

The 'Non-Negotiables'

These five practices concern actions that are *intrinsically evil* as the Church defines it, and must never be promoted by the law.

1. Abortion

The Church teaches that, regarding a law permitting abortions, it is "never licit to obey it, or take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or to vote for it." (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 73)

2. Euthanasia

"In euthanasia, the ill or elderly are killed, by action or omission, out of a misplaced sense of compassion, but true compassion cannot include intentionally doing something intrinsically evil to another person." (*Evangelium Vitae*, n. 73).

3. Embryonic Stem-Cell Research

Human embryos are new lives from conception to eight weeks, with their own DNA, sex, life-expectancy - and the right to life. "Respect for the dignity of human being excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo (Pontifical Council for the Family, *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, n. 4). Recent scientific advances show that medical treatments that researchers hope to develop from experimentation or embryonic stem cells backfire in frightening ways. At the same time, effective treatments have been developed by using morally obtained adult stem cells instead.

4. Human cloning

"Attempts ... for obtaining a human being without any connection with sexuality through "twin fission," cloning or parthenogenesis are to be considered contrary to the moral law, since they are in opposition to the dignity of both human procreation and of the conjugal union" (*Charter of the Rights of the Family*, n. I.6). Human cloning also involves abortion because the rejected or unsuccessful embryonic clones are destroyed, yet each clone is a human being.

5. Homosexual "Marriage"

"When legislation in favor of the recognition of homosexual unions is proposed for the first time in a legislative assembly, the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral" (*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Person*, n. 10).

NOTE: These 5 derived from Pope Benedict's 2006 address to European Parliamentarians and again to the members of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences who gathered for their plenary session (1 May - 5 May 2009) and are based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Encyclicals of the Pope, and issue papers from the Office of the Doctrine of the Faith, that these five issues concern actions that are intrinsically evil and must never be promoted by the law. Intrinsically evil actions are those that fundamentally conflict with the moral law and can never be performed under any circumstances.

PARTICIPATION OF CATHOLICS IN POLITICAL LIFE

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

*The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, having received the opinion of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, has decided that it would be appropriate to publish the present **Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding the participation of Catholics in political life**. This Note is directed to the Bishops of the Catholic Church and, in a particular way, to Catholic politicians and all lay members of the faithful called to participate in the political life of democratic societies.*

4. The complex array of today's problems branches out from here, including some never faced by past generations. Scientific progress has resulted in advances that are unsettling for the consciences of men and women and call for solutions that respect ethical principles in a coherent and fundamental way. At the same time, legislative proposals are put forward which, heedless of the consequences for the existence and future of human beings with regard to the formation of culture and social behavior, attack the very inviolability of human life. Catholics, in this difficult situation, have the right and the duty to recall society to a deeper understanding of human life and to the responsibility of everyone in this regard. John Paul II, continuing the constant teaching of the Church, has reiterated many times that **those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a "grave and clear obligation to oppose" any law that attacks human life. For them, as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them.**^[19] As John Paul II has taught in his Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae* <http://www.ewtn.com/library/encyc/jp2evang.htm> regarding the situation in which it is not possible to overturn or completely repeal a law allowing abortion which is already in force or coming up for a vote, "an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at *limiting the harm* done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality".^[20]

In this context, it must be noted also that **a well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law that contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals.** The Christian faith is an integral unity, and thus it is incoherent to isolate some particular element to the detriment of the whole of Catholic doctrine. A political commitment to a single isolated aspect of the Church's social doctrine does not exhaust one's responsibility towards the common good. Nor can a Catholic think of delegating his Christian responsibility to others; rather, the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives him this task, so that the truth about man and the world might be proclaimed and put into action.

When political activity comes up against moral principles that do not admit of exception, compromise or derogation, the Catholic commitment becomes more evident and laden with responsibility. In the face of *fundamental and inalienable ethical demands*, Christians must recognize that what is at stake is the essence of the moral law, which concerns the integral good of the human person. This is the case with laws concerning *abortion* and *euthanasia* (not to be confused with the decision to forgo *extraordinary treatments*, which is morally legitimate). Such laws must defend the basic right to life from conception to natural death. In the same way, it is necessary to recall the duty to respect and protect the rights of the *human embryo*. **Analogously, the family needs to be safeguarded and promoted, based on monogamous marriage between a man and a woman,** and protected in its unity and stability in the face of modern laws on divorce: in no way can other forms of cohabitation be placed on the same level as marriage, nor can they receive legal recognition as such.

Proportionalism and The Principle of Double Effect

There are two critical moral principles that must be understood and exercised when faced with voting for a candidate in an election.

Pope Benedict XVI (as Cardinal Ratzinger, prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith), responded to the issue concerning the distribution of communion to politicians that support abortion. In his statement, he noted that Catholics *could* vote for a pro-abortion candidate only for "proportionate reasons." What does this mean? When he says "proportionate means or reasons," he is using terminology from Catholic moral theology which deals with the principle of "double effect" - that one could vote for a pro-abortion candidate if one is trying to avoid voting for a candidate who embraces an equally serious or graver evil. So if you are faced with two candidates, both of which embrace intrinsic evils, to the best of your judgment, you try to determine which of these candidates is going to do the less evil.

Having said this - this is not to say that one issue or another, that perhaps you personally feel is more important than, for example, abortion, is justification for voting for a pro-abortion candidate. Why?

In Catholic moral teaching, the word "proportionate" has a very specific meaning, and "proportionate" must be interpreted in an authentic way. It is rooted in the moral principle of "double effect." For example: In the case where a person is in a dilemma in which he or she is forced to choose to act in a way that he or she would not normally act. The act in question must be good morally or at least neutral morally, and the person must not intend any foreseen evil consequence to his or her act. For such an act to be permitted, there must be a *proportionate reason*. Simple example: While one is morally obliged to avoid injury to one's own body, one jumps in a river to save someone else. There is a proportionate reason present -- to save another's life. But if one jumps in a river to save his sinking automobile -- this is not a proportionate reason.

So what are the proportionate reasons for voting for a pro-abortion candidate? Abortion is categorically different than the issue of prescription drugs because we are talking about the fundamental right to life. We are held accountable for the issues that are intrinsically evil and to not give any public credibility to them. When you have an issue of killing vs. the issue of public policy, they are not proportional.

What about the war in Iraq, or the death penalty? Even the death penalty or a pre-emptive war, ill conceived or not, which also involve human life, are not *proportionate* to abortion as the Church defines this term. You can argue the rightness or wrongness of war, but there are no two sides on direct, intentional, abortion, or euthanasia, or same-sex unions. Issues proportionate to abortion are euthanasia, funding of stem cell research, etc. which intentionally destroys the life of a human person, of body and soul - abortion taking the lives of millions of Americans each year, one every four minutes.

"But stem cell research will save lives!" "Why not abortion? -- It is hard to legislate, and an unwanted child is worse!" "Why put someone through the agony of death - it is more loving to pull the plug, as they wish it!" Right? Wrong. We must never accept anything as love if it lacks the truth, or anything as true if it lacks love. The Church condemns this practice of *proportionalism* - the performance of an evil act for a greater good. Nowhere and at no time did Jesus do evil for a greater good. Therefore, a proportionalistic reason or rationale also does not warrant the voting for a pro-abortion candidate.

So what are the non-negotiable issues ?