



Capitol Comments: Striving for a Contradiction-Free Catholic Identity

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Recent news has given a lot of airtime and ink to the results of the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS), a poll that collects data on Americans and their religious preferences.

While there is an overall decrease in the percentage of those who consider themselves Christian, in Texas, the percentage of Catholics is on the rise. For those of us who try to keep tabs on the Church in Texas, this news is no real news.

Having written my undergraduate thesis on public relations in the Catholic Church, I recognize that the statistics in the data don't necessarily align perfectly in real life. What does it mean to say that one is Catholic? Is it a yes or no answer based on baptism? Is it a scale, factoring in variables such as "number of times the subject celebrates Mass" or "average number of confessions per year"?

We know from the media that Catholic legislators do not always follow Church teaching to a tee. Instead of following Jesus' call, they and other Catholics often respond to pressures and factors in society based on their own political ideology, cultural norms, or experiential research.

Following Jesus' call is not as simple as the WWJD keychains and bumper stickers might infer. We are called to stand up for the rights of all human life, from conception to natural death. We are called to respect the dignity of human life and strive to increase the quality of life for all, especially the poor and the vulnerable of our society. Our Church provides us with consistent and non-contradicting teaching, if seen through eyes guided by the Holy Spirit.

We respect the lives of the unborn while simultaneously caring for their mothers and families, recognizing the inherent link between the needs of immigrants, the poor, and the most vulnerable. We demand that children deserve access to basic healthcare, nutrition, and educational needs, while also advocating for those same needs for prisoners, who are also God's children.

Open your Catechism and you will not find teaching on these issues in a section labeled "politics." Rather, teaching is provided in the derivation of the meaning of the Creed that we profess every Sunday. In as much as we believe in One God, the Father the Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, we also believe in the sanctity of the life of all, imprisoned, unborn, poor, undocumented, aging, educated, friend, or foe, who are, of course, our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Texas Catholics can boast the first Cardinal of the Southwest and some of the most culturally diverse and rapidly growing Sees in the United States. But, where the statistics end, the real dimensions of our faith extend, calling us to make our voices heard. Our witness as Catholics does not end in our churches. We are called to "go forth to love and serve the Lord" in our communities, without an exception for anyone.

Look to your parish, your diocese, and the Texas Catholic Conference (www.TXcatholic.org) for information on how you can actively live out your Catholic Faith.