sup> Ratzinger, “Political Life,” 4.
- <sup>24</sup> John Paul II, *Christifideles Laici*, §38.