

Being Pro-life is About Much More Than Just Abortion
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A few days ago I was surprised to receive an email from a parishioner that began, “I am honestly confused about what the Catholic Church actually considers pro-life positions. I did not think that abortion was the only pro-life position of the church.” The parishioner went on to say that they thought I was only concerned about abortion. They wanted to know why the Catholic Church and myself are not concerned about other pro-life issues such as the death penalty, assisted suicide, suicide in general, the consistent life ethic, and climate change.

I was surprised because I know that both the Catholic Church as a whole and I have written on a variety of pro-life issues. Then God reminded me that this parishioner is a fairly new reader of my writings. Questions are good when we are willing to let go of human ideas and seek answers from our faith. We also need to accept that we will never have all the answers.

Then I realized that because this parishioner is a fairly new reader of my writings and presentations, most of what they have seen me write is on abortion. However, this is not because I think that abortion is the only pro-life issue. It is also true that much of what the Catholic Church has written on pro-life issues in recent months centers on abortion.

The Holy Spirit then inspired me to realize that if this one parishioner was not aware of the breadth of our Catholic Church’s (and my) positions on pro-life issues, then there are probably others who think the same thing. So, I am writing this article to help people understand the breadth of Catholic pro-life teaching.

Catholic pro-life teaching is included in the [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) and the [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#). That said, a foundational document for understanding the Catholic position on pro-life teaching is [*Evangelium Vitae \(The Gospel of Life\)*](#). St. Pope John Paul II wrote this in 1995. In paragraph 87, he writes

Where life is involved, the service of charity must be profoundly consistent. It cannot tolerate bias and discrimination, for human life is sacred and inviolable at every stage and in every situation; it is an indivisible good. We need then to "show care" for all life and for the life of everyone. Indeed, at an even deeper level, we need to go to the very roots of life and love.

Cardinal Bernadin of Chicago spoke of this as the consistent ethic of life. All life issues are important. Every human being deserves to be treated with dignity and respect from the moment of their conception until natural death.

So, why does the Catholic Church (and me) focus on abortion? Because our American society focuses on abortion. Since the Dobbs vs. Jackson decision by the Supreme Court in 2022, many state governments in our nation have been hyper-focused on passing laws and/or amending their state constitutions to either enshrine abortion in their laws and constitutions or to ban it. (You may remember [reading my articles on New York State Proposal One](#) for the election in 2024). The

Catholic Church writes new material to help people understand *why* we say abortion is wrong in light of present arguments.

Likewise, my inspiration for new articles and presentations comes from what I read in the news. When I hear something that gives a different perspective, asks new questions, and/or calls for action (such as voting on constitutional amendments), I write to address the present concerns. Here, I will mention that I heard this week that a bill that would legalize assisted suicide in New York State was introduced in the state legislature. This has happened each year for a few years. However, it has never made it to the floor. If it appears this year that it will come up for discussion and/or a vote, I will write more. I say more because I have at least a couple of homilies on assisted-suicide on blog in the [pro-life: end of life category](#) and it is the focus of [Part III](#) in my series of presentations, [Treating Life with Dignity and Love](#). (This series is the most comprehensive work I have done on Catholic Pro-Life teaching).

You can find Catholics, even bishops, who say abortion is a make-or-break issue for voting. Taking a broader view, Pope Francis writes

Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development. Equally sacred, however, are the lives of the poor, those already born, the destitute, the abandoned and the underprivileged, the vulnerable infirm and elderly exposed to covert euthanasia, the victims of human trafficking, new forms of slavery, and every form of rejection. We cannot uphold an ideal of holiness that would ignore injustice in a world where some revel, spend with abandon and live only for the latest consumer goods, even as others look on from afar, living their entire lives in abject poverty.¹

While the abortion debate often receives the focus, this does not mean that there is no other pro-life teaching being offered. Abortion receives the focus as what the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) call the preeminent issue along with euthanasia.² Yet, it also says in paragraph 42, that we should not be single issue voters. Abortion receives the most attention of abortion, euthanasia, and the death penalty, because the child in the womb is alive ([see my recent article “The Beginning and the End”](#)) *and completely innocent*. A criminal who is sentenced to death has done something wrong (we will not get into the truly innocent people who have been wrongly convicted today). With Euthanasia, *hopefully* the person whose life is being terminated is at least making the decision for themselves. If we do not say anything, who will speak for children in the womb who cannot speak for themselves on abortion?

Here, again, I will mention that even when abortion is the preeminent and immediate issue, it does not mean that it has to be the only issue. For example, in the parishes I serve at, with the

¹ Pope Francis, [Gaudete et Exsultate](#). March 19, 2018. 101.

² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States with New Introductory Note*. USCCB: Washington, DC. 2023. <https://www.usccb.org/offices/justice-and-peace/forming-consciences-faithful-citizenship>.

anniversary of Roe v. Wade this week, we have information about abortion available on tables but there is also material on other life issues on the tables.

Regarding our Catholic understanding on other pro-life issues, I have written on several of them. For example, I have written on our Catholic understanding of [just war theory](#) (and [applied it to the war between Israel and Hamas](#)) the [corporal works of mercy](#) to help those facing poverty and isolation, [housing issues](#), [hate speech](#), and how we act towards people with [same-sex attraction](#) and [gender issues](#). In each case, I try to include the importance of loving them rather than condemning them. These articles all include references to official Catholic documents on these issues.

Our faith is relevant on many issues. For example, Pope Francis wrote an encyclical, [Laudato Si](#), dedicated to climate issues and taking care of what God has given us in creation.

Looking at other pro-life issues, just within the last six weeks, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) have called for clemency for those on death row.³ Since then, President Biden granted clemency to most of the convicted criminals on federal death row.⁴

If you read news from states with the death penalty, each time those states are about to execute someone, the bishops of that state generally issue a statement asking for *clemency*. It may not make the national news, but they persevere in asking for clemency each time. What our faith teaches about the death penalty applies to everyone. This is demonstrated in an article on how I [disagree with the death penalty even for people like Saddam Hussein](#).

The parishioner rightly questions the actions of pro-life activists who cause injury to staff at abortion centers. Here, I respond that the Catholic Church (and I totally agree) describes such actions as unacceptable.

Catholic groups have condemned violence against abortion facilities. The local bishop condemned the same action.⁵

One can find official Catholic teaching against deliberate acts of hatred in paragraph [2303](#) of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. We must never let our anger control us for when it does, it is a deadly sin.

³ see Jonah McKeown, “U.S. bishops call for Biden to spare federal death row prisoners before leaving office,” Catholic News Agency, December 9, 2024.

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/260931/americas-bishops-call-for-biden-to-spare-federal-death-row-prisoners-before-leaving-office>

⁴ see Daniel Payne, “Biden commutes death row sentences of 37 federal prisoners.” Catholic News Agency. December 23, 2024. (with quote from Pope Francis asking for clemency)

<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/261199/biden-commutes-death-row-sentences-of-nearly-40-federal-prisoners>.

⁵ “Seek mercy, not violence – Denver's archbishop on Planned Parenthood shooting.” Catholic News Agency. December 2, 2015. <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/33060/seek-mercy-not-violence-%E2%80%93-denvers-archbishop-on-planned-parenthood-shooting>.

The USCCB offers the following teaching on such acts of violence against abortion facilities.

“We cannot teach that killing is wrong by killing. We have reached the point in one very visible case where a jury has urged the execution of the person who murdered the physician who was destroying unborn children. This cycle of violence diminishes all of us -- especially our children. For our part, we oppose both the violence of abortion and the use of violence to oppose abortion. We are clear in our total repudiation of any effort to advocate or carry out murder in the name of the pro-life cause. Such acts cannot be justified. They deny the fundamental value of each human life, and do irreparable harm to genuine pro-life witness.⁶

What would Jesus have to say about such violence? The one conducting the act of violence might refer to [Matthew 10:34](#)

Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth. I have come to bring not peace but the sword.

to justify using violence. However, this is not what Jesus intended. When his disciples act with violence, Jesus said in [Matthew 26:52](#)

Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword”

and in [Luke 22:49-51](#) we read

His disciples realized what was about to happen, and they asked, “Lord, shall we strike with a sword?” And one of them struck the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear. But Jesus said in reply, “Stop, no more of this!” Then he touched the servant’s ear and healed him.

[You can’t fight hate with hate.](#) At end of my article, [“What’s It Going to Take to End the Violence?”](#) I write

What’s it going to take to end the violence? Tears, tears that flow from the depths of our “*contrite, humbled hearts*” to God.

I did a search on my website for articles referring to violence. There are [106 articles that speak about violence](#). None of them are in favor of violence. Rather, they all say in one form or another “we must break the cycle of violence.”⁷

Another example of what our Catholic Church says regarding the use of violence is

⁶ Confronting A Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action: A Pastoral Message of the U.S. Catholic Bishops – 1994” <https://www.usccb.org/resources/confronting-culture-violence-catholic-framework-action>.

⁷ see [“Is Life Being Respected?”](#).

In fact, the Church says It is deplorable that homosexual persons have been and are the object of violent malice in speech or in action. Such treatment deserves condemnation from the Church's pastors wherever it occurs. It reveals a kind of disregard for others which endangers the most fundamental principles of a healthy society. The intrinsic dignity of each person must always be respected in word, in action and in law.⁸

We need to respect life at every stage. We prioritize innocent life but all life is precious from the moment of conception until natural death. All life must be treated with the dignity it deserves.

I will end this article by pointing to action alerts offered by the USCCB and, for those living in New York State, the New York State Catholic Conference (NYSCC, Catholic bishops in most states have similar bodies). These conferences monitor upcoming legislative action and/or policy making activities by the government. When issues relevant to our faith are under discussion, they email “action alerts” to alert readers of what is being proposed and offer easy to use links with text to send the appropriate elected leaders an email.

You can sign up for the USCCB action alerts at <https://www.usccb.org/take-action>.

You can sign up for the NYSCC action alerts at <https://www.nyscatholic.org/action-center>.

Peace,

Fr. Jeff

⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), “Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the Pastoral Care of Homosexual Persons.” October 1, 1986. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19861001_homosexual-persons_en.html, 10.