

## **Catholic Laymen in the Public Square**

### **A Catholic Response to the "Call for Civility"**

1. All men and women of good will value civility, but civility is not the highest --- or the only --- civic virtue. Rather, justice is. As Pope Benedict XVI reminds us in *Deus Caritas Est*, "Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics."
2. If Catholic politicians advocated segregation or --- even worse --- slavery, would there be a call for civility towards them?
3. If Catholic politicians said they did not believe in just war principles but rather in aggressive wars of conquest, would there be a call to be civil toward them?
4. If Catholic politicians said the poor are poor because of their bad behavior and we are not obliged to help them in any way, wouldn't we say they are heartless and even un-Christian?
5. We know the answer to these questions. There would be a justified public and not very civil call for their removal from public life. Moreover, there would be a public and justified call for the Catholic hierarchy to do something about them. And leading the public cry would be many who have signed the "Call for Civility."
6. Some ask for civility now for one reason, abortion. John Paul the Great called abortion the greatest civil rights issue of our time and the US Conference of Catholic Bishops recently called it the number one political issue of our time. Embryo-destructive research, and homosexual marriage follow right behind, though numerous Catholic politicians also oppose the fundamental teachings of the Church on these issues.
7. The lack of public civility comes not from pro-lifers but from those Catholic politicians who support the right to kill innocent life in the womb and those who support defining man-woman marriage out of existence. But, some want to treat these politicians differently because they agree with them on important but purely prudential questions like health care, and the minimum wage.
8. These are old and tired arguments that have been criticized by successive Popes and by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops for putting unequal problems on the same moral plane. Though not all of its signers intend it, we believe the effect of the "Call for Civility" would be to silence the pro-life and pro-family movements. We oppose this effort root and branch.
9. One of the greatest moral leaders in modern history led the fight in Britain to end the slave trade. William Wilberforce also campaigned for prison reform, the end of child labor and many other worthy social reforms. But Wilberforce knew that all these questions would never be answered until the great poison of the slave trade was ended. The slave trade coarsened the British people, the British ruling class, and British public life. In precisely the same way, abortion and other issues have coarsened our public life, and have poisoned American political discourse and our politics. Progress will not be made on other important but prudential issues about which well-intentioned people may disagree civilly unless and until the Culture of Death is as much a part of history as the slave trade.

10. In short, we will feel free even strongly to condemn the public policy positions of Catholic politicians who support abortion, embryo-destructive research, and homosexual marriage. They stand against the teachings of the Church and in favor of morally repugnant practices that are counter to the common good and that should be unwelcome in a just or even polite society. And we support bishops who move strongly to eliminate their grave public scandal. We say this not as Democrats or Republicans but as faithful Catholics.

Signed,

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