

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
***GAUDETE ET EXSULTATE***  
OF THE HOLY FATHER  
**FRANCIS**  
ON THE CALL TO HOLINESS  
IN TODAY'S WORLD

**CHAPTER THREE: IN THE LIGHT OF THE MASTER**

***THE GREAT CRITERION***

***Ideologies striking at the heart of the Gospel***

100. I regret that ideologies lead us at times to two harmful errors. On the one hand, there is the error of those Christians who separate these Gospel demands from their personal relationship with the Lord, from their interior union with him, from openness to his grace. Christianity thus becomes a sort of NGO stripped of the luminous mysticism so evident in the lives of Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Vincent de Paul, Saint Teresa of Calcutta, and many others. For these great saints, mental prayer, the love of God and the reading of the Gospel in no way detracted from their passionate and effective commitment to their neighbours; quite the opposite.

101. The other harmful ideological error is found in those who find suspect the social engagement of others, seeing it as superficial, worldly, secular, materialist, communist or populist. Or they relativize it, as if there are other more important matters, or the only thing that counts is one particular ethical issue or cause that they themselves defend. 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.[84] 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.

102. We often hear it said that, with respect to relativism and the flaws of our present world, the situation of migrants, for example, is a lesser issue. Some Catholics consider it a secondary issue compared to the "grave" bioethical questions. That a politician looking for votes might say such a thing is understandable, but not a Christian, for whom the only proper attitude is to stand in the shoes of those brothers and sisters of ours who risk their lives to offer a future to their children. Can we not realize that this is exactly what Jesus demands of us, when he tells us that in welcoming the stranger we welcome him (cf. *Mt 25:35*)? Saint Benedict did so readily, and though it might have "complicated" the life of his monks, he ordered that all guests who knocked at the monastery door be welcomed "like Christ", [85] with a gesture of veneration; [86] the poor and pilgrims were to be met with "the greatest care and solicitude". [87]

103. A similar approach is found in the Old Testament: "You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you yourselves were strangers in the land of Egypt" (*Ex 22:21*). "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (*Lev 19:33-34*). This is not a notion invented by some Pope, or a momentary fad. In today's world too, we are called to follow the path of spiritual wisdom proposed by the prophet Isaiah to show what is pleasing to God. "Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn" (58:7-8).

# Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship

A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States

with New Introductory Letter

## Introductory Letter

As Catholics, we bring the richness of our faith to the public square. We draw from both faith and reason as we seek to affirm the dignity of the human person and the common good of all. With renewed hope, we, the Catholic Bishops of the United States, are re-issuing *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, our teaching document on the political responsibility of Catholics, which provides guidance for all who seek to exercise their rights and duties as citizens.

Everyone living in this country is called to participate in public life and contribute to the common good.<sup>1</sup> In *Rejoice and Be Glad [Gaudete et Exsultate]*, Pope Francis writes:

Your identification with Christ and his will involves a commitment to build with him that kingdom of love, justice and universal peace. . . . You cannot grow in holiness without committing yourself, body and soul, to giving your best to this endeavor.<sup>2</sup>

The call to holiness, he writes, requires a “firm and passionate” defense of “the innocent unborn.” “Equally sacred,” he further states, 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.”<sup>3</sup>

Our approach to contemporary issues is first and foremost rooted in our identity as followers of Christ and as brothers and sisters to all who are made in God’s image. For all Catholics, including those seeking public office, our participation in political parties or other groups to which we may belong should be influenced by our faith, not the other way around.

Our 2015 statement, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, sought to help Catholics form their consciences, apply a consistent moral framework to issues facing the nation and world, and shape their choices in elections in the light of Catholic Social Teaching. In choosing to re-issue this statement, we recognize that the thrust of the document and the challenges it addresses remain relevant today. At the same time, some challenges have become even more pronounced. Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to important issues such as migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation. In the United States and around the world, many challenges demand our attention.

The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself,<sup>4</sup> because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed. At the same time, we cannot dismiss or ignore other serious threats to human life and dignity such as racism, the environmental crisis, poverty and the death penalty.<sup>5</sup>