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# Cardinal Bernardin: A Framework for Consistency

*Katie St. Clair*

## Introduction

*Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of the Second Vatican Council in 1965, declared that the social task of the Church was “to read the signs of the times and to interpret them in light of the gospel.” The document stressed that this task must be taken on while keeping in mind the sacredness of human life. Furthermore, it ought to aim towards establishing a common societal desire to do good. *Gaudium et Spes* proclaims that Christians are brought together “in the search for truth and for the right solution to so many problems which arise both in the life of individuals and from social relationships.” It stresses that humans are interdependent. This reality requires humans to live moral lives, as one’s personal betterment must translate to the betterment of society as a whole. Since human beings are social by their very nature, they ought to be the beginning, the subject, and the object of every social organization (*Gaudium et Spes* 25).

Due to the inspiration derived from the pastoral constitution, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin reflected a new confidence in both the necessity and the value of speaking out on current issues. He was a member of the Second Vatican Council; one who especially took the decree of *Gaudium et Spes* seriously. Thus, he initiated a different way to address public issues with a theological voice. This new method was “aimed at providing a Catholic witness which took seriously the complexities of public policy debate and drew on the resources of the church’s moral and social teaching and its theological traditions in a way that invited reflection rather than commanding assent” (Langan 1). His desire to approach public issues in a different way was one that was shared by a number of people, consequently providing Bernardin with significant support and assistance by many respectable individuals along the way. Such a response put him in a position of leadership, as he no longer spoke by his own terms; rather it was his responsibility to represent all those who supported him and his ideas. This responsibility was great, as he not only represented himself and others, but did so within the framework of an institution that possesses both a rich history and a strong and enduring international existence. Furthermore, his approach to leadership exemplifies the foundation of

the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World of Vatican II: "In virtue of its mission to enlighten the whole world with the message of the Gospel and to gather together in one spirit all women and men of every nation, race, and culture, the church shows itself as a sign of that amity which renders possible sincere dialogue and strengthens it" (Bernardin, "Catholic Common Ground" 15).

### **Who is Joseph Cardinal Bernardin?**

Joseph Louis Bernardin was born in Columbia, South Carolina on April 2, 1928. Throughout his childhood he attended both Catholic and public schools, and ended up with intentions of pursuing a medical degree at the University of South Carolina. During his first year of premed studies, priests from a local parish took interest in Bernardin and began to talk with him about the possibility of joining the priesthood. Bernardin recalls the priests explaining to him that his intent of becoming a doctor revealed his desire to help people. They insisted that this sociable and helpful nature could also be realized through priesthood. It did not take long for Bernardin to change his mind about medical school, as by the end of the year he had decided to enter the seminary as an alternative. He studied at St. Mary's College in Kentucky, St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland, and the Catholic University of America in Washington before being ordained a priest of the Diocese of Charleston on April 26, 1952.

In 1958, Bernardin was introduced to Paul Hallinan, whom he considered his first mentor. In this year, Hallinan was named bishop of Charleston by Pope John XXIII. He immediately took interest in the hard working, intelligent, and courteous Bernardin. He saw that Bernardin had the desire as well as the knowledge to get things done within the Church. Therefore, he appointed Bernardin to be his assistant. In 1962 Bishop Hallinan was selected as archbishop of Atlanta, yet he was unwilling to leave Bernardin behind. He requested that Bernardin be allowed his auxiliary bishop. This request was fulfilled as Pope Paul VI appointed Bernardin Auxiliary Bishop of Atlanta on April 26, 1966, only a short time after the Second Vatican Council. At the age of 38, Bernardin had become the youngest bishop in the country. Both men immediately became passionate about the reforms of the council, and through their time working together they committed themselves to drafting a local pastoral letter on war and peace. This was fitting because it was during the time of the Vietnam War. The letter eventually became the foundation for the one issued by the entire National Conference of Bishops titled *Peace in Vietnam*. Not long after, Hallinan became seriously ill and died in 1968.

Shortly before Hallinan's death, Bernardin was elected General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. This group consists of two parallel organizations: the United States Catholic Conference and the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The appointment was not met without opposition, as members of the conference were hoping the position would be filled by someone who was already involved rather than an "outsider" such as Bernardin. However, "Bernardin's determination- although he changed the world in which they were familiar- never to hurt bishops and staff members' feelings soon gained him the esteem of the whole conference" (Magagnotti 6). It was here that he met his second mentor, John Cardinal Dearden, Archbishop of Detroit and president of the Episcopal conference. Dearden's intent as the first president of the conference was to develop it into a forum where the bishops could begin working together to reach an effective expression of collegiality. From the beginning Dearden believed that Bernardin was going to play an integral part in accomplishing this vision. Bernardin served from 1968-1972, having much to do with the reorganizing of the conference in regards to the norms set forth by the Second Vatican Council.

In November of 1972, Bernardin was appointed Archbishop of Cincinnati by Pope John Paul II, a position he held for ten years. From the day of his first sermon, Bernardin enthralled listeners and gained significant attention from the media. In this sermon he challenged government policies in Vietnam by addressing the Nixon administration and introducing the position against nuclear war that the conference of bishops later took in the pastoral letter *The Challenge of Peace*. Considering his success as Archbishop, "It was clear from the very beginning that Bernardin would never be regarded only as the archbishop of a mid-western archdiocese; for he was already perceived as a man whose substantial influence in the ranges of Catholicism could only increase" (Magagnotti 10). By this time, the National Conference of Bishops had built a solid foundation, thanks to the developing cooperation among its members, led by both Dearden and Bernardin. Bernardin's dedication and leadership did not go unnoticed. In 1974, he was elected to serve a three year term as president of the conference.

In June of 1982, Bernardin was installed as the Archbishop of Chicago by Pope John Paul II, a position he held until his death in 1996. Also in 1982, he served as chairman of the United States' bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace. He was elevated to the College of Cardinals in February 1983 and chaired the committee on pro-life activities from 1983 to 1989. His participation and contributions through all these means played an important role in the development of the public stance of Catholicism, speaking specifically about the moral aspects

of important issues of public life.

Cardinal Bernardin maintained that his approach to life arose from the lessons he learned from his mentors, Hallinan and Dearden. Bernardin claimed that these men taught him to trust that, through open and honest dialogue, differences could be resolved and the gospel proclaimed in its integrity. The ideas of both Hallinan and Dearden found expression through personalist and Thomistic thinking. Thus, these schools of thought also inspired Bernardin, as he employed them to help promote the social good. Both personalism and Thomistic thinking will be discussed in more detail later.

Much of Cardinal Bernardin's theology was shaped during his term as chairman of the United States' bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on War and Peace. Through his direction, and inspired by his moral vision, the committee passed the landmark pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace: God's Promise and Our Response* which links the questions of abortion and nuclear war. "The central idea in the letter is the sacredness of human life and the responsibility we have, personally and socially, to protect and preserve the sanctity of life" (Bernardin in Langan 10). The pastoral letter aimed to raise fundamental questions about the dynamic of the arms race and the direction of American nuclear strategy. The document proved to be politically sensitive, as it exposed the moral and political futility of nuclear war. This controversial letter resulted in Bernardin's aforementioned pioneering of a new method of preparing church statements on social issues: one which encompassed openness about revisions and disagreements and involved outsiders in the process of passing such documents. In his address at Fordham University Cardinal Bernardin stated that the pastoral letter had opened space in the public debate for a consideration of the moral factor.

*The Challenge of Peace* provided Bernardin with a starting point for the heart of his work: the consistent ethic of life. The pastoral letter mentions the concept that every human life has transcendent value, and therefore life may never be taken. This is a position held by an increasing number of Catholics. However, such a view is not dominant in Catholic teaching and is not the principal moral position of the letter. Rather, "What is found in the letter is the traditional Catholic teaching that there should always be a *presumption* against taking human life, but in a limited world marked by the effects of sin there are some narrowly defined *exceptions* where life can be taken. This is the moral logic which produced the "just-war" theory" ("Consistent" 5). In the last thirty years, however, there has been a noticeable shift of emphasis in the teachings and pastoral practices of the Church regarding this type of moral reasoning. That is to say that the presumption

against taking human life has been strengthened and the exceptions made more restrictive. Bernardin cites two specific instances to exemplify this shift. The first example is at the level of principle. John Courtney Murray, S.J., wrote an article in *Theological Studies* in 1959 which revealed that Pope Pius XII had reduced the threefold justification for going to war. Defense, recovery of property, and punishment, the threefold justification, was lessened to a single reason: defending the innocent and protecting values necessary for human existence. The second example cited by Bernardin is a point within pastoral practice. As the state has the right to employ capital punishment, the actions of Catholic bishops, Pope Paul VI, and Pope John Paul II have been directed against the exercise of this right by the state. This direction was made because the Church feels there are more humane methods of defending the society. Bernardin declared that an essential part of the shift “is a more acute perception of the multiple ways in which life is threatened today” (“Consistent” 6).

In addition to *The Challenge of Peace*, the principles of Catholic social teaching encouraged Bernardin to compose his ethic. These principles are based on Scripture, Tradition, and reason. The foundation of Catholic social teaching has often been accredited to Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 encyclical letter, *Rerum Novarum*. In addition to this encyclical, the values of Catholic social teaching have been intricately expressed in numerous other papal, councilor, and episcopal documents. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has summarized the prominent ideas of Catholic social teaching into seven key segments, while clearly articulating that the inviolability of life is the basis for each. This means both the sanctity of human life as well as the inherent dignity of a person. In fact, Catholic social teaching considers the test of every institution or policy to be whether it enhances or threatens either of these aspects of humanity.

The section of Catholic social teaching pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of the human person makes clear that people have a fundamental right to life as well as to those things required for human decency: food, clothing, housing, health care, education, security, social services, and employment. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities to one another, to our families, and to the larger society. The segment about the option for the poor and vulnerable attests that a basic test of the morality of society is how its more vulnerable members are faring. We are called to put the needs of these members before any other. The call to family, community, and participation explains how relationships are vital to realizing our own dignity and rights, and therefore, in addressing the questions of social justice. It follows that a central test of political,

legal, and economic institutions is what they do to people, what they do for people, and how people participate in them.

### **The Catholic Church: An Apparent Disparity**

Some would argue that the positions of the Catholic Church in respect to public policy issues are an apparent disparity. Liberal issues such as universal health care, living wages, immigrant rights, and environmental protection are all supported by the Church. At the same time, conservative issues such as the condemnation of abortion, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, and divorce are also advocated. Langan provides additional cases:

On such international issues as nuclear deterrence and restraints on the use of force in the settlement of conflicts as well as on such domestic issues as capital punishment and the use of government programs to protect and enhance the lives of the most poor and vulnerable, the church seems to be on the left, or politically liberal, side of the political arena. On other issues such as the legalization of abortion and physician-assisted suicide, as well as on allowing the legitimate use of force in the international arena the church seems to be on the right, or politically conservative side. (5)

It is clear that in respect to a political agenda, the Church simultaneously advocates issues from both liberal and conservative camps, while passionately criticizing both as well. Therefore, the Church is sometimes considered to be inconsistent. This could potentially lead to opposition, as “groups who were allies on one set of issues become opponents on the other set and that lines of argument and institutional policies which looked acceptable and even appropriate when applied to one set of issues are treated as less than reliable when applied to another set” (Langan 5). A potential outcome of this complex system, for example, is that church spokesmen may argue for federal funding to meet the needs of welfare mothers but will, at the same time, oppose federal funding for abortions for medically impoverished women. The obvious disparity is a matter of the position, liberal or conservative, that the Catholic Church takes on specific issues. Despite the variation of the Church’s political position, the Church’s stance on all issues is perfectly consistent. The consistency of the Church is found in its reasoning for taking varying political positions. Linthicum declares that the Church actually is consistent “because of its consistent ethic built around the conviction that life is a sacred gift from God and that therefore any action that reduces that sacred reality (whether it is abortion or the state’s refusal to provide adequate health care) is immoral and unacceptable to the Roman Catholic Church” (42).

## The Proposal of the Consistent Ethic of Life

With all of this in mind, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin began to formulate the consistent ethic of life. He first introduced this ethic in an address at Fordham University in 1983. Bernardin's philosophy argues, in accord with Catholic social teaching, that issues of public policy all demand a consistent application of moral principles that value the sacredness of human life. In addition, he asserted that people should be concerned with the creation and support of institutions that improve the conditions of life. In *Christi fideles laici*, Pope John Paul II writes: "In order to achieve their task directed to the Christian animation of the temporal order, in the sense of serving persons and society, the lay faithful are never to relinquish their participation in 'public life,' that is, in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the common good." He declares that the Synod fathers have affirmed on many occasions that each human has not only the right, but the duty to participate in public life through a diversity of forms, levels, tasks, and responsibilities.

A consistent ethic is essentially a social ethic, as it brings together personal moral vision with the need for a just and compassionate social policy. Although the 1999 statement of the Administrative Board of the USCC, *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, was issued much after the introduction of Bernardin's ethic, it captures the essence of it:

Every human person is created in the image and likeness of God. The conviction that human life is sacred and that each person has inherent dignity that must be respected in society lies at the heart of Catholic social teaching. Calls to advance human rights are illusions if the right to life itself is subject to attack. We believe that every human life is sacred from conception to natural death; that people are more important than things; and that the measure of every institution is whether or not it enhances the life and dignity of the human person. (*Faithful Citizenship* in Pavone 61-62)

Cardinal Bernardin essentially proposed a way to consistently approach challenging issues which arise within public policy development. Specifically, Bernardin's hope was that the consistent ethic would provide a framework from which a variety of policy issues would be pursued in a more organized way, that it would provide a method for the establishment of priorities among such issues, and that it would provide a technique to resolve conflicts. Issues of most significance for Cardinal Bernardin included the protection of life of the unborn, the reshaping of American Society and institutions for the benefit of the poorest,



the preservation of peace and progress in the attainment of justice, and the growth of mutual understanding and harmony within the church.

### **Reason and Rationality: The Involvement of Natural Law**

Cardinal Bernardin's consistent ethic calls for a specific application of reason and rationality in order to create a framework for dealing with complex social issues. Although specific references to natural law are not easily found within Bernardin's theory, it is reasonable to assume that natural law holds a significant place in the background of his work. As previously mentioned, both personalism and Thomistic thinking had significant influence on Bernardin's shaping of a consistent ethic. Personalism is derived from 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophical thinking which focuses on the integrated life of a human being (e.g., social, psychological, and economic integration) in relationship with others, as well as on the moral dimension of these relationships being central to the meaning of life. Thomistic thinking is centered on the theory of natural law. Therefore, both personalism and Thomistic schools of thought illustrate that humans are not reducible to matter alone; rather we enjoy our freedom and fulfillment in relationship with others (Schultze 31).

Natural law is a philosophic doctrine holding that there is a certain order in nature that provides norms for human conduct. It is an innate system of justice rather than a consequence of positive law or the rules set forth by society. This doctrine can be traced back to Aristotle, who held that "just by nature" was not always the same as what was "just by law." This doctrine is well-known and widely accepted, as in one way or another its existence was acknowledged by the Stoics, Cicero, the Roman jurists, St. Paul, Gratian, Francisco Suarez, and many others. Its renowned reputation, however, was largely due to its appearance in Thomas Aquinas's "Treatise on Law," a component of his larger work *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas believed that natural law was humanity's participation in the comprehensive eternal law. Likewise, the Catholic Church sees natural law and its nurturing of beneficial human law as harmonious with eternal and divine law; in other words natural law in accordance to God's master plan as well as biblical revelation. Divine natural law contends that law must be made to conform to the commands inspired by God, who governs according to the principles of compassion, truth, and justice.

While personalism emphasizes the moral nature of human relationships and their importance to an integrated life, Aquinas relates human good to biology. Biology, for Aquinas, means our life processes granted to us by God. One of

these processes bestowed by God provides humans with the ability to grasp certain self-evident principles of practical reason. Practical reason alludes to our rational capacity by which we guide our conduct, including the intuition of the rightness of particular actions or moral principles. The Encyclical letter *Veritatis splendor* defines the morality of acts by the relationship of man's freedom with the authentic good. Authentic good is established, as the eternal law, by divine wisdom which orders every being towards its end. This eternal law is known by man through man's natural reason, or natural law, as well as by God (Cessario 308). Simply stated, Aquinas, in accord with *Veritatis splendor*, equated practical reason with moral insight. From this reason, informed by our faith, comes not only the ability to do good and avoid evil, but a natural inclination towards what humans are to choose. The divine principles of right and wrong can be found in Scripture, church doctrine, papal decrees, and the decisions of ecclesiastical councils.

Furthermore, natural law proclaims the union of morality and politics, as Aquinas considered natural law to be a standard for human laws: unjust laws in principle did not bind in conscience. Natural law basically specifies a universal standard, providing a law much higher than any worldly legal system. In addition, it suggests an external standard by which such legal systems should be judged. Therefore, Aquinas asserts that justice is an irresistible, rational necessity of naturally sociable human beings.

Aquinas declares that God has granted humanity with practical reasoning. The ability to reason provides man with the capacity to understand revealed philosophies. For example, in a religion course a student may learn about different theologies. A student may be introduced to James Cone's theology of *God of the Oppressed*, or M. Douglas Meeks' *God the Economist*. Each of these theologies begins in the realm of revelation and applies reason and rationality to what is revealed in order to comprehend it. Therefore, it is not reason which substantiates what these theologians are saying, as reason alone cannot validate a particular faith claim. However, practical reason is vital to the articulation of what is being revealed. It is important to point out that although theologians, such as Cone and Meeks, articulate their theologies through the application of rationality; neither is necessarily sympathetic towards Aquinas' theory of natural law. If someone following the philosophy of Aquinas were to look at Meeks and Cone's theologies, their acceptance of natural law would cause them to take the theologies to a whole different level; placing emphasis on practical reasoning as the explanation of revelation. Meeks and Cone, on the other hand, would argue

that legitimacy of their theologies is established through revelation; that revelation is self-legitimizing. Reason only establishes the clarification and comprehension of the revelation. One begins in revelation and uses reason as a tool to elucidate the revealed philosophy. However, theologians such as Meeks and Cone claim that reason alone cannot enable one to grasp the reality of God; reason cannot do so without revelation.

People often learn about different philosophies/theologies such as those mentioned, without realizing that the ability to reason has already started them on their path to learning. In fact, without it, they would not be able to take a hold of what is being taught. This demonstrates that humans may take for granted the ability to reason, or in other words, natural law. Because of this it is reasonable to assume natural law is fundamental to Bernardin's consistent ethic of life, even though he does not specifically call much attention to the concept. His ethic centers on the sacredness of human life and our inherent dignity. He calls people to do good and to consider doing good as the standard to which human law should be held. It is clear that natural law plays a significant part in Bernardin's theology; perhaps he just does not acknowledge the concept because he assumes it is something that is already understood.

### **The Context of Our Culture Shapes the Content of Our Ethic**

Issues such as war, aggression, and capital punishment have always been problematic for society. Discrepancies in the ways these problems are addressed are nothing new. What is new, Cardinal Bernardin explained, is the context in which these ancient questions arise, and the way in which a new context shapes the content of our ethic of life. "The convergence of forces arising from contemporary society and threatening human life and sacredness create a new context in which the ancient themes of an ethic of stewardship of life take on new relevance" (Magagnotti 197). Bernardin understood the relationship of the context of our culture and the content of our ethic in terms of 1) the *need* for a consistent ethic of life; 2) the *attitude* necessary to sustain it; and 3) the *principles* needed to shape it. Recall that the Vatican II declared that the social task of the Church was to read the signs of the times and to interpret them in light of the gospel. Therefore, the terms Bernardin set in order to understand the relationship of our culture and our ethic correspond to the essential challenges that the signs of the times pose for the Church: 1) the *technological* challenge; 2) the *peace* challenge; and 3) the *justice* challenge.

## The Need for a Consistent Ethic Made Evident by Technological Challenge

The need for a consistent ethic of life is evident when considering the technological challenge imposed by the modern world. It seems that both modern science and medicine introduce new technological advances almost daily. Therefore, Cardinal Bernardin recognized that “The essential question in the technological challenge is this: in an age when we *can* do almost anything. How do we decide what we *ought* to do? The even more demanding question is: In a time when we can do anything technologically, how do we decide morally what we should *never* do?” (Bernardin in Langan 12). If such questions are considered throughout the entire lifetime of a person, one can see the dire need for a consistent ethic from which to help answer such inquiries. The challenge of technological advancement is most evident through the mysteries of both conception and death; points in life often referenced as the “womb” and the “tomb.” Technology has allowed us to develop the capability to alter natural order. “Today, from genetics through embryology to the care of the aged and the terminally ill, we confront the potential of shaping the beginning of life, making choices about its development, and sustaining it by life support systems” (Bernardin in Langan 52). Some of these technological opportunities closely follow the principle of the sacredness of human life, as we are able to enhance life expectancy, and in some cases, relieve unnecessary pain and suffering. However, these developments also allow us to make decisions about life and death; something we as humans are not meant to do.

## The Peace Challenge

The moral challenge posed by modern technology is not only visible in the fields of science and medicine. Rather, the technological challenge becomes a major component of the peace challenge as well. For instance, technology provides us with weapons that previous generations never even dreamed of; we are capable of destroying ourselves as well as the world. Bernardin frequently inquired as to how we are to keep the peace in an age when the instruments of war can threaten the very structure of human existence as a whole. Pope John Paul II often commented that the danger of our day is that we will use our technological genius to erode human dignity rather than to enhance it. We must be cautious that our choices in such challenging matters do not rest upon technological advances. Instead we must make such decisions under the influence of both human wisdom and faith in God. This is one reason a consistent ethic is needed: both the technology and the arms race require a directing vision to place them in their

appropriate subordinate roles. Our world is one that is interdependent in character while nuclear in context. Bernardin contends that this context brings sharply into focus the problem of keeping peace in an interdependent world governed by independent states. Therefore, the hope of a peaceful future is dependent on those who are able to construct and employ a correct and consistent moral vision.

Cardinal Bernardin was aware that questions of life, including abortion and modern welfare, as well as the proper care for the terminally ill, capital punishment and so forth, will in some form be a part of one's life. Likewise, he recognized that each of these problems has its own complications and that there is no single answer available to solve them. He declared that his purpose was to draw attention to the ways technological advances are dealt with in regards to each of these life issues, and that these challenges combined is what essentially defines the need for a consistent ethic of life.

### **To Sustain a Consistent Ethic: Necessary Attitude and Principles**

The consistent ethic of life structured the way Cardinal Bernardin lived his life, yet he clearly asserted that it was beyond both his ability and his duty to construct every detail of such an ethic. He explained that this is a task left to philosophers and poets, theologians and technicians, scientists and strategists, political leaders and plain citizens alike. His advice as to a starting point was that people involved, ideally all people, realize the need for a necessary attitude. Such an attitude, or an atmosphere, in society is the precondition for sustaining a consistent ethic of life.

"Attitude is the place to root an ethic of life, but ultimately ethics is about principles to guide the actions of individuals and institutions" (Bernardin, "Consistent" 7). With this as his reasoning, Cardinal Bernardin cited the inner relationship between the Catholic teaching on war and the Catholic teaching on abortion suggested in *The Challenge of Peace*. He used this example to demonstrate how a relationship is drawn at both the level of personal attitude as well as the level of moral principles. Policies concerning both warfare and abortion must consider not only the *attitude* of the respect for life, but also the *principle* that it is wrong to take an innocent life. "What links the many issues of human life is that such life is sacred: it comes from God, it belongs to God, it returns to God. All human beings have equal dignity, and nobody may ever directly destroy the innocent" (Pavone 60). One principle necessary in order to shape a consistent ethic of life is the foundation for the Church's stance on abortion: that the direct attack on fetal life is always wrong. Therefore, legal protection of the unborn is strongly advocated. This same principle shapes the major conclusion of *The Challenge of Peace* pastoral

letter: that intentional and direct attack on civilian centers is always wrong. “The use of this principle exemplifies the meaning of a consistent ethic of life. The principle which structures both cases, war and abortion, needs to be upheld in both places. It cannot be successfully sustained on one count and simultaneously eroded in a similar situation” (Bernardin, “Consistent” 8). Opposition is initiated in the public sphere when this principle is introduced as a guide of consistency. While some whole-heartedly agree that such a principle should serve as a guide in situations of abortion, the same people believe that the bishops have gone too far to simultaneously apply the principle to matters of national security. Likewise, others agree that the principle makes sense in matters of warfare while contending that implementing the principle in cases of abortion infringes on one’s right to private choice.

### The Justice Challenge

The justice challenge calls us to extend our protection of life from direct attack into the promotion of the dignity of life in society. In the words of Bernardin, “The justice challenge is how to build a society which provides the necessary material and moral support for every human being to realize his or her God-given dignity” (Bernardin in Langan 53). As humans we clearly have limits and we are aware of the prevalence of sin in our world. Therefore, creating a society as the one the justice challenge calls for will prove to be an inexhaustible undertaking. Flawless justice is only attainable in the Kingdom of God, although progress towards such a goal is achievable in our world. That is precisely the justice challenge: to work towards such progress in our world through the defense of human rights and dignity alike. *Gaudium et Spes* affirms that our world is constantly being distorted by sin, but we learn that God is busy preparing a new world for us; one that knows only righteousness and happiness instead of oppression. “We have been warned, of course, that it profits man nothing if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself” (*Gaudium et Spes* 39). This means that although we can expect a new world after death, it does not imply that we can cease caring about the development of the world we live in now. Rather, the knowledge of God’s preparation of a new world should motivate us to make the present world a better place,

for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society. (*Gaudium et Spes* 39)

We are called to do what God asks of us, not only minding our innate nature for desiring human dignity, brotherly communion, and freedom, but also acting on these principles to the best of our abilities. If we do these things, at the time of our death

We will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom “of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love, and peace.” Here on earth the kingdom is mysteriously present; when the Lord comes it will enter into its perfection. (*Gaudium et Spes* 39).

### **Right to Life and Quality of Life**

Bernardin pointed out that consistency is evaluated not only across issues, such as warfare and abortion, but also within a specific issue. Consistency can be measured in regards to a specific issue when one considers the relationship between the “right to life” and the “quality of life.” If one holds the position that abortion should be illegal, then that person’s moral, political and economic responsibilities in regards to birth do not stop with that ideology. This means that if one supports the “right to life” of the weakest among us, an unborn fetus, then they must also support the “quality of life” of the powerless among us. This means the powerless in all categories, whether old, young, homeless, hungry, or unemployed. George E. Schultze gives the example that as of 2003 there are 4,000 abortions daily in the United States. Surveys show that this statistic severely upsets a significant number of people. These people also express disturbance in the fact that society, in some places, has begun to consider euthanasia to be a beneficial practice. If these people were to exhibit Cardinal Bernardin’s consistent ethic then they should likewise be concerned with the millions of children living in poverty, or the 40 million Americans without health insurance. Support of the quality of life of such people is made visible in our political and economic positions. Bernardin implemented his understanding of consistency:

Consistency means we cannot have it both ways. We cannot argue a compassionate society and vigorous public policy to protect the rights of the unborn and then argue that compassion and significant public programs on behalf of the needy undermine the moral fiber of the society or are beyond the proper scope of governmental responsibility. (Bernardin in Langan 14)

Bernardin also elucidates that the right to life and quality of life complement each other in foreign policy as well. The pastoral letter suggests that this relationship is evident when looking at the issues of how to prevent nuclear war along with

how to build peace. If one is opposed to nuclear war, then they must also visibly support a policy aiming to build peace.

The consideration of Bernardin's contention that consistency can be measured in regards to a specific issue when one considers the relationship between the right to life and the quality of life generates dialogue among scholars. This is the case for J. Brian Benestad, the associate professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Scranton, who actually holds two objections to the way Cardinal Bernardin links the right to life with quality of life. Benestad's first objection is that linking the Church's opposition to abortion with support for specific political and economic positions could lead to an improper conflation of Catholic moral teaching with partisan politics. A goal, such as creating jobs for the unemployed, is important morally; however, implementing a specific policy to achieve this goal may or may not succeed. Benestad claims that:

If the church's opposition to abortion is perceived as of a piece with support for specific economic policies, two negative effects might follow. First, it could lead Catholics to elevate partisan politics to a theological level with dogmatism and self-righteousness as a consequence; second, it could induce Catholics and others to look at the church's teaching on abortion as just one more political position. (Benestad 11)

Cardinal Bernardin did indicate that the relationship between the right to life and quality of life is more complex than he makes it seem. However, Benestad's second objection is that Bernardin had perhaps left out too much information. He believes that Bernardin's theology improperly limits the discussion of a quality of life ethic to a more just distribution of economic resources by the government, hence leaving out too many important points from the perspective of Catholic social teaching. According to Catholic social teaching the quality of life encompasses far more than a just distribution of resources. In the words of Aquinas: "For an individual man to lead a good life two things are required. The first and most important is to act in a virtuous manner (for virtue is that by which one lives well); the second, which is secondary and instrumental, is a sufficiency of those bodily goods whose use is necessary for a virtuous life" (Aquinas in Benestad 14). Although material well-being contributes to the quality of life, it is virtue that is most vital. Clearly virtue is an intricate concept, as one is well aware of the ever-present uncertainty between right and wrong, or virtue and vice. Also proving to be complex are the ways in which a correct understanding of virtue could affect one's life. However, as Aquinas points out, there can be no quality of life without



virtue. Benestad affirms that Bernardin agrees with this concept. Although, it did cause Benestad to investigate how, despite believing that virtue is necessary, Bernardin could still limit his description of quality of life to material well-being when discussing domestic well-being.

Benestad holds that Bernardin's limitation develops from the way in which he believes that Church relates to both the political and social spheres. "He gives the impression that the U.S. bishops can best promote a quality of life ethic in the United States by advocating wise policy and legislation" (Benestad 15). Cardinal Bernardin's theology has caused some to question the place of both personal conviction and public duty. He asserts that the question should not be whether personal convictions should influence our public decisions, but rather how the two areas are related. Bernardin emphasizes that moral analysis in the public policy debate is essential due to the character of dilemmas in modern society. "In fact, he points out that the major issues of our time are fundamental questions whose moral dimension is a pervasive and persistent factor. Hence, to ignore the moral dimension of public policy is to forsake the constitutional heritage of the United States, itself a bearer of moral values" (Magagnotti 39).

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