

PEACE AND JUSTICE



Article – 5

The following is an excerpt from: <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship-title>

The Church's obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ, who offers a vision of life revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Tradition. To echo the teaching of the Second Vatican Council: Christ, the Word made flesh, in showing us the Father's love, also shows us what it truly means to be human (see *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 22). Christ's love for us lets us see our human dignity in full clarity and compels us to love our neighbors as he has loved us. Christ, the Teacher, shows us what is true and good, that is, what is in accord with our human nature as free, intelligent beings created in God's image and likeness and endowed by the Creator with dignity and rights as well as duties.

Christ also reveals to us the weaknesses that are part of all human endeavors. In the language of revelation, we are confronted with sin, both personal and structural. "The Church's wisdom," according to Pope Benedict XVI, "has always pointed to the presence of original sin in social conditions and in the structure of society" (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 34). All "structures of sin," as St. John Paul II calls them, "are rooted in personal sin, and thus always linked to the concrete acts of individuals who introduce these structures, consolidate them and make them difficult to remove" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 36). Thus, our faith helps us understand that the pursuit of a civilization of love must address our own failures and the ways in which these failures distort the broader ordering of the society in which we live. In the words of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action and morals" (no. 407). As Pope Francis, quoting Pope Benedict XVI, reaffirmed in *Evangelii Gaudium*, "We need to be convinced that charity 'is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones)'" (no. 205).

10. What faith teaches about the dignity of the human person, about the sacredness of every human life, and about humanity's strengths and weaknesses helps us see more clearly the same truths that also come to us through the gift of human reason. At the center of these truths is respect for the dignity of every person. This is the core of Catholic moral and social teaching. Because we are people of both faith and reason, it is appropriate and necessary for us to bring this essential truth about human life and dignity to the public square. We are called to practice Christ's commandment to "love one another" (Jn 13:34). We are also called to promote the well-being of all, to share our blessings with those most in need, to defend marriage, and to protect the lives and dignity of all, especially the weak, the vulnerable, the voiceless. In his first encyclical letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, Pope Benedict XVI explained that "charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as 'social charity'" (no. 29).

In Christ,

Deacon Joe Fragale – jfragale@stambroseonthehill.com