

Capitol Comments:

Tell Pharaoh, King of Egypt, to Set My People Free: The Old Testament Roots of Political Advocacy

By Jennifer Carr Allmon, Associate Director of the Texas Catholic Conference

Every week during legislative session, we send out our email newsletter, the *Texas Catholic Voice*, which includes a weekly report of bills that the conference is supporting or opposing in the Texas legislature. Every week, inevitably we get some version of the same question: “Why do the Bishops support/oppose fill-in-the-blank?” If readers agree with our position, they praise the leadership and wisdom of the Bishops and the Church. However, when someone does not agree with the position, we hear the refrain: “The Church has no place in politics and needs to stay out of state affairs.”

Is there a precedent for the mixing of church and state, scripturally speaking? There is. A short reflection on scripture shows that the tradition of advocacy, of speaking out before government, goes all the way back to the Old Testament and the story of Moses. In Exodus, Chapters 3-12, the Lord commands Moses to tell Pharaoh to set His people, the Israelites, free. Moses is nervous about such an order and explains to the Lord that he cannot do this because he is a poor speaker, “slow of speech and tongue.” God, however, is persistent in his commandment and assigns Aaron to assist Moses in his task. Now, we all know that Pharaoh doesn’t immediately jump into action and free the Israelites, to do so would upset his whole system of work and power. But, Moses and Aaron model God’s persistence and after all the plagues, Pharaoh finally allows the Israelites to leave.

Today’s injustices are numerous and, like Moses and Aaron, we are compelled by the Lord to cry out to the modern day Pharaohs. Too often respect for the life and dignity of the human person are overlooked and basic human rights, even the right to life, are disregarded as expensive or inconvenient. The Bishops, through their work in the realm of public policy, have provided guidance to us on the moral and social dimensions of today’s political questions.

Our foundational principle to protect the life and dignity of all human persons calls us to work to end abortion, euthanasia, destruction of human embryos, cloning and assisted suicide. We recognize the historic and present-day contributions of immigrants in Texas by supporting their ability to work in a healthy environment in order to provide for their families and continue their valuable participation in the community. We recognize parents as the primary educators of their children through supporting parental choice in education. We show God’s special concern for the poor and vulnerable by supporting programs that make health care more affordable and accessible, as well as measures that provide for environmental protections and morally appropriate health research. We support fiscal and moral reform in our state’s criminal justice system with an emphasis on ending the death



penalty and supporting successful rehabilitation and reintegration of those re-entering society.

So, why does the Church enter the public dialogue? Why do the Bishops direct the Texas Catholic Conference to take a position on these key issues of human life and dignity? It's simple really. The Lord has spoken and the people of God are not yet free.

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