



The Challenge Of Faithful Citizenship

Listed below is Question #2 of the Catholic Bishops' recent statement to American Catholics entitled *Faithful Citizenship: A Catholic Call to Political Responsibility*. As with Questions #1 and the others to follow in subsequent weeks, we offer a reflection for your thoughtful consideration.

- 2. How will we protect the weakest in our midst—innocent unborn children? How can our nation not turn to violence to solve some of its most difficult problems—abortion to deal with difficult pregnancies; the death penalty to combat crime; euthanasia and assisted suicide to deal with the burdens of age, illness, and disability; and war to address international disputes?**

Our Bishops certainly recognize that this is a very complicated question. However, at the same time, the question is framed in such a way so as to recognize the these life issues, violent thought they may be, inevitably are seen by many as an answer to the most difficult issues facing us at the turn of the 21st century. And yet, we are asked by the Bishops explicitly *not* to turn to violence to solve these societal problems.

Is there another way? How or where can we turn for solutions? In the midst of ever-increasing medical and technological research which sometimes seems to sanitize difficult life issues, wrapping them in neat little packages and using such words as undifferentiated tissue, targeted response, minimal or no pain, are we therefore to conclude that we can have it both ways? Will there even be an end to violence? What role must I assume even as I feel so helpless?

The late Henri Nouwen once said: “As long as issues dominate our lives, whether they are Third World issues, hunger or nuclear issues, we cannot pray...Issues imprison; a person can set free. Issues divide us; a person can unite. Issues easily exhaust; a person can give rest. Issues easily destroy; a person can offer new life. Despair is caused by orientation toward issues, but hope emerges when we direct ourselves with heart and mind to the person of a saving God. That is prayer...The deeper we enter into the heart of Jesus, the deeper we enter into the heart of the world.”

—St. Bede Justice & Peace Ministry

For a complete text of the Bishops' statement, please see www.usccb.org/faithfulcitizenship