

# **AN OPEN LETTER TO CONGRESSMAN PAUL RYAN, REPUBLICAN PARTY CANDIDATE FOR VICE PRESIDENT OF THESE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Dear Congressman Ryan,

Much has been made of your devotion -- or your confusion -- about the social teachings of the Catholic Church in the present campaign for president.

Your bishop has vouched for your social teaching credentials, but my observation is that many Catholics form their social opinions in accordance with their political opinions and I think this is generally true of most of our bishops too. It's not a unique problem for conservatives. Liberals do the same thing, as we have seen in the present campaign. Conservatives and liberals are well practiced at ignoring the aspects of Catholic social teachings that are inconvenient for their political beliefs.

So while no doubt Bishop Morlino can quote chapter and verse of the social teaching magisterium, when it comes time to apply them, I wonder how much of his judgement is Catholic, and how much comes from more worldly sources. The viewpoint called for by the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church, which is neither optional nor a matter of prudential judgment, is the preferential option for the poor. That's not something that strikes me as a major aspect of your political thought.

Bishops and other Catholics defending the Republican conservative political platform say that some things in Catholic teaching are required and some are "prudential." That statement by itself is so incomplete as to qualify at most as a half truth. While the application of some Church teachings may be subject to prudential judgement, the nature of the authority of the Church's social teachings is not a matter of prudential judgment. The social teachings were taught by Popes in encyclicals, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, and published in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. They derive from apostolic origins and the Bible. The lives of saints and martyrs witness their truth and their continued relevance. The Church's social teachings are clearly and without any ambiguity infallible and authentic teachings of Church's magisterium throughout history. It is our common Catholic duty to assent to these teachings -- without exception -- and to practice them. Indeed, it is the particular competence -- and duty -- of the laity to put the Church's social teachings into practice.

All prudential judgements about the social teachings are not created equal.

Some may be evil at work. For those of us who believe the teachings of the Catholic Church, and attempt to live them in our lives, this emphasis on "prudential judgements" sounds suspiciously like a "Get out of social justice" fig leaf being handed out by bishops to their favored candidates who may be naked before the world when it comes to social justice for the poor. The unstated implication -- wink wink, nod nod -- which is the particularly popular AmChurch heresy of the moment, is that these social teachings are somehow optional.

You should study the encyclicals of John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II, and Benedict XVI, the Catechism, and the documents of the Second Vatican Council. You will not find anything anywhere in these documents that gives these United States an exemption from our duty of obedience to any of the infallible social teachings of the Catholic Church.

The general arguments around Catholic social teaching are usually pitched in the form of "we need major social programs" versus "we need to cut the budget so we can cut taxes and this will create more prosperity which will lead to less need for social programs."

To listen to some people talk, these are the only choices, but that is, as they say, a "damnable lie of the devil."

I am responsible for ensuring food deliveries to about 500 households in Oklahoma City every month and have done this since 1999. These are people who don't have transportation so they can't get to other food banks. Over the years, I have come to know many of these people as my friends. I am a Catholic Worker, which means I am a personalist, which means I believe in taking personal responsibility for helping the poor.

I am not particularly a big fan of government social programs. Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, founders of the Catholic Worker movement, were opposed to the initiation of the Social Security system. They knew that it had its roots in Bismarck's Prussia, and its purpose was to destroy bonds of family and kinship, to break up transgenerational extended families, and thus make more obedient worker-soldiers available for the greater glory of the Prussian state.

Dorothy and Peter's solution to all of the problems of poverty were the preferential option for the poor, solidarity and participation.

The preferential option for the poor doesn't mean that God and the Church love some people more than others because of their economic status, but rather is a statement that if people are poor, they need special protection from the depredations of those who aren't poor. The fact that the rich oppress the poor cannot be doubted. The evidence of history on that subject is overwhelming and the United States, all propaganda to the contrary, is not an exception to this.

Solidarity is a matter of seeing the poor as if they were actually blood kin to us and act towards them accordingly. The Catechism says, at §1939:

..."The principle of solidarity, also articulated in terms of 'friendship' or 'social charity,' is a direct demand of human & Christian brotherhood. 'An error, today abundantly widespread, is disregard for the law of human solidarity & charity, dictated & imposed both by our common origin & by the equality in rational nature of all men, whatever nation they belong to. This law is sealed by the sacrifice of redemption offered by Jesus Christ on the altar of the Cross to his heavenly Father, on behalf of sinful humanity.' (Pope Pius XII)"

Participation is the teaching that people have a right and a duty to participate in their own life, in their own rescue if need be. Government commits grave evil when it prevents people from participating in their own life.

So let us count the ways that the governments of these United States -- federal, state, and local -- oppress the poor by making it illegal for them to participate in their own lives:

✚ In most areas it's illegal to sell along public right of ways (sidewalks, roads, rest stops on the highways and toll roads, etc.) Where legal, such high prices are charged for licenses and bizarre requirements are enacted as to make street vending for all practical intents and purposes illegal.

- ✦ It's illegal to practice small scale itinerant trades without "proper licenses" which often have expensive prerequisites so that they function as barriers to market entry rather than protections for the public. These are trades like hair braiding, hair cutting, carpentry, plumbing, etc. The proliferation of coercive credentialing in general raises political barriers to finding and doing work and lowers compensation.
- ✦ It's often illegal for poor people to practice trades out of their houses.
- ✦ Laws limit the number of garage sales people can have at their homes and restrict the ability to open a small sales or hospitality operation in a home.
- ✦ Laws forbid people from making non-hazardous foods (like jams, pickles, and baked goods) at home and selling them to the public.
- ✦ Poor people who own cars can't drive people around and charge for the service. It would likely be illegal to use a van to establish a jitney service (a type of transit, common elsewhere, where a van or small bus drives a route but deviates around the route to pick up fares dispatched from a central location). Transportation has serious political barriers to market entry.
- ✦ It's generally illegal to teach people how to apply makeup without government licenses which require expensive training.
- ✦ It is generally illegal to grow vegetables in your back yard and then sell them in your front yard.
- ✦ The government's "war on people who use drugs" breeds crime in low income areas and makes crime pay much better than honest work and entrepreneurial activity.
- ✦ The common political practice of rewarding friends and punishes enemies (known as "rent-seeking") reduces economic opportunities for all, keeps people out of the market, and is a non-market process driving the centralization of wealth.

Now let's consider how government makes the lives of poor people more hard and miserable and prevents people from helping them.

- ✦ In many areas it is effectively illegal to be homeless. This is accomplished with laws forbidding loitering, sleeping in public, etc.
- ✦ Begging is often illegal.
- ✦ Zoning laws prevent people from adding small apartments (garage, attic, basement, back-yard) that would increase the amount of rental housing and thus moderate rental prices.
- ✦ In most areas it would be illegal to put a trailer house in your back yard and allow a poor person to live in it rent free or for a moderate rental.
- ✦ In most areas it is practically impossible to establish a boarding house, which was always a traditional place for poor people to live.

- ✦ Economic redevelopment programs, using eminent domain, have attacked poor neighborhoods across the country, destroying millions of units of low income housing. This non-market, politicized process has driven up the price of housing, especially at the low end. It has taken property for the poor, cheated them by paying cheap, non-market, court-dictated and politicized prices for the property, and then given that property at low prices to persons with privileged access to politicians.
- ✦ It's illegal for people to build their own houses. Code requirements increase the cost of housing and are more related to political pressure from construction contractors than to actual safety issues.
- ✦ It's illegal for poor people to live in many neighborhoods. This is achieved by mandating minimum lot sizes, distances between houses, square feet minimums, and by forbidding any manufactured housing or trailer houses.
- ✦ It's illegal to provide some kinds of useful housing to poor people.
- ✦ It's illegal to not have electricity in your house. It's illegal to not buy water from your city utility. The state can seize your children if you don't have electricity.
- ✦ It's illegal in most areas for more than 4 unrelated people to live together.
- ✦ Government credentialing in health care drives up its cost. In particular, the practice of indenturing nurse practitioners to doctors raises the price of health care and reduces access for low income people. Government indenturing of denturists (skilled health care craftspeople who make dentures) to dentists means much high prices for dentures without a corresponding increase in quality. Dentists apparently prefer that poor people present a "snaggle toothed" appearance, which is a problem for getting a job, since they have manipulated the system to give themselves this non-science-based economic advantage.
- ✦ You can't raise chickens or other small animals in most cities unless you have a large (one acre or larger) lot. This inhibits economic activity and prevents people from supporting themselves by their own labor.
- ✦ Police commonly allow crime that would not be tolerated in upper income neighborhoods to proliferate in low income areas.
- ✦ Our education system is oriented towards college. Secondary school systems everywhere marginalize and provide poor services to non-college-bound students.
- ✦ Taxes and fees extracted from low income, working class, and middle class areas subsidize upscale development. This constantly drains older neighborhoods of revenue important for maintaining infrastructure and providing services.
- ✦ Laws that mandate minimum apartment sizes drive up the cost of low income housing and restrict its supply.

The negative cumulative impacts of these prohibitions and persecutions is to --

- ✦ Make people dependent upon government social services,
- ✦ Make the lives of poor people more miserable, risky, and unhealthy,
- ✦ Suppress the price of lower-income labor,
- ✦ Keep unemployment high,
- ✦ Reduce entrepreneurial activity and thus ensure a continued supply of cheap workers,
- ✦ Increase the number of abortions due to economic distress and psychological despair.

As is often the case, violations of social justice promote violations of life and social injustice is a known driver of abortion.

These issues are not only a problem for poor people, but also for the working and middle classes.

Since economic persecution is a reality in these United States, we have to have programs like food stamps, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and housing assistance. If we didn't have them, probably 10% of the population would be dead of starvation and exposure within the first year. Sure, some would endeavor to help, as they do now. But there's never enough private charity to go around. CHARITY CANNOT DO THE WORK OF JUSTICE. As long as our system of economic injustice prevails, people will be driven into poverty much faster and kept there longer than private and religious charities are able to cope with.

There are not enough private and religious charitable resources to go around as things stand right now. Help doesn't get to everyone. We live in a culture of death, and without the government's social safety net, as problematic as it is, mass death would be the result.

So I hope you can see my problem with the claims about your alleged knowledge of and obedience to Catholic social teaching. I don't hear anything about these poverty and justice realities from you.

Notice that in talking about these issues, I have not once called for any new big government program that would spend a large pile of money. I am saying that if we want to help the poor, then among other things that need to be done, the government should stop actively persecuting the poor.

The huge amount of drug business in low income areas indicates that there is an entrepreneurial streak a hundred miles wide among poor people. Ironically, it is easier and more profitable for poor people to go into the recreational drug business, than it would be for (e.g.) three young people to set up a hot dog stand at a rest stop on a freeway. That would certainly result in a major police and food regulatory bureaucracy response the first day they open for business. These hot dog entrepreneurs would be safer selling crack cocaine on the streets of a low income neighborhood than they would be selling hot dogs at a turnpike rest stop. That's a pretty sad commentary on the morality of our present system of laws, but it isn't something that you or any other Republican politicians, who supposedly are devoted to the free market, have much to say about.

Red state Oklahoma is ruled by Republicans. We have a Republican governor and both houses of

the legislature are controlled by the Republican Party. Could we perhaps have a little economic freedom for our state? Maybe open all of the rest stops on our freeways and toll roads and the public right of ways on our highways to small scale enterprise and street vending? Let the food trucks set up, bring in the peddlers. Open a free market flea market from one end of I-35 to the other and do the same with I-40. It would give people coming through the state another way to spend their money besides the Indian casinos and people who live here another way to earn an honest income by inventing their own micro-jobs that could perhaps grow into full time entrepreneurial self-employment.

Did anyone think about this at the state legislature? Of course not. When Republican politicians talk about the free market, **BY THEIR ACTIONS THEY PROVE THAT THEY DON'T REALLY MEAN AN ACTUAL FAIR AND FREE MARKET.**

They want rigged, politicized markets that reward their friends and punish their enemies.

They want all of the restrictions and subsidies that benefit their campaign contributors to stay in place.

They want the laws that oppress the poor and grind their faces into the dust to do their job to suppress wages, increase rents, promote political and economic dependency, and discourage personal and family and communal responsibility.

I hear the protests -- "this isn't what we want" -- but in politics, you get what you vote for. This is what our Republican (and Democratic) politicians have consistently voted for over the past fifty years. It seems at best disingenuous to disclaim responsibility for these consequences. And not all of these consequences are unintended. Most of them are deliberate attacks on the poor and are working exactly as they are designed to work. If you don't believe this, go to your City Council and propose amendments that would allow manufactured housing and trailer houses anywhere in the city. Follow this with a demand to allow micro-apartments (granny, attic, basement, backyard) in any neighborhood and to eliminate minimum house and lot sizes. The howls of outrage and screams of protest will come quickly and your council will dismiss you as a fool (at best) or maybe (at worst) a dangerous agitator. It's much the same reaction that prevailed 50 years ago, when it was proposed that people of African descent be allowed to live anywhere they choose.

So if it's true that you want to help the poor in accordance with the infallible and authentic social teachings of the Catholic Church, then why don't you come to the assistance of the poor -- not by proposing big new government programs, but by demanding that the government stop persecuting the poor? Why not harness the entrepreneurial aspirations of low income people so they can create their own jobs?

Until you defend the economic rights of poor people, by your words and deeds, you proclaim to the world that you are just another Cafeteria Catholic, willing to grind the face of the poor into the dust for political advantage.

The Bible says -- "Sow not in furrows of injustice lest you reap a seven fold harvest."

That seven-fold harvest is falling upon us even as we speak. Things are going from bad to worse, and while your campaign is trying to make it appear as if it is "all the fault of those danged Democrats," a more likely explanation is that we are reaping the bitter fruits of the seeds of

economic and social injustice and exploitation that we have sown for so many years.

It's a slow moving catastrophe, but the end result for our nation -- the ash heap of history -- is not in doubt.

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[www.justpeace.org](http://www.justpeace.org)

[www.energyconservationinfo.org](http://www.energyconservationinfo.org)

[www.bettertimesinfo.org](http://www.bettertimesinfo.org)

PS. A subsequent open letter will be published that is directed at VP Biden. I am writing the VP candidates, because you are both Catholic and thus we share a common faith that has implications for how you should govern as politicians.

**Please mail a copy of this letter to:**

**Congressman Paul Ryan  
Your bishop and pastor  
Your local Republican party office holders and party officials**

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