

FIVE NON-NEGOTIABLE ISSUES

Based on Church teachings, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Encyclicals of the Pope, and issue papers from the Office of the Doctrine of the Faith, the following five issues concern actions that are intrinsically evil and must never be promoted by the law or supported in any way by Catholics.

There is a hierarchy of truths in Catholic Social teaching. Defending innocent human life, protecting marriage and concern for the poor are at the top of it. To not compromise on these positions is not, contrary to what some may assert, to engage in "single issue" politics. Rather, it is to judge all other important issues through a lens of truth and a genuine concern for the "common good" of all.

Intrinsically evil actions are those that fundamentally conflict with the moral law and can never be performed under any circumstances. It is a serious sin to deliberately endorse or promote any of these actions, and no person who really wants to advance the common good will support any action contrary to the non-negotiable principles involved in these issues.

1. Abortion

The Church teaches that, regarding a law permitting abortions, it is "never licit to obey it, or to take part in a propaganda campaign in favor of such a law, or to vote for it" (EV 73). *Abortion is the intentional and direct killing of an innocent human being, and therefore it is a form of homicide. The unborn child is always an innocent party, and no law may permit the taking of his life. Even when a child is conceived through rape or incest, the fault is not the child's, who should not suffer death for others' sins.*

Another sub-set issue within this subject area that is non-negotiable pertains to Human Reproductive Technologies, which includes the Church's position against Contraception, In-Vitro Fertilization and Sterilization.

2. Euthanasia

Often disguised by the name "mercy killing," euthanasia is also a form of homicide. No person has a right to take his own life, and no one has the right to take the life of any innocent person. 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 (cf. EV 73).

3. Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Human embryos are human beings. "Respect for the dignity of the human being excludes all experimental manipulation or exploitation of the human embryo" (CRF 4b). *Recent scientific advances show that medical treatments that researchers hope to develop from experimentation on embryonic stem cells can often be developed by using adult stem cells instead. Adult stem cells can be obtained without doing harm to the adults from whom they come. Thus there is no valid medical argument in favor of using embryonic stem cells. And even if there were benefits to be had from such experiments, they would not justify destroying innocent embryonic humans.*

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 both of human procreation and of the conjugal union" (RHL 1:6). *Human cloning also involves abortion because the "rejected" or "unsuccessful" embryonic clones are destroyed, yet each clone is a human being.*

5. Homosexual "Marriage"

True marriage is the union of one man and one woman. Legal recognition of any other union as "marriage" undermines true marriage, and legal recognition of homosexual unions actually does homosexual persons a disfavor by encouraging them to persist in what is an objectively immoral arrangement. "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" (*UHP 10*).

Issues That Are Not Non-Negotiable

Some issues allow for a diversity of opinion, and Catholics are permitted leeway in endorsing or opposing particular policies. This is the case with the questions of when to go to war and when to apply the death penalty. Though the Church urges caution regarding both of these issues, it acknowledges that the state has the right to employ them in some circumstances (*CCC 2309, 2267*).

Pope Benedict XVI, when he was still Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, spoke of this in a document dealing with when Catholics may receive Communion:

"Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. For example, if a Catholic were to be at odds with the Holy Father on the -application of capital punishment or on the decision to wage war, he would not for that reason be considered unworthy to present himself to receive Holy Communion. While the Church exhorts civil authorities to seek peace, not war, and to exercise discretion and mercy in imposing punishment on criminals, it may still be permissible to take up arms to repel an aggressor or to have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not however with regard to abortion and euthanasia" (*WRHC 3*).

The same is true of many other issues that are the subject of political debate: the best way to help the poor, to manage the economy, to protect the environment, to handle immigration, and to provide education, health care, and retirement security. Catholics may legitimately take different approaches to these issues. While the underlying principles (such as solidarity with the poor) are non-negotiable, the specific applications being debated politically admit of many options, and so are not "non-negotiable."

Reference Resources:

CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church

CPL = Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, Doctrinal Notes on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life

CRF = Pontifical Council for the Family, Charter of the Rights of the Family

EV = John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, (the Gospel of Life)

RHL = Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation

UHP = Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons

WRHC = Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Worthiness to Receive Holy Communion, General Principles*

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