



Capitol Comments: A Government *Of* the People, *For* the People, *By* the People

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During July we celebrate Independence Day and the inception of the United States. Religion and faith influenced our Founding Fathers as the ink dried on the Declaration of Independence, and that influence still continues today.

There is a common misconception that the US Constitution requires a separation of church and state. The Constitution actually *protects* the freedom of religion by prohibiting the state from establishing a specific religion or preventing the people from practicing their religion. As Catholics we have a right and a responsibility to act as Faithful Citizens, and we are blessed to live in a country where we can do so publicly. But what does our faith teach about the responsibilities of the state?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church affirms that every human community needs an authority to govern it and that it is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society (1898, 1927).

The Common Good consists of three essential elements (paraphrased from 1906-1910):

1. Respect for the person - public authorities must respect the fundamental and inalienable rights of the human person.
2. Social well-being and development of the group - it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on.
3. Peace - stability and security of a just order.

Furthermore, the political community has a duty to honor the family by ensuring the protection of marriage, the freedom to raise children according to one's moral and religious convictions, the right to private property, free enterprise, work and housing, medical care, assistance for the aged, family benefits, and the protection of security and health (paraphrased from 2211).

It is not the sole responsibility of the individual or the Church to act charitably toward the poor and vulnerable in our midst. The Church, individuals, businesses, nonprofits, other organizations, **and** government must all work to promote the common good in our society.

With references to "Washington," "the Feds," and "Big Brother," we may be inclined to forget that the government is not an inanimate object, but rather institutions created of, for, and by the people. In our prayers and advocacy, let us never forget that those working in government are first and foremost children of God, and that they share our call to promote justice.

In teaching about state authority, the Catechism includes the Church's most ancient prayer for political authorities from Pope St. Clement of Rome: *"Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offense the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honor, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favor with you (1900)."*

If you don't have a Catechism of the Catholic Church, you can order or read it online here www.usccb.org/catechism. For more information on Catholic Advocacy, visit www.TXcatholic.org.