

Evangelium vitae and Catholic Social Teaching

*Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.**

ABSTRACT: Catholic social doctrine has three distinct but interrelated foci: the cultural (with special focus on religion, marriage, and family as the building-blocks of any society), the economic, and the political. After noting the tendency in some quarters to reduce Catholic social teaching to the economic, this essay details the contribution of Pope John Paul II's *Evangelium Vitae* not only by the clarity of its teaching on contemporary threats to human life from abortion and euthanasia but also by its way of integrating all three of the essential foci of Catholic social doctrine.

FROM THE BEGINNING of Christianity, there have been three main areas of concern in regard to social teaching: the economic, the political, and the cultural (with special attention to marriage and family). To see the object of Catholic social doctrine as exclusively – or even primarily – economic is myopic. Given the Church's insistence throughout history on the importance of all three of these areas and on their interrelation, there is reason to wonder if the penchant to deconstruct the teaching that is actually found in the documentary tradition of Catholic social doctrine and to re-interpret the documents in a socialist mode could be viewed as evidence of the intramural mischief of cultural marxism.

Admittedly, in some periods of the history of the Church there has been need for special concentration on one area rather than another. For the most part, the practice of concentrating on a small range of topics in any one document tended to bring greater clarity and forcefulness than comprehensive documents might have done. But treating the various issues in separate documents seems to have had an inadvertent silo effect of allowing some readers to think of these issues as if there were independent of one another.

Often enough, the focus of the documents has been on the political sphere.

* *Joseph W. Koterski, S.J.* is a Jesuit priest who has taught philosophy at Fordham University since 1992. He is the editor of *International Philosophical Quarterly* and the *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly*.

The battles for the freedom of the Church from control by Caesar have had to be fought and re-fought in different forms.¹ In other periods, the focus has been in the economic sphere. One sees this emphasis in the writings of Leo XIII and Pius XI that mark the beginning of the modern era of Catholic social teaching by their use of the encyclical form.² But even when it was necessary to concentrate on questions of religious liberty or on economic issues, there also tended to be separate documents by the same pope on marriage, family, and culture. It is clear that the papacy always recognized the need to understand political and economic questions in light of the Church's concern for family, marriage, and culture, precisely because the family is the basic unit of any and every society and because marriage is crucial for family life. For this reason there is a rich presentation of the role of family life in such matters as spousal love, child-rearing, personal maturation, the care of the aged, the sacramental life, and the handing on of the faith. When taken specifically in relation to the political and economic aspects of Catholic teaching, there is considerable emphasis on the role of the family in cultivating a sense of the common good and in serving as the first and most important of the many mediating institutions that protect individuals from domination by the powers invariably located in larger political and economic structures.

In my view, *Evangelium vitae* is particularly significant for counteracting both the misinterpretation of Catholic social teaching and the unintentional distortions that arise from the silo effect by the way it shows the profound interrelationship of the three principal areas of concern.

Some Preliminary Observations

To interpret the documents of Catholic social teaching correctly it is important to consider not only the topics covered in these texts but also the forms that this teaching takes. Doing so means attending to questions about the

¹ For an overview of this topic, see Robert L. Wilken, *Liberty in the Things of God: The Christian Origins of Religious Freedom* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2019).

² Maciej Zięba, *Papal Economics: The Catholic Church on Democratic Capitalism, from Rerum novarum to Caritas in veritate* (Wilmington DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2013). Over the course of history the Church has examined such issues as the right to private property, the importance of labor unions, the legitimacy of strikes under certain conditions, the question of taking interest on loans, and many others.

genre of ecclesial documents (e.g., encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, pastoral constitutions), about proper authority (e.g., the papal magisterium, the decisions of church councils, the authority of an individual bishop or an episcopal conference), about the grades of certitude expected for a particular statement and the type of assent that is required in any given case (e.g., *de fide definitiva*, *sententia probabilis*, etc.³), about the support that can be provided for such teaching by philosophical and theological argumentation, and about the crucial distinction between non-negotiable principles and prudential reasoning.⁴ The hermeneutic needed for proper understanding in this domain is quite complex, and not every assertion is at the same level.

In many quarters today there is considerable confusion when statements of a prudential nature and statements of principle. Prudential statements about contingent matters that are delivered by individuals without any formal authority should not be taken as if their judgments (including the scholarly judgments of the learned) on these topics had the same level of expected assent and obedience that statements of principle issued from the highest level of ecclesial authority require. They do not. Even the prudential judgments of experts, of professionals, and of individuals serving in positions of authority are still prudential judgments, and there can be reasonable disagreement among them.⁵ While there is no official list of the fundamental principles of Catholic social teaching, the repeated mention of certain general tenets in tandem makes the basic list relatively clear.⁶

³ See the discussion in *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* by Ludwig Ott, trans. Patrick Lynch, revised edition by Robert Fastiggi (Bonn: Baronius Press, 2018), pp. 9-12.

⁴ See, for instance, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §2423: “The Church’s social teaching proposes principles for reflection; it provides criteria for judgment; its gives guidelines for action.”

⁵ Yves Simons reminds us that on questions of practical judgment it is not simply that there can be reasonable disagreement but that there can be more than one right answer. See his *Practical Knowledge* (Bronx NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 1991).

⁶ For instance, the duty to provide for one’s family and the right to a family wage; the obligations in justice to give what is due or fair to another and the obligations in charity and mercy to care for those in need; the legitimate demands of the good and the respect due to every individual person; the duty to render obedience to legitimate authority and the right of individuals to their liberty; the duty to honor and worship the true God and the right to freedom of religion and to the personal search for the truth about God. I have tried to provide the evidence for this pairing of principles

Further, there is an unfortunate tendency among those who promote the idea that Catholic social teaching is primarily a matter of economics to suggest that Catholic social thought should take the predominantly socialist positions that are typical of today's cultural marxism on the economic and political questions at issue. Where classical marxism trained its critique on the capitalist economics typical of the nineteenth century and championed class warfare, cultural marxism has broadened its perspective to champion the cause of various "oppressed minorities" in their struggle against "majorities" and "privileged" groups that are deemed their "oppressors." Taken collectively, the term refers to a broad movement that advocates revolutionary social transformation of many types by changes in the economic foundations of society. Its intellectual roots are to be found in such figures as Herbert Marcuse,⁷ Theodor Adorno,⁸ and other thinkers of the Frankfurt School who generated an approach called "Critical Theory" to address the perceived shortcomings of classical marxism.⁹ The influence of such thought is manifest

in Catholic social teaching in "The Use of Philosophical Principles in Catholic Social Teaching," *Proceedings of the Jesuit Philosophical Association* 66 (2005): 41-50.

⁷ One of the crucial sources, I think, is Herbert Marcuse's essay "Repressive Tolerance" in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff (Boston MA: Beacon Press, 1965). An original member of the Frankfurt School, he writes in this essay about the need for intolerance of traditional perspectives as oppressive. He stresses the importance of censoring conservative viewpoints and working carefully to diversify the curriculum, precisely so as to subject every form of traditional social norm to critique while championing post-colonialism, radical feminism, and an openness to diverse sexual orientations and sexual experimentation. In that essay he outlines many of the items that are now standard parts of agenda pursued in academic institutions. Given the veneration nowadays paid to the notion of the tolerance of difference, it would be interesting to bring Marcuse's essay on intolerance to broader attention. But even that might not help, if the desire for a certain outcome makes one blind to the performative contradiction involved in tolerating intolerance.

⁸ The volumes edited by Theodor Adorno with Betty Aron, Maria Hertz Levinson, and William Morrow under the title *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York NY: Wiley, 1964 [1950]). have been extremely influential in social and political psychology, and his own essays are studies in taking the normal constituents of personal identity, such as parenthood, pride in one's family, love of one's own country, love for God, and even adherence to traditional gender roles as pathological phenomena. For alternative stances to be encouraged, he notes the need for such traditional parts of self-identity to be handled as culturally created norms rather than as natural manifestations of personal maturity.

⁹ There have been many fine books that trace the strategy and tactics of Critical

today in various political campaigns pushing for a fully socialized economy, with their stress on diminishing the role of free-market mechanisms by transferring power more and more to governmental control of the economy as the preferred route to achieving certain social objectives.

In fact, Catholic social teaching concerns all three areas of focus (the economic, the political, and the cultural). But what Catholic social teaching actually holds about these matters is not at all what many people apparently think that it is. Its careful articulation of the moral limits on capitalism¹⁰ and on the need for limited government¹¹ arise from a sense that the purpose of economic activity and of governance is the spiritual and material welfare of the human person, a goal that is promoted by the rule of law, by the establishment and preservation of liberty under law, and by the cultivation of human development, understood not only as political enfranchisement and economic productivity but also as human maturation through moral and spiritual formation.

The reduction of Catholic social teaching to something akin to a socialist program seems to be connected more to the pervasiveness of reconstituted Marxist ideology in universities and among some ecclesial officials than to what the documents of the Church actually say on this topic. Those who disagree with my assessment here might well argue that they have no interest in atheistic marxism or in violent class warfare and that they are simply bringing out the authentically socialist character of the Gospel.

But this sort of statement risks missing the point. There certainly is a certain difference between the original forms of classical marxism and modern forms of cultural marxism. Classical marxism criticized even the practice of

Theory, including: Carl Boggs, *Social Movements and Political Power: Emerging Forms of Radicalism in the West* (Philadelphia PA: Temple Univ. Press, 1986) and Paul Edward Gottfried, *The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium* (Columbia MO: Univ. of Missouri Press, 2005).

¹⁰ The *Catechism* cites *Centesimus annus* §24 when it asserts: “Any system in which social relationships are determined entirely by economic factors is contrary to the nature of the human person and his act.” The following paragraphs (§§2424-2425) quote various passages from *Gaudium et spes*, *Laborem exercens*, and *Centesimus annus* to reject purely *laissez-faire* economics as causing conflicts that disturb the social order as well as the models that centralize economic control in ways that violate human dignity by overturning the basic rights of individuals.

¹¹ The *Catechism* §1903 quotes from such encyclicals as *Pacem in terris* §51 and *Centesimus annus* §44.

charity toward the poor, lest the assistance provided would dampen the sparks needed for revolution by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.¹² This orientation on class warfare and the violent overthrow of the old order has clearly been recalibrated by cultural marxism. But culture marxism is still marxism. Sometimes its proponents still revert to open violence, but in more normal times, it practices the hermeneutics of suspicion, with new techniques and new areas of focus, such as the legitimacy of homosexual marriage and transgenderism, questions about whether non-citizens and felons may vote, questions about borders and immigration, and so on. Even to voice certain opinions on these matters in academic circles is regarded as illiberal and dangerous to democracy.

The new rhetoric speaks of oppressed minorities as having rights, and its hermeneutic of suspicion¹³ carries most of the weight that argument and evidence are supposed to carry in classical argumentation. Even to doubt that there are gay rights or transgender rights and even to propose that there is something intrinsically wrong with abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia is regarded as a sign of prejudice or the imposition of religious belief in a way that is unacceptable in liberal democracy. In this way the new rhetoric is a rhetoric that is frequently used in support of practices that are morally horrendous such as adultery, abortion, homosexual activity, transgender surgery, and the like. The explanation of the immorality of such practices in encyclicals like John Paul II's *Evangelium vitae* and Benedict XVI's *Deus caritas est* include analysis of the strategies used by the proponents of the hermeneutics of suspicion to attempt to marginalize the voice of the Church in making reasonable arguments in the public forum on these questions.¹⁴

In light of such secular opposition, it is unsurprising that the Church's doctrines on topics in the area of family and culture as well as love and sexuality get shunted to the periphery, labeled as relics of medieval piety, or

¹² For a vivid account of this aspect of marxism, see Whittaker Chambers, *Witness* (Washington, D.C.: Henry Regnery, 1952), pp. 218f.

¹³ A phrase coined by Paul Ricoeur in *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1965) to describe a tactic for cultural critique that is common to Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche, the three great "masters of suspicion." See pp. 32-35 et passim.

¹⁴ See EV §17. For an analysis of Benedict XVI's strategy for dealing with the hermeneutics of suspicion, see my essay "Benedictine Style," *Fellowship of Catholic Scholars Quarterly* 33/4 (2010): 2-3.

ridiculed as practices of outmoded customs. The economic and political implications of taking such doctrines seriously would be extremely inconvenient for a socialist agenda.

The actual contours of Catholic social doctrine are in fact quite different from socialism. From the beginning and throughout the Church's history all three of these areas are well represented in ecclesial documents and in moral theology. In fact, there is a profound continuity of vision about their interrelationship in the social order and about their inseparability in a Catholic understanding of the world. It is against the background of this understanding of Catholic social teaching that we should see the contributions of *Evangelium vitae*, both to the social magisterium of John Paul II and to the perennial wisdom of the Church in regard to the social order.

The Silo Problem

Curiously, the predominant form that ecclesial documents on the problems of social order have employed may have inadvertently contributed to the misperception of Catholic social teaching as exclusively or primarily economic. Even before the advent of Leo XIII's landmark encyclical *Rerum novarum* in 1891 and long after that document's appearance, each papal writing in the encyclical genre tended to concentrate on one major problem or topic. The advantages of keeping a sharp focus are obvious, and the complexities of the situations that had to be treated often necessitated this sort of tracking.

The unintended consequence of such foreshortening, however, was to give the appearance that one could legitimately address the problems in some one area of the social order without much explicit attention to the ramifications for other aspects. Even though the same pope who wrote a document in one area also wrote documents in the other areas, the documents themselves tended to have a narrow concentration of focus. Further, once there started to be a considerable number of documents focused on any one of the three areas, it became easier for readers to think about these documents as longitudinally proceeding along some historical axis rather than as horizontally connected to the other areas that Catholic social teaching traditionally saw as important and interconnected.¹⁵

From start to finish *Evangelium vitae* systematically analyzes attacks on

¹⁵ To see the field as a whole, see the chart in Appendix 1.

human life and dignity in relation to the three interrelated foci of Catholic social teaching. By reviewing the four parts of the document, we will be able to see the significance of this way of handling the topic.

An overview

The Introduction (EV §1-§6) sounds three themes that will often recur throughout the encyclical. First, Jesus teaches that for all aspects and stages of human life to receive their full significance, we must see them in relation to our supernatural vocation: a new and eternal life that consists in communion with God in heaven. As a corrective to some secular perspectives on the topic, the document makes clear that life on this Earth is not our ultimate destiny but the condition of the human being as *homo viator* called to eternal life with God.¹⁶ Yet this vision of earthly life as truly having penultimate importance should elicit from us more rather than less concern about respect for human life and for the conditions of the social order, especially in light of recent trends that imperil respect of human persons in general and for the vulnerable in particular. In service of this point the document quotes at length from *Gaudium et spes*'s condemnation of a wide array of crimes and attacks on human life.¹⁷

Second, every human community – including those of a political and economic character – must to the highest possible degree respect the value of human lives from their beginning to their end. While believers have a special obligation to defend and promote “the incomparable value of every human person” by virtue of the understanding of God’s love for humankind (something that our faith gives us as an implication of the Incarnation), “every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart...the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end.”¹⁸ The reference here to the way in which the natural law provides access to objective moral knowledge in matters of family and culture as it does in the political and economic sphere is an abiding theme in the entire tradition of

¹⁶ First enunciated in the introduction at EV §2, this theme appears over a hundred times in the course of the text, e.g., in the third chapter (EV §52, §80-§86) and again in the encyclical’s closing paragraph (EV §105). There is an extended treatment of it early in chapter two (EV §29-§37)

¹⁷ EV §3, citing *Gaudium et spes* §27.

¹⁸ EV §2.

Catholic social teaching.¹⁹

Third, the new form of attacks on human life and dignity in recent years have involved serious distortions of the political and economic order and thus disturbance of the human condition in which we are to seek salvation. The document notes that the justifications given for such practices as abortion and euthanasia have often appealed to the rights of individual freedom in order to claim exemption from punishment and even free assistance from health-care systems (EV §4). Attacks on human life long considered criminal and repugnant to moral sense have become socially acceptable, regardless of demographic implications, the degradations thereby introduced into the medical profession, and the contradictions set loose within juridical systems.

The Integration of Revelation with Philosophy and Theology

Before setting out its normative statements on abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia in chapter three, *Evangelium vitae* offers two chapters of biblically based moral theology and of careful philosophical reasoning about human nature and the family as well as about the political and economic spheres. As in his treatment of fundamental moral theology in *Veritatis splendor*, John Paul II devotes these two chapters of *Evangelium vitae* to moral reflection on the basis of biblical exegesis. In this way he honors the Second Vatican Council's directive to integrate the moral wisdom given us in revelation with the philosophical and theological arguments used in articulating the Church's social and moral teaching.²⁰

The meditation on the story of Cain and Abel found in the first chapter provides an opportunity to bring forth various points of Catholic social teaching. In recounting the economic and political situations that John Paul II dealt with at greater length in his 1991 encyclical *Centesimus annus*, this chapter warns against allowing utilitarian calculations to dominate public discourse and to exclude from consideration the moral norms that protect human life (especially the lives of the weak and the vulnerable).

Cain tries to cover up his crime and to elude the Lord's question regarding

¹⁹ In explaining the duty of the Church to speak with courage in the defense of such weak and defenseless persons as the unborn who are threatened by abortion, John Paul II invokes the memory of Leo XIII's defense of the rights of working classes in *Rerum novarum* at EV §5.

²⁰ See *Optatam Totius* §16. A summary keyed to the paragraph numbers used within the text of *Evangelium vitae* can be found in Appendix 2.

the whereabouts of Abel by telling a lie and asking a rhetorical question designed to take attention away from his responsibility: “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4:9). John Paul II sees a similar tendency in those who refuse to show solidarity with the weaker members of society and to accept the costs of honoring our responsibilities toward others. That conscience can never be definitively silenced (even when there is great pressure) about the inviolable value of the innocent seems evident “in the tendency to disguise certain crimes against life in its early or final stages by using innocuous medical terms that distract attention from the fact that what is involved is the right to life of an actual human person.”²¹

By getting professionals and prominent figures to engage in such semantic gymnastics, public opinion has often shifted toward thinking of crimes as if they were rights protected by law. In this way the problem goes beyond the questions about subjective responsibility of those who makes choices that in themselves are evil. It is “a problem which exists at the cultural, social, and political levels, where it reveals its more sinister and disturbing aspects in the tendency, ever more widely shared, to interpret the above crimes against life as *legitimate expressions of individual freedom, to be acknowledged and protected as actual rights.*”²²

In order to recover the perspective needed for adequately handling the political, economic, and legal questions in a particular society, there is need to combat the crisis of culture that is generated by skepticism about knowledge in general, about moral knowledge in particular, and about proper value of human life as always a good but not an absolute good. Human life is always a good precisely because the kind of life that God bestows upon human being is different in kind from that of all other living creatures. By virtue of being made in the image and according to the likeness of God, there is in every human being a sublime dignity that is the reason for the moral prohibition of ever treating human persons as mere objects for another’s use.²³ But the prospect of sin by the misuse of the divine gifts of reason, the ability to discern the difference between good and evil, and the power of free choice means that

²¹ EV §11.

²² EV §18, italics in the original.

²³ See, for instance, EV §34 for the encyclical’s treatment of the story of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:26 and its assessment of later biblical reflection on that passage in places like Sirach 17:3.

our moral dignity can be lost.²⁴ In the course of the encyclical's treatment of the moral requirement that we protect the innocent and the vulnerable, we also see an implication of the supernatural vocation to eternal life. In the course of a reflection on God's concern for bodily life evident in the many miracles of healing that Jesus performed, the encyclical notes that "the life of the body in its earthly state is not an absolute good for the believer, especially as he may be asked to give up his life for a greater good" (EV §47). In addition to its focus on the supreme sacrifice of Christ, the text also reflects on the witness of many martyrs, beginning with the readiness of John the Baptist to give his life in witness to the sacredness of marriage in God's plan. In the opening two chapters John Paul II thus reflects on the disclosures of revelation about the proper evaluation of human life as well as the duties and rights of the family.

Here and throughout the encyclical, the pope not only explains the moral norms that ought to govern the decisions of individuals but also develops a critique of social and political conditions that render moral decision-making cloudy. Without a proper understanding of the principle of solidarity, individuals are left alone to cope with the economic demands of contemporary life and the frustrations and anxieties that cloud one's vision about moral responsibility.²⁵ In particular, he recurrently addresses the contradictions between, on the one hand, the drum-beat of political declarations about human rights and especially about the rights of individuals to make decisions in moral matters and, on the other hand, the repudiation of protections for human life when the care required for the weak, the needy, the elderly, and even those newly conceived prove inconvenient. On this topic he writes: "These attacks go directly against respect for life and they represent a direct threat to the entire culture of human rights. It is a threat capable, in the end, of jeopardizing the very meaning of democratic coexistence."²⁶

At various points in this encyclical John Paul II notes that certain aspects of contemporary business, finance, and medicine are so concerned with efficiency and profit that providing truly humane care for those considered poor, weak, and useless is an intolerable burden (EV §12, §32). By way of

²⁴ The deleterious effect of sin on moral dignity is discussed in EV §36-§38, followed by an account of the limits of human autonomy and the accounting that God will demand with regard to the use of our freedom (EV §39-§41).

²⁵ For a sustained treatment of the theme of "solidarity" that is so often invoked in *Evangelium vitae*, see John Paul II's 1987 encyclical *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

²⁶ EV §18.

example, he points to the vast sums that are invested in the development and production of pharmaceuticals that make it possible to skill the unborn *in utero* and thus to make it possible to remove abortion from any kind of control or social responsibility (EV §13).²⁷ The failure to defend the weak and to respect the demands of marriage and family are linked to distortions in the economic and legal order.

In addition to the theme of solidarity, John Paul also gives much attention to the topic of dignity – a theme treated frequently in his social magisterium. Like the fratricide that is at the heart of the biblical story, every murder is “a violation of the *spiritual kinship* uniting mankind in one great family, in which all share the same fundamental good: equal personal dignity.”²⁸

As J. Brian Benestad points out in his magisterial account of Catholic social teaching, it is crucial to distinguish between metaphysical dignity and moral dignity. The metaphysical dignity of each human being comes from being a person, made in the image and according to the likeness of God, and thus different from every other kind of being.²⁹ When a culture loses a sense of God, there is quickly a loss of the sense of the dignity of the human person that comes from being made in the image of God. Utilitarian reasoning and the materialism that it presumes³⁰ replace the contemplative respect for human beings as made in God’s image and their vocation to live according to God’s plan.

Throughout the document we find a distinction between the sort of dignity that is a permanent endowment (what John Paul II calls “personal dignity” in *Evangelium vitae*) and the kind of dignity that can be lost. Moral dignity is a quality that is only retained by making morally praiseworthy choices and it is lost when one acts beneath one’s dignity by wicked or irresponsible action.³¹

²⁷ This section of *Evangelium vitae* offers a masterful account of a number of related topics, including contraception and the contraceptive mentality, techniques for artificial reproduction that separate the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal acts, prenatal screening techniques that often lead to abortion for allegedly therapeutic reasons, and the growing tendency to justify infanticide.

²⁸ EV §8.

²⁹ EV §22.

³⁰ EV §23, §32.

³¹ J. Brian Benestad, *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 42-44.

Cain, the pope points out, does not lose his personal (metaphysical) dignity even after he has gravely sinned. God is merciful to Cain even when He punishes him by putting a mark on his forehead, to protect him from revenge.³² And yet Cain has lost the moral dignity that had been his while he was still innocent of grave wrong, and so he is sent to be “a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”³³

The clarification of the different between metaphysical (personal) dignity and moral dignity is crucial for encyclical’s treatment of euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide. In addition to its use of passages like the story of Cain and Abel for the restatement of the moral norms against the deliberate taking of innocent life, the encyclical needs to counter the use of a false sense of dignity in the pro-euthanasia arguments that have become popular in public opinion and political debates.³⁴

The distortion involved in assertion that euthanasia and physician-assisted provide “death with dignity” (as if the better thing would be to kill those whose pains we cannot control) is yet another form of semantic gymnastics, for it takes dignity only to reside in the kind of life that is healthy and useful while cloaking the practice of destroying the suffering person in the language of beneficence.

John Paul also brings out the strictly utilitarian cast of the underlying economic reasoning at work here when he notes: “As well as for reasons of a misguided pity at the sight of the patient’s suffering, euthanasia is sometimes justified by the utilitarian motive of avoiding costs which bring no return and which weigh heavily on society. Thus it is proposed to eliminate malformed babies, the severely handicapped, the disabled, the elderly, especially when they are not self-sufficient, and the terminally ill.”³⁵

The encyclical also identifies the pervasively utilitarian character of the reasoning at work in many demographically based arguments for promoting contraception and abortion as parts of the aid packages imposed on developing nations, and thus we see yet another connection between the familial dimension of Catholic social teaching and its political and economic

³² EV §21.

³³ Genesis 4:14, quoted in EV §9.

³⁴ For comment on the role of the mass media in the “conspiracy against life,” see EV §17.

³⁵ EV §15.

dimensions. On this topic John Paul writes: “Rather than wishing to face and solve these serious problems [of poverty and peace] with respect for the dignity of individuals and families and for every person’s inviolable right to life, they prefer to promote and impose by whatever means a massive program of birth control. Even the economic help that they would be ready to give is unjustly made conditional on the acceptance on an anti-birth policy.”³⁶

Throughout these opening chapters of the encyclical the pope shows the need to discuss the need to protect human life and dignity as crucial elements of the total picture provided by Catholic social teaching. They may not be shunted off the stage in a misconstrual of social doctrine when presented as narrowly concerned with economic questions, whether one’s preference in economics be for *laissez-faire* capitalism or state-dominated socialism.

In *Evangelium vitae* §§19-20 we find John Paul II reflecting on the social implications of the “perverse idea of freedom” at the root of the contradiction between the public proclamation of inviolable rights of the person and the denial or distortion of the right to life in actual practice. First he spells out the perversions of the idea of freedom: (1) the tendency to recognize as a subject of rights “only the person who enjoys full or least incipient autonomy and who emerges from a state of total dependence on others” (§19). (2) The tendency “to equate personal dignity with the capacity for verbal explicit, or at least perceptible, communication” and thereby to exclude the weak and dependent who “can only communicate through the silent language of a profound sharing of affection.” (3) The exaltation of the isolated individual in a way that “gives no place to solidarity, to openness to others and service of them” (as in Cain’s haunting question “am I my brother’s keeper?”). The result is a notion of freedom as the right to be left alone rather than a sense of freedom that has an inherently relational dimension. And finally, (4) a freedom so intent on emancipation from tradition and authority that it becomes self-destructive, for it no longer recognizes and respects its essential link with the objective truth that is the foundation of personal and social life.

From this view of freedom flows a serious distortion of life in society. By way of example, consider the political implications of a society in which the self is understood in terms of absolute autonomy. Instead of acknowledging the inviolable dignity of the person, each individual is made subject to the will of the stronger party. Others are thought of as the enemies from whom one has to

³⁶ EV §16.

defend oneself if one's own interests are to prevail. The compromises that need to be made in the interest of guaranteeing everyone maximal freedom mean the loss of any truth absolutely binding on everyone: "everything is negotiable, every thing is open to bargaining, even the first of the fundamental rights, the right to life" (§20). There may still be the appearance of a strict concern for legality (as in those countries where the laws permitting abortion and euthanasia are the result of a vote according to the rules of democracy. "Really what we have here is only the tragic caricature of legality; the democratic ideal, which is only truly such when it acknowledges and safeguards the dignity of every human person, is betrayed in its foundations." In short, there is a perversion of human freedom when the result of that freedom is an absolute power over others and against them (§20).

The Implications of Encyclical for Catholic Social Teaching

Evangelium vitae follows the pattern of *Veritatis splendor* in delivering a sustained reflection on sacred revelation as crucial undertaking the tasks of moral theology. The encyclical on fundamental moral theology devoted its opening chapter to a prolonged consideration of the story of the rich young man in Matthew 19:16-26 before outlining four fundamental errors found in much of contemporary moral theology: (1) the misrepresentation of the moral law as antithetical to human freedom rather than taking it as a crucial guide (VS §35-§53); (2) the tendency to take conscience merely as consistency with one's chosen principles rather than to understand it as a place within the person where one can hear the voice of God and can know the objective truth about morality (VS §54-§64); (3) the distortions associated with "fundamental option theory" that confuse the important source of motivation that comes from a life-commitment to Christ with the pernicious idea some general intention can override the moral prohibition on certain forms of behavior that are always and everyone wrong and for that reason forbidden (VS §65-70); and (4) the confusion about teleology perpetrated by consequentialism, proportionalism, and in general utilitarianism -- specifically, the notion that the calculation of the consequences alone is sufficient for the moral evaluation of an act and the denial of even the possibility that there are intrinsically evil acts that may never and under no circumstances be done (VS §71-§83).

In similar fashion, *Evangelium vitae* opens with two chapters of a sustained reflection on important biblical passages and then employs the

insights gleaned from the moral sense of scripture³⁷ in its third chapter by treating abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, and capital punishment, as well as the issues related to each of these. Yet, it is not merely the parallels in the structure of the documents that is important or the commitment that is thereby shown to rooting moral theology in biblical revelation. As the preface of *Veritatis splendor* makes clear, the motivation for the writing of the document was the proclivity of contemporary moral theology to fall into one or another of the four errors outlined in its third chapter.

In the field of the life issues as well as in Catholic social doctrine there is much evidence of each of these errors, and especially the fourth kind, given the prevalence of utilitarian reasoning on questions of social policy in countries where there is no common understanding or shared commitment on substantive questions about the inviolability of human dignity, the eternal destiny of the human person, the nature of marriage and family, the truth about God and religion, or proper limits of human autonomy. It is easy to understand why utilitarianism is often taken to be the basis for public discourse as a kind of least common denominator, but still not adequate if taken apart from the substantive moral obligations that bear on social questions, as known from revelation and the natural moral law.

In addressing the numerous issues clustered around its three major areas of concern (abortion and infanticide, euthanasia, and capital punishment),³⁸ the third chapter of *Evangelium vitae* frequently points out ways in which the four species of error treated in *Veritatis splendor* have muddied the waters of moral discourse. By providing clear and unambiguous definition of key terms, distinctions carefully formulated for capturing crucial differences, and compelling argumentation from the basic principles of morality in general, the third chapter follows up on the work of *Veritatis splendor* by making a rigorous application of those principles to the life issues and to Catholic social teaching. In the fourth chapter there are pastoral recommendations, often with

³⁷ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §117 (2) and §1961-§1974.

³⁸ For instance, EV §63 applies the document's evaluation of the practice of abortion to related issues, such as experimentation on human embryos in biomedical research that fails to respect the life and dignity of each embryonic person, procedures that use human embryos and fetuses "produced" by *in vitro* fertilization for the "biological material" or for providing organs or tissues for transplants in the treatment of certain diseases, and the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques with a eugenic intention of selective abortion.

an aspiration and exhortatory tone, to offer assistance in realizing the cultivation of a Culture of Life (EV §78-101).

Even the title of the third chapter is significant: “You Shall Not Kill: God’s Holy Law.” To set the context for the discussion, the pope notes that this is the first of the precepts of the Decalogue that Jesus quotes to the young man who asked him which commandments he should observe in order to have eternal life.³⁹ By invoking the recurrent theme of the linkage between the promise of eternal life and the obligation to respect and protect innocent life, the text reminds its readers of a theme that has run through the entire document: earthly life is a pilgrimage to everlasting life with God. In all of what follows in this chapter the document stresses the sacredness of human life, because made in the image and likeness of God and intended for eternal union with him. But in accord with the entire tradition of Christian teaching on the life issues, it makes the necessary distinction between the universal precept that prohibits the intentional taking of innocent life and the prudential judgments that need to be made about the use of lethal force against those assailing the innocent, as is evident from a passage from *Donum vitae* quoted near the beginning of chapter three:

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God,’ and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end: no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human being.” With these words the Instruction *Donum vitae* sets forth the central content of God’s revelation the sacredness and inviolability of human life.⁴⁰

By choosing this passage to preface its discussion of the difference between the deliberate taking of innocent life and the regrettable and (under appropriate conditions) justified use of lethal force (e.g., in self-defense), the document is making a crucial distinction. Thereby it makes clear that the universal scope of the commandment prohibits the taking of *innocent* life. In its further discussion of the topic, the text shows that the universal proscription against

³⁹ EV §52, citing Mt 19:17-18 -- a part of the same scriptural passage that is considered at length in *Veritatis splendor*.

⁴⁰ EV §53, quoting *Donum vitae*, “Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation” issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (February 22, 1987), §5. The note here also cites *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §2258.

deliberately harming the innocent confers a right to the use of lethal force under certain conditions for those with a duty to care for the common good, such as parents and police officers. The relevant text here stresses that the use of lethal force is regrettable but justifiable:

Unfortunately it happens that the need to render the aggressor incapable of causing harm sometimes involves taking his life. In this case, the fatal outcome is attributable to the aggressor whose action brought it about. (EV §55)

In what follows, the document is alert to the wide range of other sins and crimes that require attention,⁴¹ but the central issues under discussion here directly concern the taking of innocent life. As such, each one is of grave importance and receives extensive and nuanced discussion, and yet there is a significant difference in the type of conclusions reached in the three areas treated. The statements about abortion and infanticide and about euthanasia are universal proscriptions that directly follow upon the general principle that one may never directly harm the innocent. But the statement about capital punishment is in the form of prudential reasoning and takes the position that it would be better as a matter of social policy not to use lethal force if it is otherwise possible to defend society. It will prove valuable for seeing the implications for social policy by considering each of these statements in turn.

The first section of chapter three concerns procured abortion and infanticide. After an extensive presentation of the moral reasoning used in the evaluation of these practices, there is a statement that communicates a definitive teaching of the Church, as follows:

Therefore, by the authority which Christ conferred upon Peter and his Successors, in communion with the bishops – who on various occasions have condemned abortion and who in the aforementioned consultation, albeit dispersed throughout the world, have shown unanimous agreement concerning this doctrine – declare that direct abortion, that is, abortion willed as an end or as a means, always constitutes a grave moral disorder, since it is the deliberate killing of an innocent human being. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written Word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. No circumstance, no purpose, no law whatsoever can make licit an act which is intrinsically illicit, since it is contrary to the Law of God which is written in every human heart, knowable by

⁴¹ *Evangelium vitae* §3 quotes a list of such issues from *Gaudium et spes* §27.

reason itself, and proclaimed by the Church.⁴²

This way of putting its evaluation of the morality of abortion directly alludes to the correctives advanced in *Veritatis splendor*, especially by its reference to something that is wrong always and everywhere and thus not justifiable by some utilitarian weighing of consequences, as well as by its reference to the natural law and to divine revelation as guiding our knowledge of morality in any discernment of conscience.

The comparable statement that concludes the section on euthanasia makes use of similar language:

For a correct moral judgment on euthanasia, in the first place a clear definition is required. *Euthanasia in the strict sense* is understood to be an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering.... Taking into account these distinctions, in harmony with the Magisterium of my Predecessors and in communion with the bishops of the Catholic Church, *I confirm that euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God*, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person. This doctrine is based upon the natural law and upon the written word of God, is transmitted by the Church's Tradition and taught by the ordinary and universal Magisterium. Depending on the circumstances, this practice involves the malice proper to suicide or murder. (EV §65).

In the course of formulating this evaluation, the document uses a number of important distinctions to handle the complexities that are encountered in these situations, including decisions to forego aggressive medical treatment, the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary means of medical care, and the provision of palliative care. The central point, however, is the confirmation that euthanasia by action or by omission is a grave moral offense because it is deliberate killing of an innocent person.

Before turning to the implications for law and for social policy in the sections that surround these two statements, it is important to compare these sections with the encyclical's statements about capital punishment, so as to see that the document treats this question as a matter requiring careful prudential reasoning rather than one that is immediately settled as a direct implication of the absolute prohibition on deliberating taking the life of the intellect.

John Paul II's personal commitment to encourage the complete abolition of the death penalty, or at least a drastic reduction of its use, is well-known.

⁴² EV §64 (italics in the original), internally citing *Lumen gentium* §25.

This section of the encyclical (EV §56-57) begins with a reprisal of the handling of this issue in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which was strengthened yet further in its Second Edition and recently strengthened again.⁴³ The text of *Evangelium vitae* does not have a statement declaring capital punishment to be an intrinsic evil but instead regards the question as one in which there is need to give positive witness for the Culture of Life and one that requires careful considerations of a prudential nature:

It is clear that, for [the purposes of punishment] to be achieved, *the nature and extent* of the punishment must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not to go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent. (EV §56).

Whatever position any of us takes on the question of capital punishment, it seems clear that *Evangelium vitae* regards it as a serious matter and yet one that is properly understood to be a question of prudential reasoning about whether a given practice achieves the purposes of punishment. The document does not contain an outright condemnation of the practice; in fact, in the passage quoted, it foresees a situation in which the practice would be necessary. Thus, it stands in considerable contrast to the handling of practices like abortion and euthanasia, which are condemned as intrinsic evils, always and everywhere forbidden. For the purposes of this essay, which aims to explore the implications of the teachings of *Evangelium vitae* for the other

⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* §§2266-2267. In addition to the revision of §2267 ordered by John Paul II in 1997, the paragraph was further revised in 2018 at the direction of Pope Francis to include the following: “Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,’ and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide.” A letter of explanation for this further change was issued by Cardinal Luis Ladaria on 1 August 2018 and is available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20180801_lettera-vescovi-penadimorte_en.html. The reasoning used in this letter, however, is quite perplexing and has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Since the present essay pertains only to the text of *Evangelium vitae* and does not attempt to cover developments since then, perhaps it is enough to say that the word “inadmissible” still allows us to interpret the remark as a matter of prudential judgment made at a very high level of authority.

domains of Catholic social teaching, this section attempts to exert influence of an exhortatory and prudential nature rather than by the display of precepts that are morally normative.

There are various implications for law and for social policy that flow from the universal and exceptionless character of the moral evaluation in portion of the document that is concerned with abortion and euthanasia. Some further reflections on these implications appear in the lengthy section of the encyclical devoted to the relation between moral law and civil law (EV §68-§74). Here the pope is concerned about the trend in contemporary society to seek legal justification for the attacks on human life along with having the state provide free medical for abortion and for euthanasia, as if they were human rights that the state should acknowledge. After using arguments like those found in the second chapter of *Veritatis splendor* against a distorted notion of freedom, a faulty sense of personal autonomy in matters of conscience, and the use of purely proportionalist reasoning on questions of public policy (EV §68), the pope directly addresses the problem posed by the possibility of a tyranny of the majority:

In the democratic culture of our time, it is commonly held that the legal system of any society should limit itself to taking account of and accepting the convictions of the majority. It should therefore be based solely upon what the majority itself considers moral and actually practices. Furthermore, if it is believed that an objective truth shared by all is *de facto* unattainable, then respect for the freedom of the citizens – who in a democratic system are considered the true rulers – would require that on the legislative level the autonomy of individual consciences be acknowledged. Consequently, when establishing those norms which are absolutely necessary for social coexistence, the only determining factor should be the will of the majority, whatever that may be. Hence every politician, in his or her activity, should clearly separate the realm of private conscience from that of public conduct. (EV §69)

In this passage, the pope warns about a problem within democracy that Alexis de Toqueville called the “tyranny of the majority.”⁴⁴ In Tocqueville’s analysis, one of the roots of the tyranny of the majority is the great leveling brought about by the abstract love of equality and the movement for equality of condition. It tends to make ideas and opinions more uniform. Those who disagree with such opinions feel isolated and afraid to speak. One sees this

⁴⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols., translated by James T. Schleifer (Indianapolis IN: Liberty Fund, 2012 [1835, 1840]).

phenomenon still in *political correctness*. For Tocqueville, democracies tend to love equality more than liberty and they tend to be more interested in equality of outcome than in equality of opportunity. One sees this in the *progressive income tax, coupled with social programs to redistribute wealth from rich to poor*. Too ardent a love of equality leads to socialism.

The issues raised in passages like the one quoted above from *Evangelium vitae* address questions of political and constitutional order and as well as on the conscience formation required of legislators. There is no hint here of any ecclesial claim to jurisdiction in political matters, but a clear assertion that there are implications for the political domain of the Church's social teaching that stem from normative aspects of the domain of marriage, family, and culture. Although clearly a great advocate for democratic government, John Paul II reiterates his worry over the possibility of a tyranny of the majority when he writes about the need for the truths of objective morality to govern democratic governance:

Democracy cannot be idolized to the point of making it a substitute for morality or a panacea for immorality. Fundamentally, democracy is a "system" and as such is a means and not an end. Its "moral" value is not automatic, but depends on conformity to the moral law to which it, like every other form of human behavior, must be subject: in other words, its morality depends on the morality of the ends which it pursues and of the means with it employs.... [T]he value of democracy stands or falls with the values which it embodies and promotes. Of course, values such as the dignity of every human person, respect for inviolable and inalienable human rights, and the adoption of the "common good" as the end and criterion regulating political life are certainly fundamental and not to be ignored. (EV §70).

For the proper understanding of Catholic social teaching, passages like this make clear that certain fundamental precepts from the domain of culture, marriage, and family are normative for its political domain and need to be championed in the arena of civil politics. For the development and preservation of a sound political order, it is crucial that respect for the dignity of the human person is a value that no majority and no polity may ever modify or destroy.

This portion of the encyclical also contains a sophisticated section on various problems of conscience that are likewise to arise for legislators in states where there already exist intrinsically unjust laws that permit abortion

of euthanasia.⁴⁵ The encyclical not only reminds us that it is never morally licit to participate in campaigns in favor of such laws or to vote for them, but it also explains the importance of the moral reasoning about legitimate and illegitimate forms of cooperation argued for as part of fundamental moral theology in *Veritatis splendor*. Where legislators, for example, find themselves in situations where it is not at a given moment possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, elected officials whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion is well known, may licitly support legislation aimed at reducing the harm done by the present laws and at lessening the negative consequences at the level of public opinion. In the same section the document speaks of the right of morally upright individuals in any walk of life to be exempt from taking part in morally evil actions.⁴⁶ In its justification of the importance of conscience protection for professionals (for instance, in the medical and pharmaceutical areas), the document once again turns to the distinction between material and formal cooperation to evil that have been a crucial part of the Catholic moral tradition and that are defended against contemporary attacks in *Veritatis splendor*.

The Social Dimensions of Establishing a New Culture of Life

In the final chapter of the encyclical Pope John Paul II again sounds the theme of Christian social obligations. In addition to the obligations of justice, and especially the universal prohibitions on the taking of innocent life in abortion, infanticide, or euthanasia, there are also a variety of obligations in charity. There are obligations that are the responsibility of individuals and of the Church, namely, to bear witness to the Gospel of Life by various programs and structures that support and promote life (EV §79-80). The obligations that we have in charity go beyond giving to others what is their due by nature or by agreement. It extends to giving to what they need, out of love for God, the author of life and the source of the goodness for which he have given us stewardship.

The encouragements found in this final and paraenetic chapter extend to many aspects of Christian life, including the spheres of liturgy and of conscience formation. There are obligations of care for the sick and suffering by providing healthcare and pastoral care and for the support of young families

⁴⁵ EV §72-§74.

⁴⁶ EV §74.

and of those who have suffered divorce. The bearing of this final section on Catholic social teaching is especially evident in its description of charity, as in the following passage:

In our service of charity, we must be inspired and distinguished by a specific attitude: we must care for the other as a person for whom God has made us responsible. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to become neighbors to everyone (cf. Lk 10:29-37), and to show special favor to those who are poorest, most alone, and most in need. In helping the hungry, the thirsty, the foreigner, the naked, the sick, the imprisoned – as well as the child in the womb and the old person who is suffering or near death – we have the opportunity to serve Jesus. He himself said: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).⁴⁷

Joined with passages like this that remind us of the demands of charity as a genuine obligation and not merely as an ideal of superogatory benevolence are passages about the social character of the Christian understanding of religion. It is precisely the intrinsically social character of Christianity’s understanding of our faith that we can and must make arguments for the freedom required by individual Christians and by Christian institutions in order to honor the demands of the Gospel. When religious orders like the Little Sisters of the Poor or Catholic educational institutions have sought exemption from mandates that would require, for instance, contraceptive and abortifacient insurance coverage, they do so by appeals to religious freedom understood precisely as a freedom to carry out the social obligations of charity without violating the moral law that is part of the religion that motivates such charity.

The final section of *Evangelium vitae* gives much support to groups like those just described. The text of the encyclical makes the argument quite explicitly, as in this passage:

If charity is to be realistic and effective, it demands that the *Gospel of life* be implemented also by means of certain *forms of social activity and commitment in the political field*, as a way of defending and promoting the value of life in our ever more complex and pluralistic societies. *Individual families, groups, and associations...* all have a responsibility for shaping society and developing cultural, economic, political, and legislative projects that. With respect for all and in keeping with democratic principles, will contribute to the building of a society in which the dignity of each person is recognized and protected and the lives of all are defended and enhanced.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ EV §87.

⁴⁸ EV §90.

The social obligations that *Evangelium vitae* specifies in this final section include work for appropriate legislation and conscience protection as well as the generation of appropriate social policies and workplace conditions:

The underlying causes of attacks on life have to be eliminated, especially by ensuring proper support for families and for mother hood. *A family policy must be the basis and driving force of all social policies....* It is also necessary to rethink labor, urban, residential and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly.⁴⁹

In Conclusion

In sum, *Evangelium vitae* makes throughout its text a sustained contribution to Catholic social teaching. It resists the efforts of cultural marxism to distort the Church's doctrines in this area as if they were socialist in character. It corrects the inadvertent tendency to treat matters of marriage, family, and culture as a separate silo, independent of the bearings of Catholic social teaching in matters of politics or economics. And it addresses many of the new dimensions of the life questions that have arisen in our era.

⁴⁹ EV §90 (italics in original). See also EV §93.

Appendix 1: Some Papal and Conciliar Documents with Special Importance for Catholic Social Doctrine

NB: There are many others besides, especially on the conditions in particular countries and regions

Pope	Economic	Political	Family/Culture	Theology/Phil.
Leo XIII (1878-1903)	QAM (1878) RN (1891)	D (1881) ID (1885) QM (1886) LP (1888) SC (1890) GC (1901)	A (1880) IP (1888) CE (1890) QR (1898) DM (1902)	AP (1879) PD (1893)
Pius X (1903-1914)	SQ (1912)	UFE (1907)	ES (1903)	PDG (1907) PS (1907)
Benedict XV (1914-1922)		ABA (1914) PDMP (1920) QID (1918)	AIP (1920) PID (1919)	
Pius XI (1922-1939)	NI (1931) QA (1931) QP (1925)	MBS (1937) UADC (1922)	CC (1930) DIM (1929) VC (1936) NAB (1931)	DR (1937) MA (1928) SD (1923)
Pius XII (1939-1958)		AAP (1958) ASG AS (1950)	Q (1946) SP (1939)	DS (1943) HG (1950) MD (1947) MC (1943)
John XXIII (1958-1963)		MM (1961) PT (1963)		ADS (1951)

Paul VI (1963-1978)	PP (1967) OA (1971)	EN (1975)	HV (1968)	LG (1964) GS (1965) DH (1965)
John Paul II (1978-2005)	LE (1981) SRS (1987) CA (1991)		EV (1995) CL (1988) FC (1981) MD (1988)	VS (1993) FR (1998)
Benedict XVI (2005-2013)	CV (2009)	DCE (2005)		DP (2008)
Francis (2013–)	LS (2015)	EG (2013)	AL (2016)	LF (2013)

Key:

- A *Arcanum* (On Marriage, 1880)
- AAP *Ad Apostolorum Principis* (Communism and the Church in China, 1958)
- ABA *Ad Beatissimi Apostolorum* (Appealing for peace, 1914)
- ADS *Aeterna Dei sapientia* (On the eternal wisdom of God, 1961)
- AIP *Annus iam plenus* (On children in central Europe, 1920)
- AL *Amoris laetitia* (On love in the family, 2016)
- AP *Aeterni Patris* (On restoration of Christian philosophy, on Thomism as useful in the struggle against liberalism in politics and social philosophy, 1879)
- AS *Anni sacri* (on combatting atheism, 1950)
- ASG *Ad sinarum gentes* (on the supranationality of the Church, 1954)
- CA *Centesimus annus* (On capital and labor, 1991)
- CC *Casti connubii* (On Christian marriage, 1930)
- CE *Catholicae ecclesiae* (on the abolition of slavery, 1890)
- CL *Christifideles laici* (The vocation & mission of the lay faithful in the Church & the world, 1988)
- CV *Caritas in veritate* (Charity in truth, 2009)

- D *Diuturnum* (On Origins of Civil Power, 1881)
- DAS *Divino afflante Spiritu* (On Sacred Scripture, 1943)
- DCE *Deus caritas est* (God is Love, 2005)
- DH *Dignitatis humanae* (On religious freedom, Vatican Council II, 1965)
- DIM *Divini illius magistri* (On Christian education, 1929)
- DM *Dum multa* (on marriage laws, 1902)
- DP *Dignitas personae* (On bioethics, 2008)
- DR *Divini redemptoris* (On atheistic communism, 1937)
- EG *Evangelii gaudium* (on the proclamation of the Gospel today, 2013)
- EN *Evangelii nuntiandi* (On evangelization in the modern world, 1975)
- ES *E supremi* (On the restoration of all things in Christ, 1903)
- EV *Evangelium vitae* (Gospel of Life, 1995)
- FC *Familiaris consortio* (the role of the Christian family, 1981)
- FR *Fides et ratio* (Faith and Reason, 1998)
- GCR *Graves de communi re* (on Christian democracy, 1901)
- GS *Gaudium et spes* (The Church in the modern world, Vatican Council II, 1965)
- HG *Humani generis* (On Human Origins, 1950)
- HV *Humanae vitae* (on the regulation of human births, 1968)
- ID *Immortale Dei* (On the Christian Constitution of States, 1885)
- IP *In Plurimis* (to the Bishops of Brazil, about the abolition of slavery, 1888)
- LE *Laborem exercens* (On human work, 1981)
- LF *Lumen fidei* (the light of faith, 2013)
- LG *Lumen gentium* (The Mystery of the Church, Vatican Council II, 1964)
- LP *Libertas praestantissimum* (On human liberty, 1888)
- LS *Laudato si* (On care for our common home, 2015)
- MA *Mortalium animos* (On religious unity, 1928)
- MD *Mediator Dei* (On the sacred liturgy, 1947)
- MBS *Mit brennender Sorge* (On the Church and the German Reich, 1937)
- MC *Mystici corporis* (The Church as the Mystical Body of Christ, 1943)
- MD *Mulieris dignitatem* (Dignity and vocation of women, 1988)
- MM *Mater et magistra* (The Church as mother and teacher of all nations, 1961)
- NAB *Non abbiamo bisogno* (On Catholic Action in Italy, 1931)
- NI *Nova impendet* (On the economic crisis, 1931)

- OA *Octagesima adveniens* (80th anniversary of *Rerum novarum*, 1971)
 PID *Paterno iam diu* (On the children of central Europe, 1919)
 PD *Providentissimus Deus* (On the study of Holy Scripture, 1893)
 PDG *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (On modernism, 1907)
 PDMP *Pacem, Dei Munus pulcherrimum* (On peace and reconciliation, 1920)
 PP *Populorum progressio* (On the development of peoples, 1967)
 PS *Praeantia Scripturae* (On the Bible, against the modernists, 1907)
 PT *Pacem in terris* (peace on earth, 1963)
 Q *Quemadmodum* (Care for the world's destitute children, 1946)
 QA *Quadragesimo Anno* (Reconstruction of the social order, 1931)
 QAM *Quod apostolici muneris* (condemnation of socialism, 1878)
 QID *Quod iam diu* (On the future peace conference, 1918)
 QM *Quod Multum* (On the Liberty of the Church, 1886)
 QP *Quas Primas* (On the new feast of Christ the King, 1925)
 QR *Quam religiosa* (On civil marriage law, 1898)
 RN *Rerum novarum* (On capital and labor, against socialism and economic liberalism, 1891)
 SC *Sapientiae Christianae* (On Christians as Citizens, noting the condemnation of the principle of liberalism by Gregory XVI and Pius IX, 1890)
 SD *Studiorem ducem* (On St Thomas Aquinas, 1923)
 SP *Summi pontificatus* (on the unity of human society, 1939)
 SQ *Singulari quadam* (On labor organizations, 1912)
 SRS *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (On social concerns, 1987)
 UADC *Ubi arcano Dei consilio* (On the peace of Christ in his kingdom, 1922)
 UFE *Une foi encore* (On the separation of Church and State, 1907)
 VC *Vigilanti cura* (On motion pictures, 1936)
 VS *Veritatis splendor* (Fundamental moral theology, 1993)

Appendix 2: An outline of *Evangelium Vitae* – The Gospel of Life (using the paragraphs numbers in the document).

1. The Gospel of Life is at the heart of Jesus’s message.
2. The incomparable worth of the human person. The value of human life even in its temporal phase; its full realization in eternity. The inviolable right of every innocent human being to have life respected from its very beginning to its end.
3. New threats to human life from the areas of science, technology, law, and even medicine.

Ch. 1: The Voice of Your Brother’s Blood Cries to Me from the Ground: Present-Day Threats

7. Meditation on the story of Cain and Abel in Gen. 4: murder as a violation of spiritual kinship.
10. The eclipse of the value of life: conscience and the social questions today.
12. Structures of sin in “the culture of death” – beware hedonism and utilitarianism in morality.
13. Abortion and contraception: both are rejected, but for different reasons.
14. On artificial techniques of reproduction, eugenic abortion, infanticide.
15. On understandable but misplaced compassion; the failure to see any value in suffering.
18. “Am I my brother’s keeper? A false idea of freedom as pure autonomy.
19. Curious contradictions: asserting human rights; exaggerated importance of subjectivity.
20. Correcting distorted notions of freedom by remembering the correlation of duties & rights.
21. Secularization: the eclipse of the sense of God tends to bring an eclipse of the sense of how.
different human beings are from animals and other types of creatures
23. Practical materialism breeds individualism, utilitarianism, hedonism, depersonalization. Loss of a sense of the meaning of the human body/sexuality as the expression of the person.
25. Signs of hope and an invitation to commitment: the witness of Christ and the Christian.

28. The need to be unconditionally pro-life in the face of a culture of death.

Ch. 2: I Came That They May Have Life

29. Knowledge about morality through faith in Christ and through natural law reasoning.
31. Testimony in revelation to the fact that life is always a good.
32. How Jesus brings life's meaning to fulfillment; the Church's mission to the poor & suffering.
34. Understanding the primacy of human life over other created things: human dominion.
35. Human beings as made in the image and likeness of God; sin as deformity of the image.
37. Christ, the new Adam, restores us to life: eternal life, not just life in time.
39. Reverence and love for every human life: knowledge in conscience of the inviolability of life.
42. Human responsibility for protecting all human life; concern for procreation and marriage.
44. The dignity of the unborn child: references in Old and New Testaments.
46. Life in old age and at times of suffering: learning how to face death.
48. From the law of Sinai to the gift of the Holy Spirit: respecting the truth about human life rather than condemning oneself to meaninglessness and unhappiness.
50. The gospel of life is brought to fulfillment on the Cross: the death of one truly innocent.

Ch. 3: You Shall Not Kill – God's Holy Law

52. Keeping the commandments out of love for God. Human dominion over the rest of creation; this lordship is not absolute but ministerial: a way to preserve the gift of personal dignity.
53. Human life is sacred and inviolable because of the special action of God from its beginning: there can be no private license ever to kill the innocent.
54. The strongly negative cast of the 5th Commandment also implies a positive respect for life.
55. The paradox of the legitimate use of lethal force in genuine self-defense.

56. Punishment, even capital punishment, must always remain in line with human dignity.
57. Absolute protection of innocent human life; discouragement (but not an absolute prohibition of capital punishment). NB: very technical language condemning the direct and voluntary killing of innocent human life as always gravely immoral. The basis for social ethics.
58. Application of this teaching to abortion. Avoid euphemisms. Careful definition.
60. Careful correction of certain scholastic arguments about delayed animation.
61. The basis for this teaching in Scripture and Tradition.
62. Again, very technical language condemning direct procured abortion.
63. Application to experimentation on embryos and eugenic abortion: see also *Donum Vitae*.
64. Application to euthanasia.
65. A careful definition of terms. Ordinary and extra-ordinary means of treatment. Palliative care. Principle of double effect. Very careful language condemning euthanasia as a grave violation of God's law.
66. Application to suicide and assisted suicide. Contrast between true and false compassion.
67. The genuine mercy demanded by human solidarity and life Christ.
68. The proper relation between civil law and moral law. The dangers of proportionalism.
69. Questions of political philosophy, pluralism, democracy, and the rule of law.
70. A warning about ethical relativism and the history of violence in the 20th century. However good a system, democracy is not a substitute for morality.
71. The truths about human nature which must be respected for democracy truly to flourish.
72. Laws which contravene the moral order undermine the very nature of authority.
73. Advice for those who must resist civil laws which permit abortion and euthanasia.
74. The problem of cooperation with evil as faced by legislators. Formal v. material cooperation.

75. The negative precepts of the moral law apply always and everywhere.
Augustine on freedom from sin as merely the beginning of freedom.

Ch. 4: You Did It to Me: For a New Culture of Human Life

78. The Church's task: evangelizing the culture: a pressing duty, for we have been sent by Christ.
80. Jesus as the only Gospel... a proclamation of eternal life.
81. Christian anthropology and the implications of this Gospel.
82. The task of forming consciences: fostering a truly contemplative attitude, a reverence for every person as made in God's image, worshipping the God of life.
87. The service of charity that this Gospel demands and that will make this Gospel credible.
88. Specific suggestions for specific problems and for specific groups of people.
91. Questions of demography and population growth.
92. The family as the sanctuary of life and as the domestic church.
95. Bringing about a transformation of culture.
96. The necessary link between freedom and truth: proper formation of consciences.
101. The Gospel of life is for the whole of human society.