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SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AS A CHALLENGE FOR THE PASTORAL CARE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

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Introduction

'E Pluribus Unum,' the predecessor to the official motto of the United States, 'In God We Trust,' embodies both the challenge and the call to the modern Catholic Church of the United States – out of many cultures, religions, beliefs, and individuals Americans aspire to be one nation. The founders of the United States proposed 'E Pluribus Unum' as the motto of the United States in 1776, until it was officially replaced by a unanimous decision of Congress in 1956, in response to the perceived existential threat of the rise of communism.[1] Since this point in American history, the attitude toward religion in this pluralistic society has changed significantly, largely driven by societal changes. The American religious landscape has continued to evolve in recent decades and, with this, the tendency toward a negative perception of the Catholic Church has also increased.

To understand the seeming dramatic shift in American culture since the turn of the century, it is imperative to first understand the historical context of higher education and the dramatic changes within these institutions and within American society as a result. Historically, the earliest colleges in colonial America were founded to train clergy. As America gained independence from Great Britain, the focus of higher education shifted toward those skills necessary for self-governance and virtues required for civil society.[2]

Prior to the 1960s, the extreme political left in American society identified with Marxist ideologies, focusing on the conflict between economic classes. "Within this paradigm, when power is perceived to be held by one group over others, there is a moral polarity: the groups seen as powerful are bad, while the other groups are seen as good."[3] The 1960s marked the first wave of dramatic change in American higher education away from education aimed at self-governance, tolerance and cultivating the skills and virtues necessary for civil society. This period was tumultuous, marred with civil unrest, a burgeoning feminist movement, calls for racial equality and away from unjust segregation and an increasingly unpopular war in Viet Nam. It was during this time that the American Left shifted from focusing on the struggle between the economic classes to civil rights, racial equality, women's rights, and other social justice movements. Higher education was not immune to these changes, rather it was immersed in the conflict and calls for

[1] Thomas A. Foster. 2011. "In God We Trust or E Pluribus Unum? The American Founders Preferred the Latter Motto." *Origins: Current Events in Historical Perspective.* Origins.osu.edu. Retrieved Jan 2, 2022.
[2] Greg Lukianoff, and Jonathan Haidt. 2018. *The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Idea Are Setting Up a Generation for Failure*. (New York: Penguin Books): 269.
[3] Ibidem, 64.

change. Perhaps no greater influence on this cultural change in higher education and consequently spreading across American society, was Herbert Marcuse, a German philosopher, sociologist, and professor at several American universities. His writings influenced the 1960s through 1970s, reframing these social justice movements as a conflict between conservative and progressive conflict in the context of Marxist terms.[4]

> In a 1965 essay titled "Repressive Tolerance," Marcuse argued that tolerance and free speech confer benefits on society only under special conditions that almost never exist: absolute equality. He believed that when powerful differentials between groups exist, tolerance only empowers the already powerful and makes it easier for them to dominate institutions like education, the media, and most channels of communications. Indiscriminate tolerance is "repressive," he argued; it blocks the political agenda and suppresses the voices of the less powerful…A truly "liberating tolerance," claimed Marcuse, is one that favors the weak and restrains the strong…Marcuse associated the right [or strong] with the business community, the military, and other vested interests that he saw wielding power, hoarding wealth, and working to block social change…The left [the weak] referred to students, intellectuals, and minorities of all kinds…Marcuse recognized that what he was advocating seemed to violate both the spirit of democracy and the liberal tradition of nondiscrimination, but he argued that when the majority of society is being repressed, it is justifiable to use "repression and indoctrination" to allow the "subversive majority" to achieve the power it deserves. In a chilling passage that foreshadows events on some college campuses today, Marcuse argued that true democracy might require denying basic rights to people who advocate for conservative causes, or for policies he viewed as aggressive or discriminatory, and that true freedom of thought might require professors to indoctrinate their students."[5]

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., American theologian, civil rights activist, and co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta Georgia embodied the ideal pastoral and civil response to the unrest of the 1960s. He and his contemporary religious leaders recognized the need to address this social unrest and systemic injustices with a concerted and deliberate pastoral plan. Rooted in Christianity, peacefully and in communion with other denominations called to heal the wounds of centuries of racial injustices, Rev. King led the civil rights movement through "nonviolent protests and civil disobedience, boycotts, and sophisticated public relations strategies to apply political pressure on intransigent lawmakers while working to change minds and hearts

[4] Ibidem, 65.
[5] Original Text: Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore Jr, and Herbert Marcuse. 1969. "A Critique of Pure Tolerance." (Boston: Beacon Press), 95-137. Retrieved from Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 65-66.

in the country at large…He appealed to the shared morals and identities of Americans by using the unifying languages of religion and patriotism…referring to people of all races and religions as 'brothers' and 'sisters.' He spoke for the need of love and forgiveness, hearkening back to the words of Jesus and echoing ancient wisdom from many cultures: "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend"[6] and "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that."[7]

Through his work, life and pastoral plan, Rev. King framed his approach through frameworks and narratives that united Americans. Rather than divisive language, he evoked the common beliefs that unified, rather than divided Americans, through love of God and love for each other with the common goal of repair and reunification. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Washington DC, he reminded Americans, although we are many, we are one and equal in the eyes of our creator:

> Even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed:[8] "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."[9]

During this same turbulent time of societal polarization in both the political and social spheres, the impact of the Second Vatican Council came to fruition. F. M Requena noted that the American religious discourse was unique and impacted by the brief history of the Catholic Church in the United States both relative to the duration of America's existence as a nation (compared to other nations) and the duration of the Catholic Church as an institution in the United States. He articulated the challenges that faced the Catholic Church following Vatican II, and the inadequacies of how the Council address the Catholic Church in the United States as the following:

> 1)A failure to respond to the questions in which the Catholics of the day were interested; 2) its predominantly confessional character — rigorous and academic in tone — but lacking significant

[6] Original text: Martin Luther King Jr. "Where Do We Go from Here." Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1967 Aug 16, Atlanta Georgia). Stanford University. In www.stanford.edu/group/king/piblications/speecher/Where_do_we_go_from_here.html. Retrieved September 8, 2022.

[7] Original text: Martin Luther King, Jr. "Sermon at Washington National Cathedral," (1968 Mar 31). Retrieved from Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 60.

[8] Martin Luther King. "I have a dream…" (1963, Aug 28). In https://www.archives.gov/ files/press/exhibits/dream-speach.pdf. Retrieved Sept 8, 2022.

[9] Original text "Declaration of Independence." In Congress (1776 July 4). As spoken by Martin Luther King, "I have a dream…" (1963, Aug 28). In https://www.archives.gov/ files/press/exhibits/dream-speach.pdf. Retrieved Sept 8, 2022.

contributions to American intellectual and social history; 3) the limitation of serious academic study of Catholic history to only a few universities; 4) the predominant emphasis on absence of Catholicism from the national historical narrative; 6) the predominance of the paradigm of "Americanization"; and 7) an emphasis on the "minority" mentality to describe the development of American Catholicism.[10]

Contrary to the unifying messages of contemporary Christian theologians of the day, like Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, and contrary to the common Catholic religious and laity that stood shoulder to shoulder with other denominations in the fight for justice and unity, the hierarchy of the American Catholic Church of that same era failed to connect with American Catholics. During this decade of divisive politics and tribalism, American's yearned for unity, healing, and a greater connection to their collective humanity. Regarding the American experience, the Second Vatican Council faltered in that it "…did not feature an explanation of how the faithful should react to the contemporary intellectual agenda. The ideology of secularism provided people with answers to socially important questions like social justice, political and civil rights activism."[11] This inaction by the leadership of the Catholic Church during this period of great social consternation opened further the door of the collective American psyche to secular ideology.

Following the turbulent 1960 and 1970s, American culture stabilized through a period of general prosperity and growth over the next three decades. Unquestionably, as the statistics below will delineate, there has been a significant and accelerating change in American society most notably manifesting in a precipitous decline in religious affiliation, secularization, social unrest, moral relativism, and general intolerance towards those with traditional belief systems. Much like the unrest and drastic social changes and trend toward secularization seen in the 1960s, changes within the youth of this current generation, the so-called 'millennials' and 'Gen Z,' appear to be at the heart of this rapid evolution. These changes, much like those seen in the 1960s, appear to be manifesting in college campuses and in the public square as protests and general intolerance to the right to free speech of those with differing opinions and beliefs. Lukianoff and Haidt noted a rapid change on many college campuses between 2013 and 2017. They acknowledge six changes leading to this dramatic shift in culture including: rising political polarization and cross-party animosity

[10] Federico M. Requena. 2015. "The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on the United States Catholic Historiography." *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33(2): 105.

[11] Grzegorz Rozborski. 2022. "Secularism as a Challenge for the Catholic Church in the United States of America in the 21st Century." *Roczniki Teologiczne* 69(6), 77-93. DOI**:** https://doi.org/10.18290/rt.22696.5; ORCID: http://orcid.org./0000-0002-2201-6164.

of US politics, diverging from the idea of an accepting pluralistic society to a divisive, tribalistic mentality; rising anxiety and depression, driven heavily by perverse social media standards for behavior and beauty; changing parenting practices; the loss of free play and unsupervised risk taking allowing for maturation into self-governing adults; increasing bureaucracy, especially on college campuses focused on protection and not critically thinking; and an increasing passion for justice with a change in the perception of what justice requires, including escalating social unrest and violence, if necessary.[12] Ultimately, the authors surmised, that this generation, especially has embraced three social untruths that are destructive and contrary to the tenants necessary for a pluralistic society:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: *What doesn't kill you makes you weaker*.
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: *Always trust your feelings.*
3. The Untruth of Us Versus Them: *Life is a battle between good people and evil people.*[13]

The Christian leaders and theologians throughout American History have recognized their role in guiding the faithful and helping to form and heal their nation. They were not separate from the society, but an intrinsic part of it. They also fully understood the impact of the secular culture, global and societal structures, the prevailing moral relativism that permitted such injustices and the impact of technology of the day. They too were imperfect humans, and their views were often colored by the beliefs and misconceptions of their day.

Decades later, Pope Benedict XVI spoke at the 9/11 memorial on April 20, 2008. In that moment his prayer for the victims of this terrorist attack, for the aching hearts of a nation, and for fear and anger that resulted reflected the call to our common humanity as the bases for forgiveness and healing. His words recognized the plurality that is the matrix of American society. He recognized that, in that moment his role was not to pastor to Catholics, but the fullness of humanity:

> O God of love, compassion and healing, look on us, people of many different faiths and traditions, who gather at this site, the scene of incredible violence and pain. We ask you in your goodness to give eternal light and peace to all who died here…God of peace, bring your peace to our violent world: peace in the hearts of all men and women and peace among the nations of the earth. Turn to your way of love those whose hearts and minds are consumed with hatred. God of understanding, overwhelmed by the magnitude of this tragedy, we seek your light and guidance as we confront such terrible events. Grant that those whose lives were spared may live so that the lives lost here

[12] Lukianoff and Haidt, *The Coddling of the American Mind*, 15.
[13] Ibidem, 4.

> may not have been lost in vain. Comfort and console us, strengthen us in hope, and give us the wisdom and courage to work tirelessly for a world where true peace and love reign among nations and in the hearts of all.[14]

In this prayer, Pope Benedict XVI combated two untruths that permeate this generation: *Always trust your feelings,* and *Life is a battle between good and evil people.* While he acknowledged the pain, anger and suffering in response to the violence of that day, for the American people and for the world, he reminded Americans and the world that love and forgiveness are decisions that transcend these emotions — albeit justifiable by man's standards. He further reminded Americans and the world that these were evil acts, but the citizens of these countries were not intrinsically evil. He implored Americans to work toward peace.

American society is on the precipice of dramatic change. Much like the theologians that have been intertwined with this society through previous historic changes, I recognize the risk to society of these changes and the impact on the Church. I chose this topic to address the current state of American Society, the current impact of secularism, globalization, moral relativism, the technological revolution, and the current state of the Catholic Church and to develop a pastoral plan addressing the faithful and the fragile. As an immigrant and now a citizen of this country, I too recognize the challenges and the beauty of this pluralistic society as did Pope Benedict on his visit to the 9/11 memorial. He reminded Americans that God's love transcends the human constructs of borders and nations. Emboldened by his Christian faith, Dr King and his contemporaries reminded a battered nation that the Light and Love of God can heal, too. He had a dream, but he also had a plan. Addressing the current forces tearing at the social fabric of this nation, and the declining faithful, will require nothing less.

According to surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center completed in 2019, the number of adult Americans who consider themselves Christians is 12% less than it was prior to 2000. These surveys additionally revealed that, in the last decade, the percentage of the population who profess to be religiously unaffiliated, including atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" had increased from 17% to 26%. Furthermore, American Catholics decreased from 23% to 20% from 2009-2019. Perplexingly, more than 50% of all Catholics reported that they were born in Christian

[14] Pope Benedict XVI. (2008 Apr 20). "Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters. Visit to Ground Zero: Prayer of His Holiness Benedict XVI." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved September 11, 2022.

families and had received a religious upbringing. Additionally, troubling for the American Catholic Church is that the amount of people who decided to become Catholic in adulthood is also consistently decreasing.[15] If there is but one small glimmer of hope regarding these statistics for the Catholic Church within the United States, it is that the Pew Research Center reported that those Christians identifying as Catholics appears to have stabilized as of 2021 at 21%; precipitous ongoing decline in those identifying as non-Catholic Protestant Christians continues, however. As of December 2021, Protestants account for 40% of the US population, down from 52% in 2007.[16]

The constant change in the American religious landscape is another manifestation and evolution of cultural pluralism across the United States. The religious and cultural landscape of the United States has experienced shifts, with multiple individuals transitioning from their traditional beliefs and adopting new religious beliefs and practices.[17] For example, more than 40 percent of American adults identify with different religious beliefs in which they were raised, rising by more than six percentage points in the last decade.[18] Similarly, between 2007 and 2014, there was an increase in the percentage of the non-Christian faithful in the U.S. from 4.7 percent to 5.9 percent. Beyond this, there has been increasing change in the ethnicity of the faithful. Racial and ethnic minorities have increased among Catholics, from 35% in 2007 to 41% in 2015. Much of this change is represented by an increasing percentage of Hispanics.[19] These statistics further demonstrate the cultural and religious pluralism in the United States, which is associated with acceptance and diversity of religion among the United States population.

In addition, the integration of ethnic, cultural practices and religion also indicates the evolution and manifestation of cultural pluralism in the United States. The cultural and religious integration rate across the United States is almost at a similar level to that of colonization. This "ethnoreligious diversification had made the country more responsive to inclusive notions of community and more welcoming of the critical approaches to the world being advanced

[15] Gregory A. Smith et al. 2019. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," *Pew Research Center.* In https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/. Retrieved Jan 4, 2022.
[16] Gregory A. Smith et al. 2021. "About Three-in-Ten U.S. Adults Are Now Religiously Unaffiliated," *Pew Research Center*. In https://www.pewforum.org/2021. Retrieved Jan 4, 2022.
[17] David A Hollinger. 2022. *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 22.
[18] "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (2015 May 12). *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.
[19] Ibidem.

elsewhere."[20] Despite the small but significant Catholic population in the United States during its founding, statistics indicate that the Catholic religion currently accounts for the largest single religious affiliation among the United States population, with more than 23 percent of the population subscribing to Catholic belief.[21] This number significantly increased largely due to immigration from traditionally Catholic cultures and conversion to Catholicism.

In fact, as an immigrant church, the Roman Catholic Church grew into the largest single religious institution in the United States. Presently, the Catholic Church in the United States accounts for 17,000 parish communities serving diverse cultures and ethnicities. The Religious Landscape Study, conducted by Pew Research Center's American Trends Panel and General Social Survey noted 51 million Americans identify as Catholic. Unfortunately, with this growth, the Church has experienced significant pressures impacting its decline both related to self-inflicted damage as well as the changing social and cultural landscape within the United States. Manifestations if the Church's struggles in the United States can be seen in the marked decline in vocations to the priesthood and consecrated life, the explosion of the sexual abuse scandals by clergy, their punishment, and the Church's handling including cover-up, the outcry of victims and the outrage of the American public. These scandals have had a lasting negative impact on participation of the faithful with the Church, including a decrease in the number of the faithful that regularly attend Mass and a significant number of people permanently leaving the Church. The Pew study surveyed 35,000 Americans (U.S. citizens). This research illustrated the disintegration of participation by Catholics. Data pertaining to the abuse scandal noted, 95% of Catholics are aware of the crimes committed and their concealment by priests, bishops, and consecrated persons, 69% of Church members believe that these abuses remain a problem, and only 24%, believe that the Church has moved beyond the scandal. Only 3% of those surveyed believe that the problem of sexual abuse is less in the Catholic Church than other religious traditions. About 46% of those surveyed, discussed the abuse scandal in their families, among friends or with acquaintances. Regarding regular participation among those identifying as practicing Catholics, (defined as those regularly attending Holy Mass), 27% resigned from active participation in the Eucharist, and 26% limited their financial support of their parish in response

[20] David. A Hollinger. *Christianity's American Fate*, 22.
[21] Central Intelligence Agency. 2022. *Field Listings – Religion.* The World Fact Book. In https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/. Retrieved September 30, 2022.

to the scandals.[22]

Among those who leave the Church, the vast majority enter the communities of the Protestant Churches. Concomitant with drastic decline in lay faithful, American clergy have also had a notable decline. According to a survey conducted by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington, the number of priests has fallen by 38% over the past fifty years, from nearly 60,000 diocesan and religious priests in 1970 to merely 37,000 in 2016. Each year there are ten retiring for every one ordained. The average age of a priest is currently 67 years. In addition to natural attrition through retirement, many clergy were removed from pastoral ministry as a result of accusations and convictions related to the sexual abuse. Related to this decline many parishes communities remain without a pastor, resulting in the need for closure of thousands of them. For example, in 2019, approximately 3,500 parishes were left without parish priests. This critical shortage has led to escalating calls for radical change including calls for married priests, priesthood of women and the need to transmit a significant percentage of the ecclesiastical duties (including administration but also religious formation) to the laity.[23]

The need and calls for change within the American Catholic Church are impacted by socio-cultural, moral, and political changes. This is an expression not only of internal crises, but also of the growing ideology of secularism. For example, 76% of members of the Catholic Church demand a change in the church's social teaching in the field of contraception; 62% favor permitting the marriage of priests, and thus the abolition of celibacy as a practice; 62% of Catholics express receipt of Holy Communion should be permitted to divorced persons regardless of non-ecclesiastical annulment of the sacrament of marriage; 61% believe people living in extramarital relationships should not only attend Mass but also receive Holy Communion; 59% of Catholics desire the priesthood of women; 46% express a desire for broad acceptance of same-sex marriage, including permitting it within the Church. It should be emphasized, however, that the approval of the above postulates is to a large extent the opinion of those who attend Mass only irregularly. However, this does not change the fact of the enormous liberalization and

[22] "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (2015 May 12). *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.
[23] "Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate: Placing Social Science Research at the Service of the Catholic Church since 1964." In www.CARA.georgetown.edu. Retrieved October 2, 2022.

secularization of American society and their impact on the life of the Church.[24]

The Pew Research Poll in 2019 also demonstrated an increasing disconnect and respect of the authority of the Pope for American Catholics, much of this decline was reportedly associated with the handling of the sex abuse scandal by the Holy See. In 2014, 54% of American Catholics showed great appreciation to the Holy Father, especially for his commitment to the very harsh and painful reality of sexual abuse by clergy. However, the lack of concrete and decisive steps taken and the growing lack of trust of lay people in ecclesiastical institutions have led to a clear weakening of the authority of the Pope. According to the Pew Research Center Poll, as of August 2019 (after the events related to Cardinal Mc Carrick), only 31% positively assessed the role of the Holy Father and his commitment to addressing the Scandal.[25] In 2022, when surveyed on the handling of the scandal, 51% of all Americans and Catholics disapproved of the Catholic Church's actions. Only 13% of the American public and 20% of Catholics approved overall of the Church's handling of the scandal. Among all Catholics, 48% noted their attendance at church was similar to 5 years prior, while 37% noted they were attending church less often, and only 14% noted they attend more frequently.[26]

The disintegration of the regular involvement of the faithful in the celebration of the Holy Mass and other sacraments reflects the extent of impact of cultural secularization on the Catholic Church. One in five adult Catholics identify as actively participating in the faith. According to the Pew study from 2015, of these only 30% regularly attend Mass; 26% irregularly attend Mass (once a month or less); 17% attend only for specific celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, wedding, funeral, or baptism, and 27% identify as believers but non-practitioners. With the decline in the participation of the faithful in the Holy Mass, the lack of awareness and faith in the living and true presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine also has decreased. Only 31% believe in the true presence of Christ in the Eucharist; 69% believe that the Eucharist is only a symbol and not the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. Furthermore, the celebration of other sacraments has also decreased. For example, since 2017, the baptism of children has decreased

[24] "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (2015 May 12). *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.
[25] AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. (June 2022). "Most Catholic Americans disagree with hardline positions of church leadership. In https://apnorc.org/projects/most-catholic-americans-disagree-with-hardline-position-of-church-leadership/. Retrieved October 26, 2022.
[26] "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (2015 May 12). *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.

by 34%; the sacrament of Confirmation by 25%; the sacrament of marriage by 37%. In a 2019 General Social Survey only 60% of respondents acknowledged that not only has regular participation in these sacraments decreased, but the role these sacraments play in their lives has diminished. When specifically questioned on the greatest value of specific sacraments in their lives, the results were as follows: baptism 72%; Eucharist 64%; Holy Confession 39%; Confirmation 59%; marriage 65%; sacrament of the sick 52%; the sacrament of Holy Orders 46%.[27]

A great influence on today's image of the church is also the political awareness of Catholics and their sense of responsibility for the nation. Patriotism is a fundamental aspect in the life and development of an American. The United States has a two-party system – Democrats and Republicans. Democrats represent the political left or liberal ideology, and Republicans represent the political right or conservative ideology. Catholics are roughly split on their political affiliations. According to polls, 47% of Catholics identify politically as Democrats; 46% are Republicans; 7% are not affiliated according to Pew.[28]

In general, if the current trend toward declination of the number of Christians, including Catholics, and the increase in the number of religiously unaffiliated, including agnostics and atheists, continues in the United States, the existing religious landscape will be dramatically different for the next generation of Catholics. The number of Catholics will be significantly fewer. These statistical data illustrate the crisis of faith in contemporary American society and establish both the relevance and urgency of attention required by Catholic clergy to abate these trends toward secularization.

The aims of this dissertation can be expressed in the following three questions:

1) What are the most important manifestations of social and cultural changes in American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century?

2) How are these changes interpreted and evaluated in the official documents of the Church in the United States?

3) What changes should be made in the pastoral ministry so that the Church in the United

[27] "America's Changing Religious Landscape." (2015 May 12). *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.

[28] Gregory A. Smith et al. 2019. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace." *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/ Retrieved October 2, 2022.

States can fulfill her saving mission in the current social and cultural conditions?

It is possible to hypothesize that the social and cultural changes of 21st century America and the dramatic movement towards secularization does not suppose a religious worldview. As such, specific components of social and cultural changes, as it pertains to the American experience, including secularization, globalization, moral relativism, and the technological revolution, will be evaluated relative to their impact on declining affiliation with the Catholic Church in the United States.

Evaluation of contemporary society and the cultural changes of the past decades requires an understanding of the interplay of the field of religious, social, cultural, political, economic, and political studies. Understanding the synergism between these fields as a means to evaluate society as a whole, as well as their dynamism, constitutes the basis for an adequate investigation of these societal changes. The intersections of these spheres of knowledge are critical for the research of contemporary society. Understanding the liberal and secular essence of contemporary culture and society in the United States is critical to adequately understand the current position of the Catholic Church in the United States. It is through this lens of contemporary culture that society perceives the place of the Catholic Church in the new social and cultural paradigm.

There is no single opinion among theologians and clergy about the appropriate ways in which the Church should participate in community life. The 20th century was marked by a tremendous interest in the social sciences. Prior to the 20th century, religion was one of the most influential social institutions whose authority spanned many centuries. Though, after the end of World War II, the authority of the Christian Church started to decline gradually. Western culture became increasingly secular, and the freedom that people enjoyed changed their worldview. As a result, the social sciences and religion became seemingly completely different spheres of knowledge, and clergy had to find new ways of combining these two domains.[29]

Consequently, the latter half of the 20th Century saw the development of Catholic Social Teaching. This was the logical continuation of the above-mentioned tendencies to combine these domains. One cleric who contributed significantly to this movement was Joseph Cardijn, who was elevated to cardinal in 1965. Through his work in the field of Catholic Social Teaching, he organized the movement of young Christian workers who aimed at improving life in the community by helping people in the places where they lived. The clerics of the Vatican II council

[29] Joseph A. Selling. 2016. *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics* (Oxford: University Press): 118.

defined their *see, judge, and act* method as liberation theology. This immersive approach to social problems has become popular among the Catholic clergy who started to apply this method to their interactions with the community. Additionally, use of the *see, judge, and act* method became a means by which clergy could evaluate decisions and implement actions they had to make.[30]

Hence, Cardinal Joseph Cardijn introduced the See-Judge-Act paradigm into the theoretical discourse now utilized by contemporary theologians. This approach additionally allows the faithful community to become more attentive towards the needs of other people and encourages them to react to their concerns. It is possible to describe this method as the movement from the solidarity of people and their engagement to an understanding of the issue and reflection that are followed by the active involvement of everyone's action. Cardijn articulated this method in 1967, and it has become the major method in Christian social activism that reconciles religion and social justice. The See-Judge-Act method is practical by its essence, and it helps the faithful community to participate in social activism effectively. In other words, this method supposes that Christians should be attentive to other people who live in their community, which allows them to see their needs, both physical and spiritual.[31]

It is possible to illustrate the approach proposed by Cardinal Cardijn with the following lines from his works:

> This judgment, finally, does not remain a dead letter, it leads to action: to solving problems, it turns to reality to change it and make use of it, to make daily life vast and beautiful… This method of education is suited equally well to the masses as to the elites. It takes place in life and through life.[32]

In other words, the See-Judge-Act method proposed by Cardinal Cardijn shows effective results in practice. It is through this solidarity of all members of the community that allows people to change their lives significantly. From the religious perspective, it is an instrument of spiritual liberation and the means of pursuing the Christian mission that is based on an altruistic desire to help other people.

The American Christian religious contemporaries of Rev. Dr Martin Luther King, including the Catholic priests, religious and faithful laity demonstrated an intuitive understanding

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[30] Joseph A. Selling. 2016. *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics* (Oxford: University Press), 118.
[31] Justin Sands. 2018. "Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See-Judge-Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice," *Religions* 9 (129): 3.
[32] Original text: Joseph Cardijn., "La Pensee de Joseph Cardijn." (1982), 87-88. Retrieved from: Justin Sands. 2018. "Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See-Judge-Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice," *Religions* 9 (129): 4.

of the practical nature of pastoral theology. Though their actions were not prescriptive, they witnessed the injustices and inequalities facing their contemporary society, judged the morality of these social constructs in accordance with Christian teaching and devised organized and deliberate actions using the peaceful tenants of Christian teaching to address the injustices within the social spheres of their day. Their actions foreshadowed the See-Judge-Act paradigm as described by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn. The social and cultural challenges facing American society in the 21st century is no less contentious. As such, a thorough understanding and application of this paradigm within the context of pastoral theology is necessary.

Clodovis Boff and Leonardo Boff developed the theological basis of the See-Judge-Act paradigm. They asserted that the Holy Scripture is the basis of the doctrine, and Biblical interpretation serves as the guidance in all actions that the faithful do. They expanded on this assertion with the following postulations:

> It is hermeneutics that favors application rather than explanation. In this, the theology of liberation takes up the kind of probing that has been the perennial pursuit of all true biblical reading, as can be seen, for example, in the church fathers — a pursuit that was neglected for a long time in favor of a rationalistic exegesis concerned with dragging out the meaning-in-itself. Libertarian hermeneutics reads the Bible as a book of life, not as a book of strange stories. The textual meaning is indeed sought, but only as a function of the practical meaning: the important thing is not so much interpreting the text of the scriptures as interpreting life 'according to the scriptures. Ultimately, this old/new reading aims to find contemporary actualization (practicality) for the textual meaning.[33]

Consequently, viewing this paradigm in the context that Holy Scripture is its basis, allows for the synopsis that faith is the basic principle in the See-Judge-Act method articulated by Cardinal Cardijn. Faith allows believers to cognize God and to apply the moral lesson in practice. It is also an instrument by which believers may fulfill their own Christian mission and to attain salvation. The doctrine of See-Judge-Act therefore becomes a real-life and practical application of the theological and Christian worldview. Moreover, it is a means by which to reconcile religion and secular society, making the Catholic Church an active participant in community life. This active participation makes the institution of the Catholic church visible, valuable, and tangible to its congregants thereby increasing its presence and its popularity among people.

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[33] Original text: Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, "Introducing Liberation Theology." (1987): 32.
Retrieved from: Justin Sands. 2018. "Introducing Cardinal Cardijn's See-Judge-Act as an Interdisciplinary Method to Move Theory into Practice," *Religions* 9 (129): 5.

As previously mentioned, the See-Judge-Act paradigm was adopted after the Vatican II Council. Although many clerics professed support of the method, there was criticism of Cardinal Cardijn's hypothesis as well. The critics of the See-Judge-Act method imputed that the Church was excessively optimistic about people and society in general. The broken nature of humanity impedes the faithful from opposing temptations and acting righteously is often too arduous a task. The supporters of the method noted that the progress of humankind can truly make people happy. [34] Additionally, the motivation for Christian actions should not be malice and vanity. As noted in Rom. 12:2, Christians to "Be not conformed to this world." This passage charges the faithful to be cautious in their actions. The faithful instead should ensure that their energy aspires to serve people and God. Further, a passage from 1 Cor. 3:22-23 states, "All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's." In other words, it is critical for believers to remember that everything they do should be motivated by their Christian faith, their mission, and their dedication to God.

In this research, the focus is to apply the See-Judge-Act paradigm to the crisis facing the American Catholic Church of a progressively secularized society because this method is an effective means to overcome existing challenges of the pastoral care facing the Catholic Church. Unquestionably, there is an evident crisis of faith in the predominantly secular American society. The Church needs to find new ways of interacting with the community that will enhance acceptance of the Church as a reliable moral authority. When society views the Catholic Church as an active participant in social life, and through this participation a transformative moral authority, acceptance of this role within society naturally becomes more prominent. As a reputable power for the greater good, the Church's authority becomes further legitimized in society. Thus, its prominence and even popularity in secular society has the potential to increase.

This thesis focuses on finding the appropriate ways of optimizing the pastoral care that can improve the image of the Catholic Church in the secular American society of the 21st century. In the first part of the method of objective and structural analysis of available sources will be used, presenting the social and cultural changes in the United States at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In the second part, a subject analysis of the statements of the Magisterium Ecclesiae, first of all, of the Catholic Church in the United States, containing the interpretation and assessment of current social and cultural changes in the United States will be used. In the third part, praxeological methods will be used to build a new strategy of the pastoral ministry of the Church in the United

[34] Joseph A. Selling. 2016. *Reframing Catholic Theological Ethics* (Oxford: University Press): 119.

States. The main method used in this investigation is qualitative research via a literature review of the theoretical and theological basis of the contributing factors related to the progressing crisis of faith in American Society including historical and theological context as well as analysis of the cultural and social changes of American society that started in the 20th century and continued in the 21st century. Regarding the theological component of the investigation, the focus will be on the Catholic tradition of social thought, relationships between secularism and religious worldview, and existing conflicts within these relationships.

Pastoral care and ministry in the Catholic Church in general requires a practical approach. As such, this research aims at articulating the new perspective on pastoral care that correlates with the needs of the secular society without losing its religious essence. In other words, the approach to pastoral care must satisfy the spiritual needs of the faithful without opposing the cultural and social context of the 21st century United States.

Understanding the interplay of the Church with society in the context of increasingly secular and pluralistic culture requires a cross discipline review. As such, the scholarly resources reviewed are at the intersection between the social sciences and theology. This combination of diverse disciplines allows for a broad and adequate understanding of the modern society and the historical context unique to the American experience. These academic spheres provide the necessary basis for review of historical understanding of the Catholic Church in the United States, the present state of the Church, and practical recommendations for pastoral care. Through this review the intention is to develop optimal solutions to the problems that arise in contemporary pastoral care as it pertains to the current state of the Catholic Church in the United States.

Antecedent to the application of the See-Judge-Act paradigm to the problems facing the Catholic Church in the United States and the practical application of a pastoral strategy therein, a thorough understanding of the changes in the contemporary American society, the Church's teachings related to its interaction with society and the current state of pastoral care of the Catholic Church. The above introduction evaluates the urgency of the current crisis and delineates the need for a comprehensive pastoral care plan for the Catholic Church in the United States. Furthermore, the above evaluates the current status of the Church and its diminished popularity in the secular American society. Moreover, the above introduction features an explanation of the See-Judge-Act paradigm as proposed by Cardinal Cardijn which is the basis for the practical implementation of the pastoral strategy. The use of this paradigm is not just limited to religious life or to better

pastoral care, it is truly meant to enrich pastoral theology and the pastoral mission of the Church. As described by Richard R. Osmer, "the Church's mission is part of God's mission, which is universal. Concern for the Church's mission is not an escape into the private world of religion, but a matter of discerning the Church's participation in God's purposes of creating, guiding and redeeming the world."[35]

The paradigm proposed by Cardinal J. Cardijn gained acceptance of Pope John XXIII in the *Mater et Magistra* encyclical (no 236). This paradigm was applied to the Second Vatican Council, especially in the development of the pastoral constitution, "Gaudium et spes." After Vatican II, the paradigm of See-Judge-Act has been widely used in pastoral theology as methodological modus for developing new models of the Church's salvific activity. Pastoral theology is uniquely suited to the use of Cardinal J. Cardijn's paradigm for developing new models of pastoral care that responds to contemporary social and cultural challenges. Although pastoral theology represents a practical field of theology, it also derives its basis from historical and systemic fields as well. In fact, it cooperates with historical and systemic fields of theology, relying mostly on the normative factors in order to reach its own conclusions. Therefore, the aim of pastoral theology is to create models of redemptory activity addressing the latest socio-cultural demands. According to W. Przygoda "in order to propose models of effective redemptory activity, it is necessary to analyze regularly the dynamic social reality of the Church. This in turn demands using inductive methods. The difficulty to carry out such new research in pastoral theology, also known as practical theology, lies in the appropriate combination of both deductive and inductive methods. In this context, the scientific question of methodological paradigms in pastoral theology is raised."[36] Cardinal J. Cardijn's methodological paradigm will also be applied in this doctoral dissertation. According to this paradigm, the socio-cultural reality should be recognized, then judged in accordance with theological criteria, and, on the basis of these analyses, pastoral conclusions will be drawn regarding the current state of the Church in contemporary society.

Thus, the commencement of the research proceedings in this dissertation is the analysis of the social and cultural situation in which the Catholic Church in the United States conducts its

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[35] Richard R. Osmer. 2008. "Practical Theology A Current International." *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 67(2). In http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts. v67i2.1058, p. 1-7. Princeton Theological Seminary, PO Box 821, Princeton, New Jersey 08540, United States; cf. Richard R. Osmer. 2008. *Practical theology*: *An introduction*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.

[36] Wiesław Przygoda. 2013. "Methodological Paradigms in the Contemporary Pastoral Theology." *Roczniki Pastoralno-Katechetyczne* 60 (6): 33.

salvific activity. There are many reflections and analyses on the four phenomenon of secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and the impact technology as it pertains to modern American society in the spheres of Theology, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology and alike; and this body of academic analysis will be presented throughout this thesis. Historically, Christian leaders and theologians throughout American history have embraced this role of guiding the faithful, forming their nascent nation, and, in times of great social unrest, provided respite and healing. These Christian leaders and theologians, as noted previously, were not separate from the society, but an intrinsic part of it. As such, these leaders and theologians understood the value of this collective wisdom and its impact on secular culture. What has not been done thus far in this field of study is the application of the See-Judge-Act paradigm, as proposed by Cardinal Cardijn, which is the basis for the practical implementation of pastoral strategy. It is important to notice that the use of the paradigm is not just limited to religious life or to better pastoral care, but it is truly meant to enrich pastoral theology, and the pastoral mission of the Church. Utilizing the modalities of Pastoral Theology that includes evaluating, developing, and implementing the pastoral plan for the challenges of modern society and the Catholic Church's pastoral response to the modern social and cultural paradigm, the author intends to create new models of redemptive activity addressing the latest social and cultural demands of secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and technology facing the Catholic Church in the United States. In order to propose such models of effective redemptory activity, the thesis will analyze concurrently the social and cultural dynamic of American Society and the Catholic Church within that society.

The body of literature regarding both the historical context of secularism in the United States, as the separation of Church as State as an embedded protection of religious liberties, and the contemporaneous understanding of the secularization of society is expansive. Both in the context of the social sciences and in theological studies resources related to secularism in American society are comparatively well developed. The concept of secularism in American society has been present since its founding. However, the tendencies towards secularization of the Western culture and society truly took root following the end of World War II. This cultural secularization was initially a gradual and insidious process that lasted several decades. With regard to the discourse related to the direct impact of globalization on the Catholic Church in America, its immediate association less explicit; rather the effects of globalization are best illustrated through its impact on the following issues: Social Justice, the life and dignity of the human person, its impact on the

traditional family and community and participation therein, respect for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers, environmental justice and the impact of religious practices on social stability. The body of literature related to globalization itself does not portray it as a menace to the Catholic Church in the United States, rather the impact on the Church can be illustrated by globalization's impact on the aforementioned issues and through society's response to these issues. This impact can be especially illustrated in the fight for social justice and, through this fight, the destruction of moral traditions, coupled with the rise of consumerism and egoism.

The popular perception of tradition in secular American culture is that it is regarded as outdated and that traditional axioms cannot be applied in modern life. Religion in general and the Catholic faith, in particular, are representations of this moral and cultural tradition. This perception of the Catholic Church as a representation of traditional and therefore outdated ideals has led to the biased attitude toward it in contemporary American society. It is critical for the Catholic Church to alter this image. The Church is often viewed as a reactionary institution that opposes progress in all spheres of human life. This narrative, however, does not reflect a true representation of the involvement of the Catholic Church in the United States, especially in the latter half of the 20th Century to present as an advocate for Social Justice, especially those related to the dignity of life, the rights of workers, respect for the vulnerable and poor and the furtherance of social stability through family life, community and social stability, and as an advocate for scientific advancements for the betterment of human life.

The literature review of secular and theological sources perpetuates the narrative that the Christian faith and contemporary secularism are opposite to each other in many aspects. This perception of opposition is erroneous especially with regard to the Christian perspective on social justice, expression of its stance on issues related to justice and its mission to advance social justice pursuits. Truly the folly of the Catholic Church has been in its failure to articulate where and how it and the secular society of the 21st century can, and presently does, cooperate effectively especially on these issues. The intent of this thesis is to illustrate the opportunities for this cooperation between the secular society and the Catholic Church and the practical solution-oriented ways to realize these opportunities. Implementation of the renewal in pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States and cooperation with the increasingly secularized society of the 21st century is possible. Its clergy understand these changes are necessary, but arduous. As a result, the ways to overcome challenges for the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the 21st

century United States is an urgent field for further research.

Regarding the Catholic Church's position on secularism, globalization, moral relativism, technological advancements and the Catholic social teaching, the main sources that constitute the core of the study reflect the official position of the Vatican. Among these are the documents published by the Holy See and the papal encyclicals, mainly Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis. In addition to these sources, documents published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops represent the American perspective on the teaching articulated by the Vatican, thus representing that this research is applicable to American society and culture. The current thesis concentrates on the questions connected with the Catholic social teaching that interacts with the questions of secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and the development of technologies that influence the lives of contemporary Catholics in the United States. The comparison of the general context that the documents by the Holy See and by Popes features and the context presented in the documents published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops representing the American perspective offers a thorough and multi-dimensional analysis of the current state of the Catholic Church in the United States. Understanding the cultural, social, political, and economic background surrounding the changes in the 21st century United States is vital in elaborating the plan for the pastoral care of the Catholic Church and ultimately its implementation.

The structure of the dissertation follows consistently from the adopted See-Judge-Act methodological paradigm. The Part I of this dissertation will present the Social and Cultural changes of the twenty-first century in the United States. As such, the aim in this part is to diagnose the main phenomena of socio-cultural changes affecting the Christian Life and pastoral ministry of the Church in the USA. Understanding contemporary secularism in American Society requires an understanding of the history of Secularism in the USA and that, in America, secularism holds a uniquely duplicitous nature. Critical to this analysis is an understanding of the modern interpretation of secularism in American society, that is the dominant ideology of atheists, or those people whose religious views are not completely defined, juxtaposed to the historical understanding of secularism in the United States, that is the separation of Church and State which affords protections to its citizenry to practice their religion freely. This part will present secularism in the context of a pluralistic society, including pluralism in the organization of social life (the historical context of secularism, as it pertains to a democratic system, the secular organization of

the state and the promotion of secularism in society). Next, this part will present the cultural pluralism of American society including the world view of pluralism, ideological confusion, secularist ideology, atheism, individualism, feminism, racism, and other topics related to individual rights. A thorough understanding of this atheistic and lay worldview, including idealization of this lifestyle in the mainstream media and individualism that the secular society promotes, is needed to understand the ongoing impact of these views on American society. Additionally, these issues lead to the polarization of American culture, society, and politics, which is evident in the opposition between liberals and progressives versus conservatives and traditionalists. Further, as part of this analysis, examples of urgent threats to current liberties and individual rights, including freedom of speech, expression, and religion in the United States, and the attitudes toward equality and social justice, including the feminist and the anti-racist agenda will be presented.

The next section of Part I will present globalism and its social consequences. Globalization has had a direct impact on the formation of modern American culture. Moreover, globalization influences the religious context in which the Catholic Church functions. As a result of the impact of globalism, religious perspectives and dogmatic principles are challenged. This section further will present the impact of globalization on the contemporary social, cultural, and religious fabric, the deleterious effects of social disintegration, social and economic exclusion, consumerism as a lifestyle, and the causes and manifestations of poverty (including unemployment, immigration, and institutional racism). Following globalism, the next section of Part I will present the relativism of moral beliefs and its practical consequences in society. Specific topics evaluated include moral relativism in the sphere of ethics pertaining to human sexuality (including issues related to LGBTQ+ individuals and the scandals related to the sexual abuse of minors), the effects of moral relativism on marriage and family (such as contraception, abortion, invitro fertilization, divorce, civil partnerships and same sex unions), and relativism in the sphere of order and organization of social life (such as professional ethics, health ethics such as issues related to COVID-19 vaccination, civil law and criminal law issues). This section further examines the impact of relativism of moral beliefs and practical consequences of this relativity of beliefs on the Catholic Church with its waning moral authority in American Society. The impact of moral relativism on marriage, the individual, the family, and society at large must be thoroughly evaluated to understand the impact of this relativism on the Church. Biased topics connected with morality such

as contraception, abortion, the death penalty, issues related to LGBTQ individuals, health and individual choices related to the human sexuality and fertility, and the scandals connected with sex abuse within the Catholic Church must be considered as the congregants within the Church and society at large may hold differing convictions on these topics relative to Church teaching and traditions, and these convictions with individuals may evolve with time. Given the dynamic of moral relativism in individuals and society over time, it is necessary to present these topics both from the perspective of the social sciences and religious studies. Furthermore, the position of the religiously devout person who adheres to the teachings of their faith community on these questions, may be contrary and even antagonistic to an individual with a secularized worldview, or an atheist whose views on morality are completely disparate from the Christian doctrine.

The final section of Part I will present the technological revolution and its impact on religious life, especially as it pertains to American Catholics. This section will present the historical context of the technological revolution in the USA, the use of technology to improve human existence, the use of technology to both humanize and dehumanize, and the dangers arising from the misuse and dependency on technology. Though technological advances have contributed significantly to the physical health and wellbeing of society at large, the technical revolution is fraught with perils as well. For this reason, it is critical to understand the history of the technological revolution in the United States and the potential dangers that the misuse of technologies might pose. Such potential dangers include the humanization of technology and the dehumanization of individuals by technology. As technology advances with the intent to improve the existence of individuals, it may inadvertently contribute to the disconnection of individuals from others. This disconnection concerns theologians and religious people because it is destructive to the sense of community, a central tenet to the Christian perspective. Furthermore, as artificial intelligence advances, this too has the potential to diminish an individual's connection with others, distracting from family, friends, and communities. In addition to the potential hazards posed by technology, there are also compelling reasons to engage with technology's capacity for expansive outreach to the masses. The impact on the Church by such changes imposed by technological advances cannot be understated.

Part II of this dissertation will make a theological assessment of social and cultural changes in the US society in the 21st century in light of the teaching of the Church – prioritizing the Catholic Church in the United States. The author's task in this second part is to interpret and evaluate the

evolving changes in American society upon the teaching of the Catholic Church. Stemming the tide of societal change is not an attainable objective by the Catholic Church nor any other institution; how the Church responds, mitigates, interacts with the impact of these changes is within the purview of the Church. Failure to do so will be to the Church's detriment. The ways in which the Catholic Church faces secularization, globalization, moral relativism and the technological revolution, and the theological evaluation therein of these phenomena, are paramount.

The first section of Part II presents the Church's teaching on secularism and its theological evaluation. This part describes the Church's assessment of the pluralism of the organization of social life, interpretation, and evaluation of the manifestations of cultural pluralism, assessment of the dangers of religious indifferentism, and the positive and negative manifestations of doctrinal discourse in the community of the Catholic Church. The next section of Part II will evaluate the Church's position on the phenomenon of globalization, assessment of the different manifestations of social disintegration, the Church's teaching on social and economic exclusion, the Church's approach to consumerism as a lifestyle and the Church's response to poverty and its causes. This will be followed by an analysis of the Church's teaching on moral relativism and its influence on the religious life of the faithful, including a criticism of moral relativism related to the sphere of ethics of human sexuality, Catholic principles of married life and caring for the stability of the family, and assessment of relativism in the sphere of order and organization of social life.

In the final section of Part II, the author will undertake a theological assessment of the digital revolution and its impact on the religious life of the faithful including the Church's general stance on the digital revolution, assessment of the risks arising from the use and abuse of digital technologies, the Church's guidelines for the positive use of digital technologies and the positive and negative impact of the use of digital technologies in the pastoral ministries of the Church (including improving efficiencies, worship and function of the Church, representation of the Church through the media or other technologies, and the disadvantages therein). Understanding the theological response of the Church, as predicated on Biblical teachings concerning secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and the humanistic impact of technological advancements, that has been presented through papal teachings, the catechism of the Catholic Church, and other Church documents, is critical to analyzing the adequacy of response thus far. Understanding the Church's role in such topics as advocating for social justice, helping the poor and organizing institutional

charity, as well as stewardship of the earth permits analysis of the Church's response thus far. The critique of these Catholic documents permits a comprehensive evaluation of the religious perspective toward the social and cultural changes of the 21st century.

Part III, the final section of the dissertation, will propose a renewal of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States. This proposal will be the result of an analysis of social and cultural changes (Part I) and their theological evaluation (Part II). The author will make specific recommendations and practical propositions for the pastoral practice of the Catholic Church in the United States. This final part's intent is to analyze the content of the first two parts, both the current state of the Social and Cultural changes in the United States and current state of the Church's theological response and synthesize a cohesive and practical pastoral strategy to address these contemporary challenges. Specifically, Part III will evaluate pastoral care through the concern for the deepening and development of religious faith, ways to combat social disintegration, poverty, and social exclusion, provide direction for the renewal of moral formation of the faithful, and use of Christian media and digital education in religious life.

It is not sufficient to merely analyze these contemporary social and cultural changes, nor the Church's past and present stance on this change. The renewal of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States, and its practical application to the present crisis of faith mounted by this contemporary societal change, is necessary to address the decreasing popularity of the Catholic Church among Americans and, by extension, declining affiliation. Both inadequate action and inappropriate actions by the Church may have egregious effects. For this reason, the third part features practical content and applicable responses to this contemporary social and cultural change that is predicated upon the conclusions of previous parts. Furthermore, the focus of Part III on the existing concerns for deepening and development of religious faith allows for problem-oriented solutions to the decline in engagement of the faithful and society-at-large into the discipline of faith-based life. Additionally, through the renewal of pastoral care, effective ways of counteracting social disintegration and social exclusion will be proposed, as well as, through pastoral care, finding directions of renewal of the moral formation of the faithful. Lastly, through the lens of pastoral theology, this thesis will evaluate the current state of Christian media and digital education connected with those Catholics still actively participating in their faith community and the outreach of Catholicism, through these media, to non-practicing Catholics, Christians of other denominations, members of other faith traditions, the religiously non-affiliated

and even atheist.

The Catholic Church must react in a balanced and prompt way to the cultural and social changes of the 21st century in the United States. The phenomenon of secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and rapidly evolving technology are the most significant trends in contemporary society that present drastic pressures on the American Catholic Church. It is the responsibility of the Catholic Church to see the negative manifestations of these phenomena and judge them according to the Christian perspective on morality. The pastoral plan of the Catholic Church must preserve tradition while welcoming positive innovations simultaneously, which is both complicated and necessary in a constantly changing pluralistic society.

I. The Social and Cultural Changes of the Twenty-First Century in the USA

Part I of this dissertation presents the social and cultural changes of the twenty-first century in the United States, following the methodical paradigm, See-Judge-Act, as proposed by Cardinal Cardijn, known by the paradigm as "See". As such, the aim in Part I is to diagnose the main phenomena of socio-cultural changes affecting the Christian Life and pastoral ministry of the Church in the USA. Understanding contemporary secularism in American Society requires an understanding of the history of Secularism in the USA and that, in America, secularism holds a uniquely duplicitous nature. Critical to this analysis is an understanding of the modern interpretation of secularism in American society, that is the dominant ideology of atheists, or those people whose religious views are not completely defined, juxtaposed to the historical understanding of secularism in the United States, that is the separation of Church and State which affords protections to its citizenry to practice their religion freely.

Part I of this dissertation further presents secularism in the context of a pluralistic society, including pluralism in the organization of social life (the historical context of secularism, as it pertains to a democratic system, the secular organization of the state and the promotion of secularism in society). Next, this section presents the cultural pluralism of American society including the world view of pluralism, ideological confusion, secularist ideology, atheism, individualism, feminism, racism, and other topics related to individual rights. A thorough understanding of this atheistic and lay worldview, including idealization of this lifestyle in the mainstream media and individualism that the secular society promotes, is needed to understand the ongoing impact of these views on American society. Additionally, these issues lead to the polarization of American culture, society, and politics, which is evident in the opposition between liberals and progressives versus conservatives and traditionalists. Further, as part of this analysis, examples of urgent threats to current liberties and individual rights, including freedom of speech, expression, and religion in the United States, and the attitudes toward equality and social justice, including the feminist and the anti-racist agenda are presented.

The next section of Part I presents globalism and its social consequences. Globalization

has had a direct impact on the formation of modern American culture. Moreover, globalization influences the religious context in which the Catholic Church functions. As a result of the impact of globalism, religious perspectives and dogmatic principles are challenged. This section further presents the impact of globalization on the contemporary social, cultural, and religious fabric, the deleterious effects of social disintegration, social and economic exclusion, consumerism as a lifestyle, and the causes and manifestations of poverty (including unemployment, immigration, and institutional racism).

Following globalism, the next section of Part I presents the relativism of moral beliefs and its practical consequences in society. Specific topics evaluated include moral relativism in the sphere of ethics pertaining to human sexuality (including issues related to LGBTQ+ individuals and the scandals related to the sexual abuse of minors), the effects of moral relativism on marriage and family (such as contraception, abortion, invitro fertilization, divorce, civil partnerships and same sex unions), and relativism in the sphere of order and organization of social life (such as professional ethics, health ethics such as issues related to COVID-19 vaccination, civil law and criminal law issues). This section further examines the impact of relativism of moral beliefs and practical consequences of this relativity of beliefs on the Catholic Church with its waning moral authority in American Society. The impact of moral relativism on marriage, the individual, the family, and society at large must be thoroughly evaluated to understand the impact of this relativism on the Church. Given the dynamic of moral relativism in individuals and society over time, it is necessary to present these topics both from the perspective of the social sciences and religious studies.

The final section of Part I presents the technological revolution and its impact on religious life, especially as it pertains to American Catholics. This section presents the historical context of the technological revolution in the USA, the use of technology to improve human existence, the use of technology to both humanize and dehumanize, and the dangers arising from the misuse and dependency on technology. Though technological advances have contributed significantly to the physical health and wellbeing of society at large, the technical revolution is fraught with perils as well. For this reason, it is critical to understand the history of the technological revolution in the United States and the potential dangers that the misuse of technologies might pose. As technology advances, with the intent to improve the existence of individuals, it may inadvertently contribute to the disconnection of individuals from others. Furthermore, as artificial intelligence advances,

this too has the potential to diminish an individual's connection with others, distracting from family, friends, and communities.

1. Contemporary Secularism in American Society

Secularism (lat. *saecularis*) is a broad concept that lacks a concise meaning. In social science, secularism is usually understood as "the process of gradual liberation of various sectors of society and culture from the reign of religious institutions and symbols."[37] Secularism, as a social process, limits the influence of religious institutions and religious meaning systems on socio-cultural reality. The inception of secularism's limitations on the influence of religion on culture dates to the Middle Ages. These limitations started in the field of politics and then under the influence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Secularism's influence was gradually extended to other areas of society and culture (i.e., art, philosophy, literature). Later, the industrial revolution and urbanization processes also significantly contributed to the expansion of this phenomenon. The radical aspirations to limit the influence of religion on social life, articulated by various ideologies, resulted in the emergence of secularism (laicization) in addition to a descriptive and neutral understanding of the secularization process, which evolved into a hostile ideology toward all religions. Therefore, in any analysis of the phenomenon of secularism, one should distinguish at least three of its meanings: a) secularism as a social fact, b) secularism as a principle of social life, c) secularism as an ideology. "The process of secularism affects all religions and denominations today, but it is a particular challenge for the Catholic Church, as it means the weakening of institutional forms of piety as well as religious meanings and justifications."[38]

a. Pluralism in the Organization of Social Life

Secularism opposes religious social order and worldview. Secularism presupposes that the country is best governed by secular laws and that religious dogmas should not determine the way people live. In other words, the moral laws from the Sacred Scripture or other religious canon are not regarded as the legal code by which a nation's citizenry should be governed. For instance, a country or nation which adheres to secularism as its guiding legal and political basis would assert

[37] Kazimierz Święs. 2006. „Sekularyzacja", In *Leksykon teologii pastoralnej*, ed. Ryszard Kamiński, Wiesław Przygoda, Marek Fiałkowski (Lublin: Towarzystwo Naukowe KUL): 785.

[38] Ibidem.

that its citizenry is free to choose their faith or, conversely, to elect not to follow any particular religious ideology. A theocracy, conversely, would adhere to a state sponsored and even potentially mandated religion, where the laws are based on the canon of that religion. Researchers claim that the majority of people regard secularism and overall religious liberty as a movement towards progress, which creates a positive perception of political secularism in society.[39] The overall liberalization of society in all spheres including political, economic, and cultural aspects is perceived as the movement from dogmatic tradition towards freedom.

Critical distinction must be made between secularism as guiding legal or political fact connected with the principle of political organization of the country, and the ideology that dominates the cultural discourse. The influence of the Church was limited centuries ago, and it was the beginning of secularism in the political sphere. This transition occurred in Europe, prior to the American Revolution and prior to the establishment of the United States. The Catholic Church had little if any direct influence on the establishment of governance of the United States, nor its founding documents. The modern Catholic Church does not try to impart dominance in the political life of the United States nor its legislation. However, the Catholic Church tries to oppose the ultimate secularization of society in the ideological context. As people lose their moral orientation, secular culture fails to provide them with an ideology that satisfies their spirituality needs. Jose Casanova illustrates this differentiation in the forms of secularism:

> … modern secularism also comes in multiple historical forms, in terms of different normative models of legal-constitutional separation of the secular state and religion, or terms of the different types of cognitive differentiation between science, philosophy, and theology, or in terms of the different models of practical differentiation between law, morality, and religion.[40]

In other words, a secular basis for political and economic life in the United States is not a problem from the Catholic perspective. The Church embraces the ideals of religious liberty; this stance makes it tolerant towards people of all confessions and views. Although the Church embraces protections for the free expression of religion, the Church considers the loss of ideological background as an existential threat to these freedoms within the cultural sphere. Secularism is an effective form of organizing political and economic life within a state, but it deprives people of the spiritual and moral support often provided through faith. Moreover, it

[39] José Casanova. 2009. "The Secular and Secularisms," *Social Research* 76 (4): 1050.
[40] Ibidem, 1050.

creates a new ideology that does not have a moral compass as its base, rather the ethical assumptions for a secularly based culture and society may place the needs and perceived greater good above the needs of the individual, vulnerable or weak, thus contributing to false ethical narrative or even amorality.

Politically, the United States is a secular country, which presupposes that the government is separate from the Church. In a politically secular country, the spheres of government and religious institutions are autonomous and function independently of the other. All people who reside in the United States have the constitutional right to exercise the religion of their choice. The citizenry and residents of the United States are guaranteed the freedom of religious expression and freedom of speech. At its inception, the United States was founded by deeply religious people seeking refuge from state imposed religious hierarchy and the liberty to practice their faith, at times, even more stringently than that of their homeland. Interestingly, the first colonists of America were 'too religious' even for the Christian Old World. McClay described the beginning of American history in the following words:

> Another feature that helped to establish the religious tone of early American history was the curious fact that the Europeans settling British North America were not merely Christians but [rather] the modernizing rebels within the Christian world. [These] Protestant Christian Reformers, whose agendas were various and much conflicted among themselves, had in common a rejection of the standard traditional hierarchy, priestly authority, and traditionalism of Roman Catholicism, and to some extent Anglicanism as well.[41]

It is challenging to find examples of countries in the modern world that are structurally hybrids of theocratic and secular ideologies with the exception being Islamic states. For instance, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan use the Quran, Islam's holy book, as well as the Sunnah and Hadith which are the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, as the source of legislation and basis of their legal system for its citizenry and residents. These states function according to the Sharia law. Sharia additionally acts as the code by which all Muslims should adhere. This code includes instruction on prayers, fasting, and care for the poor. It provides instruction for every aspect of daily life, including family law, criminal justice, finance, and business, in accordance with God's wishes. Interpretation of Islamic law varies from region to region and is influenced by

[41] Wilfred McClay. 2007. "Religion and Secularism: The American Experience," *Pew Forum Faith Angle Conference.* In https://www.pewforum.org/2007/12/03/religion-and-secularism-the-american-experience.

differing cultures and customs and have evolved significantly, in an attempt by these theocracies to codify their legal system. These nuances can vary significantly. [42] Judgements rendered by Sharia law are viewed as a form of casuistry. In the most ardent regimes, the punishments can be harsh and especially imbalanced as it pertains to the treatment of women, which drives most Western human rights activists to oppose this traditional political regime. From the Western perspective, where liberal secular ideologies prevail, these non-secular states are viewed as authoritarian and are charged with depriving their citizens of basic human rights. From the perspective of the individual who lives in the 21st century, the religious law is too radical, extremist, and does not correspond to modern reality.

The very essence of the origin of the United States was the quest for liberty. The history of the United States and its fight for liberty shaped the attitude of its people, regarding the questions of religious freedom. It is crucial to remember that America was the destination for Christians who yearned for religious freedom that they could not find in Europe; and the first settlers were pious people. This ardent fervor for religious traditions was the predominant disposition of most Americans until the middle of the 20th century. Even now, American society is considerably more religious than the societies in Western European countries. Indeed, for centuries political secularism coexisted with a thriving religious culture in the United States. This symbiotic relationship was, in many ways, mutualistic—both political secularism and religious culture mutually flourished. This harmonious coexistence determined the attitudes of generations of Americans. In general, the United States managed to reconcile modernistic views with the traditionalist religious worldview in the 19th and 20th centuries when society remained predominantly Christian.

Secularism and the popular global impression of American culture are viewed as synonymous. The prevailing impression is that secular society embodies the vision of democracy--freedom of speech and self-expression, individualism, and the opportunity to develop their inclinations. As previously noted, secularism means democracy in the United States, and religious worldview is considered a supplementary characteristic that a person can have. This secular culture is reflected in popular art, including movies, TV series, books, songs, social media trends, and in

[42] Joshua Paul. (2021 Aug 19). "What is Sharia law? What does it mean for women in Afghanistan?" *BBC News*. BBC.com. Retrieved Jan 17, 2022.

the overall cultural agenda. An example of the dominance of this secular culture and the advantage of free self-expression occurred with the social media phenomenon related to the flash mob #MeToo movement related to the feminist reaction to sexual abuse. This social media movement dominated secular culture. In support of the movement, people who were the victims of sexual abuse disclosed their stories in social media accounts, highlighting the ubiquitous nature of this abuse within modern American culture and the urgent need to both address and solve it.[43]

At the same time, not all trends in secular culture are positive. For instance, popular culture promotes the ideas of individualism and consumerism. Consumerism extols the value of trying to achieve a luxurious lifestyle. This lifestyle is regarded as the paramount of human existence, which completely subverts any spiritual meaning to life. Similarly, individualism lauds the fortitude and advantages of the fiercely independent. Secular society promotes the idea that relationships can be abusive, and thus they can ruin the psyche of the person. Self-reliance and engagement only in encounters deemed to be healthy relationships with perceived benefits to the individual becomes the ideal. This individualism is viewed as being a positive attribute in secular society. [44] From another perspective, this stanch individualism may have an isolating and therefore harmful effect. Impacting the unfounded doubts into the nature of interpersonal relationships is often the amount of information about abuse in relationships. This body of information is enormous on the Internet and may instill doubt for individuals on their need for relationships and even family. If having a family is perceived as difficult and potentiates an individual's risk for psychological and physical abuse, then avoiding these encounters may be seen as preferred. Unfortunately, isolation as a means of avoiding confrontation is destructive. Humans, by their nature, are social animals. Cooperation, communication, conflict and its resolution, and intimacy with others contributes to the healthy development of individuals—individualism, in this regard, is self-destructive and contrary to stated objective.

In a purely secular society, individualism is idealized. A secular person is focused on their own needs, desires, and freedoms. The assertion that every person is expected to make choices and be responsible for these choices is one of the main concepts in secularism. It is assumed that the individual can choose the place to live and work, the family with which they participate, their

[43] Andrew Copson. 2017. *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom,* (Oxford: University Press): 20.
[44] Ibidem, 23.

health state, and the ideals they wish to pursue. Secular society encourages individuals to feel empowered and to develop one's own talents and inclinations. The secular perspective supposes that the only constraint in decision-making is the law. If something does not infringe the rights of other people and the law of the country, then it is permissible. The idea that every person must make choices and be responsible for these choices is one of the main concepts in secularism, and one of the driving ideologies of American Society. This is illustrated by Ronald Dworkin, New York University Law professor:

> Each of us, every human being every place has, a personable inalienable responsibility to decide for ourselves what success in living consists in, what would be a good or appropriate live for us…Government comprises or infringes your freedom whenever it prevents you from doing something that you want to do or indeed might want to do…Liberty is the power to do what the government has no right to stop us from doing…Liberty is not constrained when the government has an adequate distributive reason for limiting freedom.[45]

The idea of the secular state postulates that the government remains neutral in the questions of faith and choice of religion. The secular state does not prioritize one religion over another, which permits the country to preserve its democratic structure as there are no privileged and oppressed groups, based on beliefs, within the society. Such questions as the religious affiliation of the person, their beliefs, or the absence thereof, are unimportant in social and economic relationships. In the secular organization of the state, faith is segregated to the personal sphere of individuals and the state cannot intervene in this sphere.

It is acceptable for people in the secular state not to live according to a religious tradition, and they are not persecuted for it. The researchers used the following statistics to illustrate the current social trends in secular American society:

> The ARIS 2008 findings showed that half of U.S. households did not currently belong to a religious congregation and on the average Sunday 73% of Americans did not go to Church. While 27% of Americans did not anticipate a religious funeral, 30% of Americans did not believe in a personal biblical style of God. And more recent surveys have confirmed these data and trends so we may be at an important tipping point in U. S. history. The evidence demonstrates that the Zeitgeist, if not

[45] Ronald Dworkin. (19 Apr 2006). Lecture at University of Virginia School of Law. Retrieved from Elizabeth Katz (2006) "Dworkin Explores Secular, Religious Models for Society." *University of Virginia, School of Law.* Law.virginia.edu. Retrieved October Nov 10, 2022.

the Force, is with the secular and secularizing "None's" and this development makes the analysis and study of secularism per se of major relevance for American social science.[46]

In other words, 21st century America is ideologically secular, and being a secularist is the dominant trend for its citizens. Although secularism does not necessarily portend atheism, it still does not promote a religious worldview, relegating faith to merely a personal choice. From one point of view, this tendency has a positive impact on the democratic development of the state because people of all denominations and views have equal status and opportunities. Though, from another point of view, secularism supposes remaining silent about religious matters. It leads to the gradual loss of authority of religion and to the change of the cultural tradition, which may impart negative consequences in the spheres of morality, ethics, and human relationships.

There are secularist organizations that regulate this ideological sphere. Among them are American Atheists, Freedom from Religion Foundation, Council for Secular Humanism, and the American Humanist Association. They have worked for decades in the United States, and they guard the separation of the state and the Church. These organizations started their activity in the 1960s, and as a result, a great number of the "baby boomers" generation became atheists and secularists. [47] The beginning of the work of these secular organizations were the impetus for radical change in American society and denoted its shift from religiosity to secularism.

b. Cultural Pluralism in American Society

The number of adult Americans who consider themselves Christian has declined significantly over the past few decades, and with this decline, an increase of religiously unaffiliated, including atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" has occurred. This constant change in the American religious landscape is a manifestation of cultural pluralism across the United States. Beyond the change in religious landscape, the United States continues to experience further integration of ethnic and cultural pluralism. Although the Catholic population in the United States is the single largest denomination, this cultural shift presents pressures on the American Catholic Church. The need and calls for change within the American Catholic Church are impacted by socio-cultural, moral, and political changes. This is an expression of both internal crises and of the growing

[46] Ryan T. Cragun, Christel Manning, and Lori L. Fazzino. 2017. *Organized Secularism in the United States. New Directions in Research.* (Berlin: De Gruyter): 301.
[47] Ibidem, 303.

ideology of secularism. The enormous liberalization and secularization of American society continues to impact the life of the Church.[48] The image of the Church, the political awareness of Catholics, and their sense of responsibility for the nation impacts the dynamic between the faithful and the Church. Patriotism is a fundamental aspect of American Life. The largely two-party system within the United States, Democrats and Republicans, divides Americans as well. Democrats generally represent the political left or liberal ideology, while Republicans represent the political right or conservative ideology. Catholics are roughly split on their political affiliations. According to polls, 47% of Catholics identify politically as Democrats; 46% are Republicans; 7% are not affiliated according to Pew.[49] Neither party aligns with Catholic beliefs. While Republicans are generally aligned with the Pro-life movement as it pertains to abortion, this party also aligns with strong support for individual gun ownership and the death penalty. While the Democrat party aligns with social justice and immigrant rights, their platform supports little to no restrictions on abortion and reproductive technologies.

Regardless of the perceived differences related to political ideology, the majority of Americans, 58%, agree that democracy in the United States is working well. Republicans have a more positive view of American democracy. 72% are satisfied with American democracy, while 48% of democrats feel that this form of democracy works well for them. More Democrats than Republicans desire a change to the structure of American government, by a ratio of 2 to 1, 68% to 31%, whereas Republicans are more evenly split on the need for change. Americans with both political affiliations support the right to free and peaceful protests, as protected by the American Constitution.[50]

The American perspective of secularism is duplicitous. This dual nature is illustrated especially in how contemporary American culture is perceived by other nations. This assertion becomes especially evident when considering the Christian history of the United States and contrasting this with the popularization of secularism in modern society. American culture is synonymous with secular culture for people from other countries. The United States is the

[48] "America's Changing Religious Landscape. (2015 May 12)." *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 2, 2022.

[49] Gregory A. Smith et al. 2019. "In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace," *Pew Research Center.* https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/ Retrieved October 2, 2022.

[50] Pew Research Center. (2018 April 26). "The Public, the Political System and American Democracy." Pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 10, 2022.

trendsetter of secular ideals that are often opposite to the religious worldview. Due to globalist tendencies of contemporary society, the American secular culture propagates globally. Globally, people associate the United States with freedom of expression and liberalism. In other words, the secular individual is perceived to be the typical American. Ironically, this perception might not correspond to reality given there is a greater number of religiously affiliated people in the United States than in the Western European countries especially that hold this perception.

Throughout history, the United States was a predominantly and often fervently religious country. European Christians denominations who were outcasts or persecuted for their beliefs in the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries immigrated to the United States. These immigrants chose it as their destination with the promise that the United States would afford them the liberty to express their religious views more freely and openly. The first colonists tried to build exclusively Christian communities in America. Moreover, new Christian denominations and perspectives on the Christian faith appeared in the United States during the centuries since its inception; this demonstrates that American society has been inquisitive about questions of faith throughout its history. With the expansion of Christian professions, the United States has experienced an expansion of other, non-Christian faiths especially as immigration increased from non-Christian majority countries over the last century.

The historical narrative of the United States is opposite to the contemporary reality that Americans are a nation of non-believers, as Baker and Smith wrote.[51] During the Cold War, Americans emphasized faith and freedom of religious expression to differentiate the United States from the Communist ideology of the Soviet Union that was comparatively atheistic. The attitude toward God and Church had become the basis of the ideological rivalry between the two countries. Simultaneously, American society was far from living according to Christian ethics. DuBois addressed racial inequality as one of the urgent problems in the United States during the Cold War, as an example of practical disregard of Christianity. From the Christian perspective, all people are equal, but the country that promotes faith as the basis of its morality largely considers African Americans as subordinate to White Americans.[52] Americans created an image of the religious nation that they used in international politics, but in practice, the domestic policy of the United

[51] Joseph O. Baker, Buster G. Smith. 2015. *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems* (New York: New York University Press): 5.
[52] Ibidem, 10-11.

States was far from the dogmas of faith about equality and compassion.

Three main principles of secularism are that the Church should be separate from the state, all citizens should have the guaranteed freedom of religious expression, and there should be no discrimination based on faith. Adhering to such an ideology should be desirable. As a result, people in a secular society may attain a covetable life because there will be no restrictions on personal freedom, and they should enjoy a greater number of opportunities for self-expression and realization of their potential.[53]

Most people in the Western world support the idea of separation of the Church from the state. This separation is manifested in the overt absence of clergy interference in the affairs of the government and furthered by the lack of the Church's influence in the political decisions of the country. The separation of the Church and state is a primary characteristic of a democratic society. A critical component of the modern understanding of secularism is the professed equality for every citizen. This equality guarantees that citizens have equal rights that are prescribed by the laws of the country. Religion does not propose civil regulations. This lack of civil regulations presents a challenge for governments to codify religious beliefs into law and further impedes building a democratic society based on religious documents. Moreover, secularism presupposes freedom of religious expression, which means that it does not oppose faith.[54] Secularism simply dissociates nonreligious political, economic, and cultural life in society from the dogmatic principles of religion.

Secularism opposes the religious worldview, claiming that religion is based on faith that has no rational proof as its basis. As a result, secularists regard science as the only acceptable proof of theories and ideas, while religious sources such as the Holy Scripture are regarded as fabricated stories about implausible miracles that cannot reasonably happen, by scientific standards. The religious worldview is synonymous with the primitive perspective wrought with fallacies for secularists; some even profess Jesus Christ as fictional, despite historical evidence that Jesus indeed was a real person who lived and preached. Secularists, who are atheists, usually disregard these appeals to logic in argumentation.[55]

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[53] Jocelyn MacLure, Charles Taylor, Jane Marie Todd. 2011. *Secularism and Freedom of Conscience,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press): 28.
[54] Ibidem, 27.
[55] Hugh Montefiore. 1990. *Reclaiming the High Ground: A Christian Response to Secularism* (Palgrave Macmillan

Another critical detail is that secularism and atheism satisfy the needs of modern people who live in industrialized societies. The Christian faith, in its turn, focuses more on spirituality and traditional lifestyle that has changed dramatically during the last decades. It is difficult to promote traditional gender roles in a society where most of the women work and people hesitate to start families and have children because of economic or social constraints. Economic concerns influence cultural discourse, and secularism corresponds to the needs of many people better than the religious worldview.[56] In other words, it is easier and more convenient for a person to be an atheist and to be part of the secular culture than being grounded in religious values that help to govern their lives.

Perez and Vallières wrote that there are many Christians who decide to become atheists and embrace secularism in all its representations. All respondents who participated in this survey reported that their de-conversion from faith was a long and gradual process. Their views started to change predominantly because their lives were far from the religious way of thinking. For example, the religious pattern in life supposes that the couple marries early, does not divorce, and has many children. Adhering to this lifestyle is a challenging task in modern Western society because all these life patterns require economic stability.[57] People become professionals who receive enough money to support the family when they are comparatively old, according to the Biblical perception. It is difficult to find 18-year-old parents who can provide their children adequate socioeconomic stability in the United States. As a result, individuals in a developed industrialized society find it easier to transition to secularism.

The ultimate embrace of atheism and secularism by individuals is often the result of conflict between the religious worldview and ethically biased topics, including the rights of the LGBTQ community, gender inequality and gender roles, the attitude towards sexual expression and activity, and abortion.[58] The religious worldview is dramatically different from the tendencies in contemporary American culture, which makes it impossible to reconcile these two perspectives. As a result, people often must choose their position radically, and it is easier to choose atheism

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UK): 9.

[56] Joseph O. Baker, Buster G. Smith. 2015. *American Secularism: Cultural Contours of Nonreligious Belief Systems* (New York: New York University Press): 34.

[57] Sergio Perez, Frederique Vallières. 2019. "How Do Religious People Become Atheists? Applying a Grounded Theory Approach to Propose a Model of Deconversion," *Secularism and Nonreligion 8.* https://www.secularismandnonreligion.org/articles/10.5334/snr.108/ Retrieved February 21, 2022.

[58] Ibidem.

and secularism rather than conform ideologically to the traditional morality held by the religious world view.

The Catholic Church has faced challenges to its image from the liberal public media. The secularized culture, in its turn, is idealized in mainstream media, which influences the attitude of people to both the religious and to the secular way of life. In the majority of cases, there is no mention of the benevolent activities of the Catholic Church in the popular media. When American journalists mention the Catholic Church, the stories usually revolve around scandals connected with fraud or clerical sexual abuse of minors. Years of prolific servitude by the Church in all American states are usually disregarded. The image that remains is that of an abusive religious institution that society does not need.[59]

The image of the Catholic Church portrayed in the popular media is often negative and therefore, this image is also a catalyst driving people toward the secularist view of the world. The question of whether the Catholic Church needs promotion is biased. From one point of view, it seems outlandish to promote something that does not require advertising, like Christianity. The religious tradition proved its wisdom and spiritual value centuries ago. From another point of view, secularism receives much promotion in modern society. This overbearing promotion quells traditional views and attracts more people to it.

At the same time, secularists' individualistic ideology differentiates them from those who hold a religious ideology, especially Christian based for which an altruistic ideology, especially for the weak and downtrodden, is paramount. Research demonstrates that traditionally, the bulk of secular organizations are composed of middle-aged or older white males and young people from urban areas. Younger families, older women, African Americans, and people from rural areas more commonly are members of religious communities. It is possible to assume that religious people seek the community, while secularists seek personal freedom. Therefore, individualism is the main characteristic of secularism.[60]

A secular person emphasizes the importance of democratic principles, humanistic virtues, and ethical values as priorities. At the same time, these characteristics should not be construed as

[59] Hugh Montefiore. 1990. *Reclaiming the High Ground: A Christian Response to Secularism* (Palgrave Macmillan UK): 9-10.
[60] Ryan T. Cragun, Christel Manning, Lori L. Fazzino. 2017. *Organized Secularism in the United States New Directions in Research* (Berlin: De Gruyter): 309.

religious in their character simply because one can also find humanism and ethical values in the Christian faith. The compulsion to adhere to these principles in secularism is based solely on the perceived greater good for society. Some scholars claim that the secular position is anti-religious by its essence, and this opposition is the conscious choice of secularists.[61] This anti-religious position allows researchers to infer parallels between secularism and atheism, although this connection is not obligatory.

The modern secular person is portrayed as individualistic in popular media. Modern popular culture emphasizes the importance of focusing on personal development and delving deeply into one's own personal feelings. Self-improvement, physically and emotionally, becomes the goal of human existence instead of these endeavors being the means of achieving some greater goal. Egoism and satisfaction of one's own desires are regarded as the primary drivers of modern secular culture. These principles are inconsistent with Christian doctrine that considers altruism and pursuing the mission to be more important than the satisfaction of selfish desires. Although secularism focuses on morality, ethics, and humanism, in theory, these questions are rarely discussed in practice. As a result, many young people do not receive adequate moral upbringing in the secular culture, which propagates this individualistic discourse.

Opposition is evident between the secular culture and the religious worldview, and this opposition becomes an ideological conflict for many people. This ideological conflict is especially urgent for young people who doubt whether the basic principles of faith are consistent with life in the modern secular society. They often regard religious laws as artificial restrictions that do not allow them to live as their peers. Spiritual needs that faith in God satisfies are substituted by consumerism and escapism that the secular society promotes. This discourse is especially popular among the younger generation because they struggle with the distinction between moral and corrupt due to the lack of experience and lack of wisdom. Further, secular pleasures seem to give them more positive and immediate gratifications than spiritual pursuits.

This ease and immediate gratifications, through secular pursuits, makes the popularity of the secular worldview logical. Spitzer writes in the report for the United States Conference for Catholic Bishops that the number of young Catholics is gradually decreasing; 49% of young people

[61] Ibidem, 194.

who were raised in Catholic families report that they are atheists in adulthood.[62] These statistics show that even those people who received a Christian upbringing cannot controvert the temptation of a secular lifestyle. This generation was exposed to ideological confusion when they were young and, because of this ideological confusion, often decided that secularism corresponds to their needs better than religious affiliation. It is imperative, therefore, that the Catholic Church stem the tide of the popularization of secular ideology and take steps towards popularization of the Christian faith in contemporary secular society through media familiar to youth.

The preceding several decades of active secularization of Western society has led to the polarization of communities within society. People who belong to different ideological groups often express disdain for each other. This disdain may escalate to animus and even intensify to the point of violence. Evil actions become ubiquitous. As it is said in Genesis 2:16-17: "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'" It is possible to conclude that secularism is not merely a benign ideology of indifference, rather it has profound and significant impediments that most people underestimate, as 20th century history demonstrates.

Feminism is the ideological, political, and social movement that focuses on the equality of genders. It is one of the most popular current trends in social justice that the American secular culture promotes. From the feminist perspective, society is dominated by males, and females' voices are underrepresented in all spheres of life. Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are significant societal problems that do not permit all of American society to achieve gender justice.[63] An example of this gender stereotype, from the traditionalist perspective, would be to assume that men are naturally better leaders because they are predisposed to stay focused on professional goals, while females are less capable because, by their nature, they are more emotional and therefore impaired from being capable and competent in leaders.

Moreover, there is an ongoing discussion about the notion of femininity that the traditionalist culture promotes. From the traditionalist's perspective, a woman should have a mild

[62] Robert J. Spitzer. 2019. "Confronting Secularism Today." *United States Conference for Catholic Bishops.* In https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/enlisting-witnesses/confronting-secularism-today. Retrieved March 1, 2022.
[63] Andrew Copson. 2017. *Secularism: Politics, Religion, and Freedom,* (Oxford: University Press): 48.

character, she should be oriented on establishing good relationships with other people, she should be beautiful, get married, and bear and rear children. All these assumptions are opposed by feminist activists who claim that traditional gender roles cannot be applied to the modern American reality. For example, the claims that women should be beautiful are supported by the popularization of non-realistic photos of models as standards of beauty. Opposing gender stereotypes is also connected with the promotion of non-traditional sexual orientation and gender identification. This discussion is connected with the idea that gender is a notion that society and culture imposes on people. Individuals are not born with a particular gender, instead they "do gender," which implies that the concept of gender is superficial.[64]

At the same time, feminism promotes concepts that can be measured objectively. For instance, feminism aims at ensuring equal pay for the same job performed by men and women. Statistically, women often receive less money for the same activities compared to men. This inequality augments financial disparities between the genders. Moreover, feminism has become synonymous with the fight for the reproductive rights of women. Feminism asserts that unintended pregnancies pose significant public health risks and further denigrates the status of women. For these reasons' feminism adduces women's right to abortion as a means of liberation and gender equality. As noted by feminist Stella Creasy, "Feminism is not about women, it is about power imbalances."[65]

According to Pew Research, 61% of American women describe themselves as feminist; 19% are described as 'very' and 42% as 'somewhat' or 'well' associated with being a feminist. When considering feminism by age group, women ages 50 to 64 are least likely to describe themselves as 'very' well associated with being a feminist (12%) while 27% of women ages 18 to 29 consider themselves to be strongly associated with the feminist ideology. Additionally, this association with feminism is associated both with education level and political affiliation. Seventy-two percent of women with a bachelor's degree consider themselves feminist compared to 56% of women with less education. Seventy-five percent of liberal or Democrat affiliated women consider

[64] Ranjoo S. Herr. 2014. "Reclaiming Third World Feminism: or Why Transnational Feminism Needs Third World Feminism." *Meridians 12* (1): 1-2. Retrieved March 1, 2022.
[65] Stella Creasy. (8 Mar 2012) "Feminism is not about Women, it is about Power imbalances." *The New Statesmen.* newstatesman.com. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.

themselves feminist, compared to only 42% of conservative or Republican affiliated women.[66]

Racism remains one of the most urgent social problems that American society endures; a problem that has persisted since its inception. Human rights activists regularly discuss the recent movement "Black Lives Matter" and the overall concerns connected with institutional racism in the United States. The Catholic Church also supports racial equality, which fully corresponds to Christian doctrine. From the beginning of American history, the Catholic Church tried to promote the Christian faith of people from other nations. Christian theologians, starting from St. Augustine, wrote about equality of all nations in the eyes of God, as this equality is described in the Holy Scripture.[67] At the same time, regardless of the theological justification of racial equality and unacceptability of racial segregation, slavery and the subsequent segregation of African Americans was an acceptable attribute in secular American society prior to the American Civil War, and the latter until the 1960s.

There is no justification for segregation or racism based on racial background in the Catholic Church; opposition to segregation and racism fully corresponds to Christian doctrine. According to estimates, approximately 25% of the faithful in the Catholic Church are black. Latin America is also predominantly Catholic.[68] This diversity amongst the faithful exemplifies how the Catholic Church embodies the call to equality; all are considered equal in the eyes of the Church. Regarding specifically the question of race in American secular society, especially as it pertains to African Americans and Latin Americans, these groups belong to the categories of socially vulnerable ethnic minorities and, for this reason, the Catholic Church is called to advocate for them.

Many Catholic clergymen and members of the Church have participated in the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Participation in this movement by Catholic clergy and other members of the Church is perceived as an opportunity to improve the situation in the society, to contribute to the formation of a more equal community, and to fulfill their Christian mission. Williams writes about the participation of the Catholic Church in this movement:

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[66] Amanda Barroso. (7 Jul 2020). "61% of US women say 'feminist' describes them well; many see feminism as empowering, polarizing." *Pew Research Center.* Preresearch.org. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.
[67] Gary B. Agee. 2015. "Racial Equality, Catholicism, and the Third Colored Catholic Congress." *Pennsylvania Legacies* 15(2): 21.
[68] Shannen Dee Williams. 2015. "The Global Catholic Church and the Radical Possibilities of #Black Lives Matter," *Journal of Africana Religions* 3(4): 503.

> Although the tenets of "Black Lives Matter" align perfectly with Catholic social teaching, much of the church remains unmoved by the escalating rates of police militarization and state and vigilante violence against Black communities throughout the world. It remains to be seen whether the church will be one of the movement's biggest supporters or one of its foes. Indeed, embracing "Black Lives Matter" will require the church to come to terms with its enduring investments in European and White supremacy.[69]

These concerns show that the Catholic Church promotes tolerance of people regardless of their racial background, which makes the Church's integration into secular culture attainable. It is possible to hypothesize that the biased attitude of the secular society and atheists toward the Catholic Church is the consequence of a lack of adequate illumination of its longstanding position on racial justice and similar social justice issues. The majority of Americans are ignorant of the historical positions and works of the Catholic Church and its attitude toward slavery in the United States; they rarely see biographies of civil rights activists who were often Catholics. Realistically, the Catholic Church in the early decades of the American republic was as divided on the issue of slavery as America was itself. The Church in the northern states was a church of the immigrants and the downtrodden. It also was a missionary church to the native peoples of the Americas. The Catholic Church in the southern American states reflected the southern society of that time. In fact, the Jesuits in the southern American states owned enslaved peoples. By 1838, they owned approximately 300 men, women, and children. Modern day Jesuits acknowledge this past, offer remorse for the actions of their order, and vow to raise millions to benefit the descendants of those once enslaved and to promote racial healing initiatives across the nation.[70] The journalistic narrative in modern secular American society focuses on this checkered past, rather than the historical context. The present narrative fails to tell the stories of clergy like Edmundite Fr Maurice Ouellet, pastor of St. Elizabeth's African-American mission in Selma, Mississippi. Fr. Ouellet was the first white Selma resident to openly support justice for African-Americans, and he was a friend to Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. He and more than 900 clergy, religious, and lay Catholics walked in solidarity with Reverend King in Selma, MS in 1965 and in many marches to follow.[71] This vocal and visible support for racial justice remains in the present day "Black Lives Matter"

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[69] Ibidem, 510.
[70] Rachel L. Swarns. (2021 Mar 16). "My research into the history of Catholic slaveholding transformed my understanding of my Church." *The New York Times*. nytimes.com. Retrieved Feb. 2, 2022.
[71] Paul Murray. (2015 Mar 7). "54 Miles to freedom: Catholics were prominent in the 1965 Selma March." *National Catholic Register.* In ncronline.org. Retrieved February 3, 2022.

movement. The current narrative also overlooks the Church's actions over the past century in the United States, in which She has been an advocate and ally of civil rights and racial justice. Popularization of knowledge about the historical position of the Catholic Church on racial equality, its active and ongoing participation in racial equality and its commitment to acknowledge and heal past wounds might improve the spiritual authority of the Church in the predominantly secular popular culture in the United States.

Equality is the key value in American secular culture that is guaranteed by law. The Constitution of the United States establishes the benchmark of equality for all laws in the United States. The American Constitution and the Bill of Rights delineates the requirement that laws are the same for all American citizens and residents of the country ensuring, at least in the eyes of the law, that everyone is equal. This idea allows the government to preserve stability and peace, and to protect the rights of every person, which is essential in a diverse society. Regardless of ideology, those who profess religious beliefs, agnostics and atheists recognize humans are imperfect. It is therefore not practically justified to assume that all members of society will adhere to high moral standards by their own volition. In every society there will be criminals and those who infringe others' rights. The guiding premise of equality in American law is the basis of social order. This equality not only applies to the rendering of judgements justly, when members of society infringe on the rights of others, it also ensures all Americans have equal rights, which means that there is no discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, health status, etc. This adherence to the principle of equality allows the United States to achieve social justice.

c. Religious Indifferentism

Secular identity is closely connected with religious indifferentism because this notion supposes that all ideologies and religions have equal value and none of them is superior. With secularism, religious indifferentism equates agnostic, pantheistic, and atheistic ideologies, to other religions. There are several types of religious indifferentism, including liberal (latitudinarian), absolute, and restricted indifferentism. These concepts were initially discussed in the work by Pope Gregory XVI. The critical detail is that indifferentism is not synonymous to complete religious indifference because the major component of this theory is equal respect for all views that people

might have.[72]

Many in Catholicism attribute indifferentism to the belief that no one religion or philosophy is superior to another.

> The Catholic Church ascribes indifferentism to many atheistic, materialistic, pantheistic, and agnostic philosophies…Religious Indifferentism is to be distinguished from political indifferentism, which is applied to the policy of a state that treats all the religions within its borders as being on an equal footing before the law of the country. Indifferentism is not to be confounded with religious indifference. The former is primarily a theory disparaging the value of religion; the latter term designates the conduct of those who, whether they do or do not believe in the necessity and utility of religion, do in fact neglect to fulfill its duties.[73]

A secular person is nonreligious, but this characteristic should not be interpreted as a negative attribute for faithful people. This reserved and respectful attitude is an example of religious indifferentism, according to Catholic doctrine. This characteristic is the primary attribute that unites secularists and makes them different from the religious community. Despite this common characteristic, there is no single way in which people become indifferent to religion. Some of them were not exposed to religion in their lives and were brought up in secular families and environments. Other people felt dissatisfied with religion and subsequently lost their faith in God. The reasons that lead to this disillusionment with faith may be different; it may even start with an identity crisis and end with the traumatic experience connected with faith.[74]

Most Americans profess a religious preference, and this remains predominantly Christian, though that percentage continues to decline. Furthermore, a smaller percentage of Americans identify that religion is "very important to them," that they belong to a church or that they regularly attend religious services. Seven percent of Americans identify with non-Christian religions, including 2% who are Jewish, 1% Muslim and 1% Buddhist. Still 49% of Americans state religion is very important to them, while 27% state it is fairly important and 25% state it is "not very important." In 1965, when Gallup first asked this question, 70% stated religion was very

[72] John Coleman. 2006. "The Achievement of Religious Freedom," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 24(1): 21-22.
[73] The Spiritual Life. (n.d.) "Indifferentism." Slife.org. Retrieved October 9, 2022.
[74] Ryan T. Cragun, Christel Manning, Lori L. Fazzino. 2017. *Organized Secularism in the United States. New Directions in Research* (Berlin: De Gruyter): 93.

important, that fell to 52% in 1978 and, interestingly, increased to 60% between 1990 to 2005.[75] This demonstrates that it is possible, within the American psyche, to collectively return to their religious roots.

Freedom of speech, religion, and self-expression are among priorities in American secular culture. These rights are described not just guaranteed as part of the Bill of Rights in the American Constitution, they are delineated in the very first amendment. All citizens are informed about these rights early in their primary school education. It is possible to hypothesize that this public awareness about freedom of speech, expression, and religion is the direct consequence of the long-term popularization of secular culture. It supposes that every American has the right to choose religion, or to be an atheist, because faith is the personal preference that does not infringe other people's rights. As a result, there are many churches in the United States, and all of them have the right to promote their vision, without governmental interference. This freedom from government interference was again affirmed by the US Supreme court in the case "Trustees of the New Life in Christ Church v. City of Fredericksburg" which involved a denial by the city officials to allow the church to use their tax exemption for property utilized by their youth ministers. The Supreme Court Justice, Neil Gorsuch, clearly warned the government officials that they do not have the ability to define genuine religious beliefs, nor to subject this or any other church to verification of their beliefs. Justice Gorsuch reiterated that the Constitution protects religious institutions from being manipulated by government officials stating, "In this country, we would not subscribe to the 'arrogant pretension' that secular officials may serve as 'competent Judge[s] of Religious truth.'"[76]

This freedom of religion and self-expression leads to situations that God fearing individuals may find duplicitous and even deplorable, including the existence of religious organizations whose activity is destructive, like the Church of Satan that Anton Szandor LaVey founded in 1966.[77] This religious organization is an example of the counterculture that is morally acceptable in a secular society with freedom of self-expression, speech, and religion. Though, it is also an example of radicalism and heresy from the perspective of the Christian Church. Moreover, most people who

[75] Jeffery M. Jones. (2021 Dec 23). "How Religious Are Americans?" *Gallup*. In www.news.gallup.com. Retrieved October 9, 2022.
[76] Michael Lee. (2022 Jan 18). "Gorsuch writes scathing dissent in the church tax case, saying religious beliefs are not subject to 'Verification'." *Fox News.* Retrieved from Foxnews.com. Jan 18, 2022.
[77] Blanche Barton. 1990. *The Church of Satan: A History of the World's Most Notorious Religion,* (New York: Hell's Kitchen Productions): 14.

regard themselves as atheists might agree that worshiping evil is reprehensible as well.

The Christian doctrine contains wisdom that people regarded as the saving power for many centuries. It makes ignoring faith and religious doctrine in the cultural discourse a strange consequence of secularism that has gradually become aggressively atheistic. The example of the atheist communist society that the Soviet Union built in the historical example proves the negative impact of militant secularism and atheism.[78] Religion can shed light on the questions that science and secular morality cannot answer, including the meaning of life and the origins of the universe. Moreover, faith provides people with spiritual support that psychologists cannot give them because, through spirituality, the person looks introspectively for the source of inspiration within their own heart. Without spiritual support, through faith, this deep introspection often cannot be attained.

> On balance, US adults have a favorable view about the role religious institutions play in American Life more broadly—beyond politics. More than half of the public believes that churches and religious organizations do more good than harm in American society, while just one-in-five Americans say religious organizations do more harm than good. Likewise, there are far more US adults who say that religious organizations strengthen morality in society and mostly bring people together than there are who say that religious organizations weaken morality and mostly push people apart…Roughly four-in-ten US adults—including a majority of Christians—lament what they perceive as religion's declining influence on American society, while fewer than two-in-ten say that they think religion losing influence in American life and that this is a good thing. In addition, roughly two-thirds of the public believes that religious leaders in general have high or very high ethical standards, and a larger share of Americans who attend religious services at least a few times a year say this about their clergy and their own congregations. Among these US adults…majorities express at least "some" confidence in their clergy to provide useful guidance not only on clearly religious topics (such as how to interpret scripture) but also on other matters such as parenting and personal finance.[79]

Unquestionably, times of great societal stress creates a yearning for connection with religion and answers beyond humanity's understanding. Unfortunately, these same events can,

[78] Hugh Montefiore. 1990. *Reclaiming the High Ground: A Christian Response to Secularism* (Palgrave Macmillan UK): 8.
[79] Pew Research Center. (15 Nov 2019). "Americans Have Positive Views about Religion's Tole in Society, but Want It Out of Politics." In Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.

through humanity's failings, cause the faithful to question their beliefs. Such was the case of the September 11, 2001 attacks by Muslim extremists. Atheist Richard Dawkins noted that the "insane cruelty of the suicide attacks"[80] came from religion. "But", as noted by sociologist David G. Meyers, "so has the driving energy behind the founding of hospitals, universities, and civil rights campaigns. Religion…has inspired both the KKK [Ku Klux Klan] and MLK [Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.]. The horror and heroes aside, research has noted…religion's links with volunteerism, non-materialistic values, and charitable giving."[81] Meyers further asserts, "In many ways, people of faith have found psychology's insights and critical analysis supportive of their understanding of human nature and their assumption that religion is sometimes toxic but also, in its healthier forms, conductive to altruism, happiness, and health."[82]

d. Polarization of Views in the Community of the Catholic Church

American society has become increasingly polarized. This tendency towards polarization of society is most notable in political, social, and cultural spheres and it relates to the ideological division within society. From the 1960s, Americans began to segregate primarily along two ideological inclinations—conservatives who promoted the traditional lifestyle and views on morality, and liberals who promoted progressive democratic reforms. The 1960s especially were a period of significant civil and political unrest. This period amplified the fight for equal rights for people of different ethnic backgrounds, the emergence of feminist ideas, and the opposition to military ambitions of the American government. Although the call for change was not limited to civil rights, equality for women and limitation of military ambitions, these were priorities of the liberal movement. Ironically, while many in the American Catholic Church identify with these liberal democratic ideals, the perception of American society of the present-day Catholic Church is associated with a conservative worldview.[83] Historically, traditionalists were usually perceived as religious people, and traditionalism has become synonymous with the Catholic faith in American culture. Secularism and atheism, in turn, are more commonly attributed to liberals and

[80] Richard Dawkins. (17 Dec 2001). "Time to Stand Up" *Freedom from Religion Formation*. In www.ffrf.org. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.
[81] David G. Myers. (24 Oct 2005). " Psychological Science Meets the World of Faith." *Association for Psychological Science*. www.Psychologicalscience.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[82] Ibidem.
[83] Todd Scribner. 2015. *A Partisan Church: American Catholicism and the rise of neoconservative Catholics* (Catholic University of America Press): 3.

progressives.

Requena asserts in the article, "The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on United States Catholic Historiography" that the Catholic religious discourse in the United States is unique.[84] Although the Catholic Church tries to keep pace with cultural development and embraces the liberal ideals of democracy, it still has the traditionalist image in the eyes of secular Americans. It is daunting to change this view on faith and religious worldview. Some scholars hypothesize that this image of excessive traditionalism that Americans associate with Catholicism is the consequence of its comparatively short history in the United States. Moreover, the congregation of Catholics in the United States is smaller than the one of Protestants, which makes the ideals of the Catholic community less evident to most of the people. The traditionalist attitude of the Catholic Church to abortion and homosexuality is often considered proof of conservatism that the Vatican promotes.

The results of the Second Vatican Council illustrate the hypothesis that the Catholic Church tries to adapt to the cultural and social context in the 21st century United States. It is possible to enumerate the following challenges that the American Catholic Church should face if it wants to serve the community effectively. Among the goals that the Second Vatican Council, highlights include:

> 1) a failure to respond to the questions in which the Catholics of the day were interested; 2) its predominantly confessional character—rigorous and academic in tone—but lacking significant contributions to American intellectual and social history; 3) the limitation of the serious academic study of Catholic history to only a few universities; 4) the predominant emphasis on Catholicism's juridical and institutional character with scarce attention given to the laity; 5) the absence of Catholicism from the national historical narrative; 6) the predominance of the paradigm of "Americanization", and 7) an emphasis on the "minority" mentality to describe the development of American Catholicism.[85]

It follows that the American Catholic Church should respond to the unique agenda that is different from the European agenda. The polarization of American society, the existing tension between liberals and conservatives, the comparatively small number of faithful in the Catholic

[84] Federico M. Requena. 2015. "The Impact of the Second Vatican Council on United States Catholic Historiography," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 33(2): 105.
[85] Ibidem, 111-112.

Church in the United States are among the issues that the clergy should discuss. The American social context with its demographic peculiarities constitutes the basis for understanding the place of the Catholic Church in the United States and evaluation of potentially effective ways to improve pastoral care.

The debate between conservatives and liberals is an integral part of the American political discourse. The existence of these two dominant perspectives on political and social matters has led to the continued polarization of American society in recent years, demonstrating the existing tension between these two worldviews. This ideological division of society into progressives and conservatives is multi-layered, and the opposition between these ideologies is not limited to politics. Each group has views on critical questions including the attitude toward immigration, to feminism, to racism, to abortion, etc. Ethically biased questions and the issues that are connected with strong emotional sentiments aggravate the divergence in worldviews between traditionalists and progressives in American secular society.

Presumably, the perception of the Catholic Church is the consequence of the existing polarization in American society. Society judges the Catholic Church based on its views on such disputable questions as homosexuality, abortion, medical ethics, etc. The Protestant Church is usually associated with a more liberal inclination toward these questions, while the Catholic Church has been vocally resolute on such topics as abortion and euthanasia while haltingly approaching changes in attitudes toward other societal issues such as homosexuality and medical ethics. There is no unanimous opinion among both the Catholic community and clergy concerning these issues which remain disputable in society because these issues are usually contrary to Christian doctrine. Conversely, in other issues in American society associated with social justice such as racial equity, the Catholic Church does not hesitate to adopt these innovations. One contemporary example of this early adoption is the support of the Black Lives Matter movement by the Church and its antiracist stance. Another example of the Church's embracement of social justice ideals can be seen in how the Catholic Church supports secular societies initiatives to address and fight poverty. The Church supports approaches to quell injustices like poverty because doing so is central to Her mission. Charity and caring for the vulnerable groups of the community are examples of truly beneficent conduct for Christians.

These examples emphasize the dubious character of changes that occur in modern secular

society. The question is whether the Catholic Church should adapt to the most radical manifestations of secularism that dominate present day American culture. Perhaps, it is better to remain traditionalists and to preserve morality in the way it is described in the Holy Scripture and other religious texts instead of adopting the ideas that radically oppose the Christian worldview. In this case, the gap between traditionalist Catholics and liberal atheists widens, potentiating further polarization in American society.

2. Globalization and its Social Consequences

Globalization is one of the most universal trends in contemporary society that is present in political, cultural, economic, social, and religious spheres. The definition of globalization is predicated on the perspective from which it is discussed. Primarily, globalization would be defined as the interdependence of countries that individual states cannot avoid. From one point of view, globalization facilitates the intensification of relationships on all levels, including social and cultural interactions, because the distance and country's frontiers do not prohibit this process. From another point of view, globalization is connected with the improved level of interaction and increased comprehension because individual differences are substituted by the formation of the common international space.[86]

a. The Impact of Globalization on the Contemporary Social, Cultural and Religious Fabric

Globalization commenced in the 18th century with the improvement of communication technologies and transportation, although there were no formal discussions, definitions, or academic understanding of this topic at that time. Globalization allowed people to become more mobile, to travel largely unfettered, communicate more efficiently and effectively, and to exchange views respectively. Globalization leads to the amalgamation of cultures and beliefs, which is a gradual process. The end of the 20th century was marked by a significant improvement in the sphere of globalization because modern technologies allowed people to communicate without boundaries. Examples of the modern technologies that facilitate this admixture of cultures and ideas include the internet, cell phones, satellite communication, and even into the 21st century, live streamed

[86] Charles Wolf. 2002. *Straddling Economics and Politics: Cross-Cutting Issues in Asia, the United States, and the Global Economy* (Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation): 4-5.

meetings, social media.

Globalization leads to the formation of the universal international culture that people in different cultures can discern. The American secular culture is the preeminent example of the consequences of globalism in this sphere. Economic globalization leads to the appearance of international corporations that sell products in all countries. For instance, a great number of people in developed countries buy clothes from mass-market brands like Zara or H&M that are represented worldwide. Political globalization leads to the appearance of international organizations that regulate global affairs, including NATO or the United Nations. Yoga practices that used to be part of Buddhism have become part of the global popular culture, which illustrates the inclination to globalize even in religion. These examples demonstrate that globalization is the major driver of 21st century reality.

b. Social Disintegration

Social disintegration relates to the concept of the fabric of society eroding thereby leading to increased rate of violence, crime, and overall instability in the society. This erosion is attributed to problems in both civil and political spheres. When social disintegration is progressing, it leads to diminished satisfaction of individuals with society and a growing gap between the rich and the poor. Society becomes polarized, exacerbating further conflicts between individuals, groups and classes and the radicalization of citizens.

Understanding the impact of globalization on society is integral to analyzing the historical context, its present state and future. Plainly, globalization is a factor that analysts cannot avoid when evaluating any specific situation in society. The participation of the country in the global economic, political, and cultural life precipitates changes within the society through influences on the income rate of the population, its resident's working conditions, the level of employment, and social protection. Moreover, the change of the cultural setting influences the perception of identity, human interactions in society, family life, and a host of other societal factors.[87]

Such factors as cultural confusion, extensive poverty, migration, and radical social changes are among the main contributors to social disintegration. Stress is escalated in society when

[87] John Saxe-Fernández. 1994. "Globalization: Processes of Integration and Disintegration," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 8(2): 204.

stability is further lost through dissolution of traditional societal constructs. Realistically, the percentage of society that can tolerate rapid change is relatively small. The majority of people will struggle with rapid change, searching rather to find stability.[88]

It is crucial to recognize that globalization is not restricted exclusively to economic circumstances. Its ubiquitous impact on social factors requires thorough and objective evaluation. Moreover, globalization implies the balance of powers, not social disintegration. It is possible to illustrate this idea with the following excerpt:

> This view of "globalism" often underestimates the importance of certain palpable realities. For example, one or two powers no longer control industry, technology, finance, or trade in the world economy. Machine tools and advanced technologies can be found in Japan, Switzerland, Sweden, Hungary, Canada, the United States, or Korea, among many other countries. In weaponry, more than ten Third-World nations export ballistic technologies, while the capacity to build nuclear weapons has proliferated with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the enormous economic crisis that pummels the former Soviet republics, and those countries' urgent need to obtain hard currency.[89]

In other words, social disintegration is the negative consequence of globalization that is most evident in developing economies. In theory, globalization should preserve balance and give equal opportunities to every state. Despite this assumption that developed countries are largely benefactors from globalization and are relatively immune to the negative consequences of globalization, discrepancies of certain subsets within a country, such as race, immigration and migration, economic status, urban versus rural, may contribute to social disintegration.

America is the epitome of a multicultural society with a vast array of cultures and socio-economic standings. American society faces the problem of social disintegration, especially related to the significant gap between rich and poor members of society. Additionally, immigrants who come to the United States experience cultural confusion because their culture often differs significantly from the largely secular culture in the United States. Enculturation requires that they adapt to this new reality. Failure of full integration into American society may lead to a sense of disassociation from society and inability to become completely *American*. Inability to integrate into American society often leads to poverty and overall segregation of these people from the rest

[88] Ibidem, 203.
[89] Ibidem, 205.

of the citizens. As a result, the gap between social and economic classes in the United States expands, which leads to the appearance of radical ideals and movements for equality and against injustice, and occasionally disdain for their new residence.

There is no single opinion about the impact of globalization on human existence. Its proponents regard globalization as the development in all spheres of human life, expansion of opportunities, and overall improvement of the level of life. Globalization allows for benchmarked comparisons of countries juxtaposed to others especially regarding quality-of-life measures and human rights. International political organizations allow the countries to popularize and preserve democracy, to ensure that the states do not infringe on human rights. These comparisons illuminate infringements on basic quality of life human rights issues and compels the international community to react to these infringements, thereby allowing the global community to do everything possible to protect human life. Global corporations additionally make products easier to access for many people in different countries. It also potentially makes manufacturing more efficient and less expensive resulting in lower prices for a myriad of products, which is generally positive for individuals. Cultural interaction improves opportunities for self-expression and, through this interaction, enriches art. Ideological interaction between countries additionally allows people to develop new perspectives that may contribute to improved quality of life in a given community.[90]

Despite the potential advantages, globalization is also wrought with disadvantages and potential harm. Opponents to globalization note that it leads to the gradual loss of balance in the world. Developed economies capitalize on fledgling economies, becoming richer, while less developed countries may be further depredated by the unjust wealthier countries preying on their needs. Globalization also leads to the emergence of social structural inequality, a negative consequence of colonialism. Opponents of globalism perceive it as the new form of colonialism in the 21st century that not only leads to economic impoverishment of colonies, but also to cultural appropriation, cultural assimilation, and Western ethnocentrism that is especially evident in Eastern countries.[91]

It is possible to illustrate existing biases connected with globalization with the following excerpt:

[90] Anja Weiß. 2017. "Sociological Theories of Global Inequalities," *Sociology 51*(6): 1318.
[91] Ibidem, 1319.

> It is also worth noting that the gains and losses, and their corresponding beneficiaries and victims occur within both the rich and poor countries. Increased access to national markets by non-national businesses disrupts high-cost, less-efficient enterprises in developed as well as developing countries. Indeed, most of the anti-globalization protest demonstrations that have occurred in recent years have been led by individuals and organizations from rich, developed countries, rather than poor developing ones.[92]

This shows that there is duality to the nature of globalization, with both positive and negative consequences. Because of this duplexity, it is difficult to develop an objective judgment about this phenomenon. Pope Francis articulated the official position of the Catholic Church on globalization in 2019, asserting that globalization is synonymous with unity, which makes humanity stronger.[93] Hence, the Vatican embraces globalization and sets the example for all Catholics.

For the United States, its experience in globalization has been one of both liberation and exploitation. Some Americans, who belonged to the financial elites or those who had unique professional or entrepreneurial skills, received more opportunities for personal growth in the global economy and society. The American Dream is embodied by this unfettered opportunity to rise from the ranks of the impoverished to wealth with ingenuity and sweat equity. For those Americans, who did not possess these qualities, their experience may be vastly different. Non-qualified workers were at risk for losing their livelihood to advances in technology. Failure to adapt to these changes meant that they risked their position being substituted by a new technology and loss of their opportunity for economic development. Moreover, rapid expansion of the American economy made the country attractive for immigrants who searched for a better life. Over the past two centuries immigrants have come from countries around the globe. As a result, the United States continues to face issues connected with their immigration policy and distribution of jobs among the population.

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[92] Charles Wolf. 2002. *Straddling Economics and Politics: Cross-Cutting Issues in Asia, the United States, and the Global Economy* (Santa Monica, CA; Arlington, VA; Pittsburgh, PA: RAND Corporation): 12.

[93] Robin Gomes. 2019. "Pope: isolationism and populism lead to war," *Vatican News.* In https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-08/pope-francis-interview-europe-amazonia-synod-politics-environmen.html. Retrieved March 3, 2022.

c. Social and Economic Exclusion

Social exclusion is another one of the negative consequences of globalization. Social exclusion manifests in societies with high levels of income inequality and the polarization of ideological, political, and social groups. Globalism contributes to economic and social changes that may result in an economic recession. To lessen the effects of social exclusion, the government should intervene by implementing laws that reduce social exclusion, which is a profound social injustice. It is possible to hypothesize that globalization leads to the formation of the economically privileged group of people that are opposed to other members of the society, and this opposition increases the overall tension. [94] In the city of Detroit, Michigan stands the most glaring physical manifestation of social exclusion. The "Birdwood Wall" known also as the "Eight Mile Wall" or the "Wailing Wall" was built as a physical barrier separating black residents from white residents in 1941. The concrete wall is 6 feet high and 4 inches thick and spans ½ mile. The west side was for the white residents, and the east side the black residents. The presence of the wall affected the sale price of their homes, the value of their neighbors' homes, the school they attended, the persons with whom they interacted and ultimately the wealth they would inherit from their family. The wall affected the inhabitants of this divided neighborhood for generations. Eighty years later, the wall still stands, brightly painted with colorful murals. The neighborhood is now of mixed races and the discriminatory policies that permitted it to be built have been outlawed. As for the city of Detroit, it remains the most segregated city in the nation, and the price of this segregation goes far beyond the economic impact. This ongoing segregation is not by law, but by fact. Those families living in the impoverished, dilapidated homes of inner-city Detroit remain not because they are forced to by law, but because they cannot afford a way out. Only now is the city slowly rising from its segregated past and making meaningful changes toward rectifying the racial inequality that very nearly destroyed the city.[95]

Poverty and homelessness are the most vivid examples of social exclusion in all countries. People who do not have money, a job, and place to live are marginalized in every society.[96] They

[94] Chris Phillipson. 2012. "Globalization, Economic Recession and Social Exclusion: Policy Challenges and Responses." In *From Exclusion to Inclusion in Old Age: A Global Challenge*, edited by Scharf Thomas and Keating Norah, 17-32 (Bristol: Bristol University Press): 17.

[95] Erin Einhorn and Olivia Lewis. (2021 Jul 19). *"*Built to keep black from white: Eighty years after a segregation wall rose in Detroit, America remains divided. That's not an accident*." Bridge Detroit*. In www.nbcnews.com. Retrieved Feb 7, 2022.

[96] John Iceland. 2013. "Global Poverty." In *Poverty in America: A Handbook,* 61-78. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London:

are excluded from the community of socially active people who can adapt to new circumstances, who have social connections, etc. Homeless people often have no documents, which prohibits them from finding a stable job even if they have the necessary skills. Their homelessness also deters companies from hiring them. Due to lack of a home and proper facilities, they may not be able to adequately maintain personal hygiene and health. Many cases of homelessness are marred by mental issues and substance abuse. These conditions make the return to the "normal" society impossible or at least very complicated.

Social exclusion associated with ageism is especially evident in the globalist society. The contemporary cultural discourse focuses on the young and active individuals who have money and desire to consume various goods. Consumerism is rarely seen in the elderly; excessive spending is infrequently an issue with this age group. Their interests, needs and desires differ significantly due to their experience and physiological state. Those elderly who are compelled to work due to insufficient funds for retirement often cannot compete with younger professionals, or it is perceived that they cannot, due to objective factors. Consequently, companies in the global market rarely hire older workers because doing so is not economically beneficial.[97] This ageism may lead to challenges in finding adequate and meaningful employment. Inability to earn adequate employment, inadequate social support and health changes may also contribute to poverty and social exclusion of this group as well.

Globalization for developing countries is associated with low income, problems obtaining gainful employment, and overall economic exclusion. These negative attributions are especially evident in those developing countries where the economy is based on cheap, plentiful manual labor. Globalization supposes that all national economies are integrated into the international economy and that the global market determines their development. The absence of boundaries in trade and low or no tariffs for foreign products lead to the demise of smaller companies that could not compete with international corporations because of being priced out of the market.[98] In other words, developing countries and their economies are often excluded from the global market in the globalized world, which is economically a disadvantageous influence on the well-being of a nation.

University of California Press), 61.

[97] Chris Phillipson. 2012. "Globalization, Economic Recession and Social Exclusion: Policy Challenges and Responses," 33.

[98] Emilio Klein, Victor Tokman. 2000. "Social stratification under tension in a globalized era," *Cepal Review 2000* (72): 8.

Interestingly, globalization is akin to deregulation and privatization in the economic sphere. The global character of these changes leads to the formation of the universal ideological discourse that all developing countries share. Privatization infers the reduction of governmental participation in the economy and the increase of the market and the private sector in the economic development of the state. With privatization, governmental bodies do not assume the responsibility of providing employment opportunities. From one point of view, privatization improves competition in the market. From another point of view, without the security of governmental involvement, thousands of people may lose their jobs and may not be able to provide for themselves. Moreover, if a population's qualifications do not correspond to the requirements of the global market, they may have no economic recourse, leading to economic crisis. The state economy is completely deregulated in this situation, and the chances that it will survive without serious losses of human and financial capital after privatization are comparatively low.[99]

It is possible to illustrate this situation with the case of the Soviet Union and the destruction of its economy after its collapse. The Soviet economy was regulated by the state, and millions of people had guaranteed jobs and adequate salaries that provided a sufficient living wage. After the collapse of the country, the economy quickly transitioned to capitalism. As a result, all companies were privatized. Thousands of workplaces disappeared, which led to the increase of poverty among the population. Many people had to change their occupation to integrate into the capitalist economy, which was daunting for them. A great number of people remained unemployed for years.[100]

The American economy, conversely, has been capitalist since its inception. As a capitalistic society, there was minimal regulation of business by the state. Unfettered by governmental interference, the American economy developed quickly because businesses were able to make decisions freely. The downside is that competition in the American market is severe, consequently many companies cannot survive. An example, small farmers must promote the idea that their production is eco-friendly and natural, which justifies their comparatively high prices. Though, they cannot compete with corporations that produce cheap food in great amounts because the amount of people who are ready to pay more for organic products is comparatively low. This

[99] Ibidem, 9.
[100] Ibidem, 11.

situation is a vivid example of economical exclusion that is not rare in the American economy.

Thirty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, collectively American society appears to be increasingly accepting of communism, especially among the millennial generation. In the 'YouGov' poll, by the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation reported in October 2020, those viewing 'socialism' favorably increased in the Gen Z (ages 16-23) age group from 40% in 2019 to 49% in 2020. Opinions of capitalism also declined from 2019 to 2020 among all Americans (from 58% to 55%). Furthermore, 35% of Millennials and 31% of Gen Z support the gradual elimination of the capitalist system in favor of a more socialist system. This same poll demonstrated growing concern for Donald Trump as president, among these age groups in particular, with 34% of Gen Z and 35% of Millennial seeing him as the greatest threat to world peace; noting also that 39% of Gen Z Americans believed that Donald Trump was more responsible for the COVID 19 pandemic than China's Xi Jinping. Further concerning statistics noted that nearly two-thirds of Americans (64%) say that they are unaware that the Chinese Communist Party is responsible for more deaths than Nazi Germany and 26% of Americans think that climate change is the number one threat to national security over the rise of the People's Republic of China or Russian expansionism.[101] It is critical to note, however, that this study was reported prior to the current conflict in Ukraine. Marion Smith, the Executive Director of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation noted:

> It shocks the conscience that more Americans today believe the U.S. President is a bigger threat to world peace than the most brutal dictators in the world, and that four-in-ten Americans believe that their country is a 'racist' nation. This represents a total failure of our education system, not just in schools but also a basic dishonesty in our media and popular culture. When one-in-four Americans want to eliminate capitalism and embrace socialism, we know that we have failed to educate about the historical and moral failings of these ideologies.[102]

d. Consumerism as a Lifestyle

Globalization leads to the formation of a new cultural discourse shared around the globe with all countries. This international culture is predominantly secular and centered around the

[101] Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation 2020 YouGov Poll. (Oct 2020). "US Attitudes Toward Socialism, Communism and Collectivism." *YouGov, Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation.* In Victimsofcommunism.org. Retrieved November 11, 2022.
[102] Ibidem.

satisfaction of egoistic desires. Consumerism is the most vivid manifestation of this global culture that reflects the essence of a capitalistic worldview. The notion of consumerism assumes the endless consumption of goods and services that the person does not truly need to survive and to be happy. Consumerism is the logical consequence of overproduction that is characteristic of the industrial society of the 21st century.[103]

Consumerism is often criticized by philosophers because it supplants the search for spirituality, the meaning of life, and altruism. Psychologists also connect consumerism with stress-related issues. This becomes apparent when consumers make purchases solely based on improving their emotional state and not on physical necessity. From the ecological point of view, consumerism is the consequence of overproduction, and the popularization of mass-marketing will manifest detrimental to the climate because industry requires the overconsumption of many natural resources and this gradually impoverishes the planet. From the sociological perspective, consumerism leads to the aggravation of social and economic inequalities and subsequent polarization of society, especially where there are profound discrepancies in the amount of product consumption between social groups.[104]

It is possible to hypothesize that consumerism is profitable only for the economy because it justifies the existence of international corporations. People spend money on items and services that they do not need, and corporations' profit from their acquisitiveness. The capitalist economic model depends on the level of consumption. When the consumers' needs are met, they naturally stop consuming, to the detriment of corporations. Corporations therefore are driven to develop items that appeal to the consumers' wants and even their psychological need for acceptance in culture. Consumerism, and the marketing strategies surrounding it, preys on the consumers' psychological insecurities. On the ideological level, it compels people to make purchases to secure their social and economic status.

Overproduction does not guarantee that even the basic needs of all are met. There remains poverty in the world, and in many countries, many people are financially insecure and cannot satisfy even their basic needs, like clean water and adequate food. Supermarkets in other developed countries, in turn, dispose of food as waste because the supply is higher than the demand. This

[103] Abhijit V. Banerjee, and Ester Duflo. 2012. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. (New York: Public Affairs): 47.
[104] Ibidem, 50-51.

example shows that consumerism and overproduction exacerbate inequalities in the world without improving the basic quality of life for all people in different countries.

Individualism is at the core of contemporary secular culture. Individualism advances the idea that individuals should support themselves both financially and emotionally because others are not responsible for their life. This ideology is based on the principles of self-reliance and complete autonomy of the person. Individualism is the opposite of collectivism that describes the person as part of a family, a small community, society in general, and their nation. Researchers contrast individualism with collectivism that is often associated with totalitarianism and pressure to conform to societal demands rather than celebrating the person's unique individuality. This conformity is unacceptable in liberal society.[105]

It is possible to assume that the secular culture is opposed to the religious worldviews because secularism is predominantly individualistic. Faith in God presupposes that the person is part of the religious community; it promotes the traditional family values that emphasize the importance of family connections and the responsibility of the person to take care of those who need assistance, including poor and elderly, homeless, and orphans. Individualism, contrarily, emphasizes the personal responsibility of everyone in disposing of one's own life. For example, from the individualistic point of view, a homeless man who suffers from alcohol addiction is responsible for his own destiny and others in the society are not morally obliged to help this man.

The primary concern regarding individualism in American culture is that this ideology is actively promoted by the secular society and popular media. American culture was never collectivist by its character, but the recent decades illustrate that individualism that is combined with consumerism reached its apogee. A great number of young people decide to live alone because marriage and children are psychologically challenging for them. As a result, the traditional family becomes an outdated concept. Popular American culture changes towards being more oriented to the individual. The movies promote the image of the self-sufficient person who concentrates on their work and hobbies. It does not necessarily mean that the individualistic slant in American culture is negative, but it obviously means that the cultural discourse changes compared to the previous decades.

[105] Abhijit V. Banerjee, and Ester Duflo. 2012. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 12.

e. Causes and Manifestations of Poverty

There is a dramatic contrast between the degree of poverty in developed countries compared to poor countries where many people do not have access to basic human needs. For example, the contrast between the United States and Somalia is striking because poverty and chaos in the African state are difficult to imagine for the majority of people from the Western world. This dichotomy requires defining the poverty line based on the differing perspectives. From one perspective, objective poverty surmises that people do not have access to food and shelter that are basic human needs. Other perspectives assert that the poverty line must be considered in the context of a particular country. For instance, the poverty line in the United States would be higher than that of Somalia, where most people are food and shelter insecure in addition to being restricted in other basic needs. The World Bank investigated connected with the definition of global poverty, and emphasized the following biased issues:

> Many poverty lines fail to deal with the economies of scale of different household sizes, as well as the different household compositions. All individuals are assumed to have the same requirements regardless of age, sex, and occupation. Poverty lines also fail to deal with gender dimensions of poverty, and intra-household inequality in general, as the household is used as a unit of analysis. Price variations are not adequately dealt with. While some poverty lines deal with rural/urban differences, they usually fail to deal with price variations in a single locale. In many cases, the poor pay more for goods and services even in the same city. Comparing poverty trends both across and within countries is impossible because data from different studies cannot be compared due to the different approaches used.[106]

The universal or subjective character of poverty in the contemporary global economy remains debatable and is nuanced based on the circumstances of the country, region, locality and even idiosyncrasies of a population. Consumerism exacerbates the social and economic gap between people, and the division between rich and poor in societies becomes especially conspicuous in the global world. This contrast between rich and poor is an indispensable feature of large urban areas where business and political activity are centered. Homeless and poor people also congregate in these places because it is easier for them to fade away into crowds and to locate food and shelter. Moreover, the persistent gap between rich and poor countries in the modern

[106] Sarah Sabry. 2009. "Poverty Lines in Greater Cairo: Underestimating and Misrepresenting Poverty." Report, (*International Institute for Environment and Development*): 3.

world, remains a significant issue in the discussion of poverty.

Poverty persists as an urgent problem that the American government is compelled to solve. The number of poor and homeless people in the United States is comparatively high with 13.7% of Americans living below the poverty line according to the estimates conducted in 2021. This means that about 1 person out of every 7 is considered poor by the country's cost of living standards. In general, there are almost 38.1 million people who receive some form of financial aid from the U.S. Federal Government in the form of its social safety net. The COVID pandemic exacerbated the tenuous economic conditions of many Americans even worse due to the resultant economic recession.[107] Although the social safety net provided by the American Government lessened the impact of the global pandemic and demonstrated the desire to assist its citizens, this situation illustrated that there remains significant work in this sphere. It is critical to identify and diminish the underlying contributing factors that lead to poverty, which is daunting in the global economy. Moreover, the COVID pandemic delineated the degree to which globalism connects all economies. No economy was immune to the effects of the pandemic; all were impacted negatively, including the United States.

Competition is one of the consequences of globalization, and unemployment is an untoward consequence of this global competition. It is possible to distinguish frictional unemployment, that is volitional unemployment in which an individual has made the conscious decision not to work, and structural unemployment which is the consequence of the inefficient organization of the labor market and other related foundational problems in the country's economy.[108] For example, the global economic context supposes that international corporations have superior production capabilities over local companies; because of this they can produce more efficiently and therefore the price for customers is lower. International corporations can outsource cheap labor to developing countries, while the local company is compelled to pay a higher salary to its workers, as well as support fringe benefits such as workmen's compensation and health insurance and comply with mandatory government requirements such as social security and taxes. This situation increases the burden on local companies often causing struggles with remaining

[107] Linda Giannarelli et al. 2021. *Poverty Projections,* (Urban Institute): 1. https://www.urban.org /sites/default/files/publication/103656/2021-poverty-projections_1. pdf. Retrieved January 19, 2022.
[108] Abhijit V. Banerjee, and Ester Duflo. 2012. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, 59.

financially afloat, consequently resulting in loss of employment and income for workers. This loss of employment, due to economic factors and global competition, is an illustration of structural unemployment.

Prolonged unemployment leads to financial distress and a strain on social services, presuming their availability. When individuals cannot meet their financial obligations, they become further indebted. In severe cases, this may result in poverty or homelessness. At minimum, these financial constraints may lead to mental anguish, the breakdown of the family dynamic, and stress. Moreover, this stress may lead to mental illness including depression, anxiety, loss of purpose and self-worth and, in severe cases, an increased risk of suicidal ideation and suicide. The driving factors of this mental anguish include the inability to integrate normally into society and negative social stigma associated with unemployment. In addition, health insurance and the financial ability to attain health care may be associated with employment. For these reasons, unemployed people have a higher probability of developing physical ailments related to their financial inability to visit the physician, poor diet, and chronic stress.[109]

Globalization and technological development in all spheres are interconnected. Advancement in technology may also exacerbate the level of unemployment. For example, many spheres of work have become automated through technological innovations. As a result, unskilled workers are no longer needed to perform those jobs. Even with retraining, their labor may not be warranted. Long-term unemployment, absence of money, debts, and loss of profession are the causes of further social stratification and identity crisis that people often face in such situations. The World Economic Forum noted that advancements in technology, including artificial intelligence and robotics, may supplant up to 85 million jobs by 2025. Accelerating this drive toward automation is the current coronavirus pandemic, inflation, and the desperate need to cut costs to financially survive in the global economy. Currently 30% of all production tasks are completed by machines. By 2025, estimates suggest this may be as much as a 50-50 combination of human labor and machine.[110]

There is a direct connection between globalization and migration. Unquestionably, the ease

[109] Anne G. Tøge. 2016. "Health Effects of Unemployment in Europe During the Great Recession: The Impact of Unemployment Generosity," *International Journal of Health Services* 46(4): 614.
[110] Jack Kelly. (2020 Oct 27). "The U.S. lost over 60 million jobs—Now robots, tech and artificial intelligence will take millions more." *Forbes*. www.Forbes.com. Retrieved Feb 11, 2022.

of travel via modern transportation and, in many countries, the expedited visa processes, have diminished the burden of immigration. Immigration is not a new phenomenon of the modern world, rather people have always moved from one country to another for financial opportunities, climate preferences, familial obligations or freedoms not afforded by their native land. The modern world has afforded many more opportunities for immigration than any previous time in history. Moreover, globalization presupposes that people from one country can easily move to another country, live, and work there.

At the same time, not all immigrants are professionals or skilled workers who can find a well-paying job in another country. A great number of people decide, or are even forced, to immigrate because their country is poverty-stricken, it is embattled with war, or the quality of life is dismal with limited opportunity to improve within their native land. As a result, the countries with developed economies are implored to manage millions of immigrants desiring to become their residents. This mass migration strains the political and social spheres of the receiving country that officials from that government are obliged to manage.[111] This forced migration leads to imbalance in the immigration sphere when people move from impoverished countries to affluent states, in pursuit of better opportunities.

Subsequently, immigration is a multifaceted dilemma that is predicated on various political, economic, social, and cultural factors. Globalization determines the vector of development in these spheres in the 21st century, which makes it the crucial factor in evaluating immigration as a phenomenon. It is possible to illustrate the importance of globalization's impact on immigration with the following excerpt:

> [Scholars] consider globalization to be transformations in socioeconomic and political structures and processes shaped by the movement of tangible and intangible factors, ranging from goods and labor to ideas and services, across territorial borders. Increasing economic interconnections are critically important, to be sure. But they do not tell the entire story, nor are they the only source for fostering other consequences… When we examine current trends in cross-border movements, a more complex picture of globalization emerges, one that includes economic integration but is not limited to it.[112]

[111] Choucri Nazli, and Dinsha Mistree. 2009. "Globalization, Migration, and New Challenges to Governance." *Current History* 108(717): 173.
[112] Ibidem, 175.

Unquestionably, the trends towards globalization have made immigration easier for many. At the same time, globalization has been the impetus that both motivates and facilitates the need to migrate away from their country of origin, exposing globalization as a biased issue.

The American experience epitomizes the impact of globalization on immigration. Due to the high standard of living and developed economy, the United States is attractive for immigrants from less developed countries. This compulsion of the impoverished and embattled poor from countries south of the US border to migrate north into the U.S. has driven the swells of immigrants to cross illegally. This illegal immigration, especially from Mexico has been problematic for the United States. Until recently, there were many speculations about the construction of the wall between the United States and Mexico as a means for the government to control this migration. These measures are biased from the ethical point of view because the U.S. has been traditionally regarded as a country of immigrants. According to the estimates, 44.8 million people in the United States were not born in America.[113] This statistic demonstrates that the percentage of immigrants in the United States has always been high, and this current government policy may be imposing restrictions on immigration policy that might be excessive relative to historical norms.

The Center for American Progress notes that "Immigration has been a constant source of economic vitality and demographic dynamism throughout our nation's history. Immigrants are taxpayers, entrepreneurs, job creators, and consumers. But the immigration system is broken and in need of an overhaul."[114] Additionally, according to the latest statistics, over 700 thousand persons have obtained legal permanent resident status in the USA, and 321 thousand obtained this residency through sponsorship of relatives living in the USA. More than 25 thousand refugees are currently admitted to the USA and 31 thousand have been granted asylum affirmatively and defensively. Currently 5.42 million illegal or undocumented residents, from Mexico, reside in the USA. Despite the above, 58% of Americans are unhappy with the current level of immigration, 75% of Americans believe illegal immigrants should be able to stay in the country and 57% believe that the US should accept refugees from Ukraine.[115]

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[113] Abby Budiman. 2020. "Key findings about U.S. immigrants", *Pew Research Center*: 1. In https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/20/key-findings-about-u-s-immigrants/. Retrieved Feb 11, 2022.
[114] The CAP Immigration Team, staff Authors. (23 Oct 2014). "The Facts on Immigration Today," *Center for American Progress (CAP)*. Americanprogress.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[115] Erin Duffin. (30 Sept 2022). "US Immigration/Migration Statistics & Facts." *Statista.* Statista.com. Retrieved November 10, 2022.

The teaching of the Catholic Church on immigration is one of balance in which the receiving country is called to be welcoming to immigrants, but the immigrant, in turn, is called to respect the laws of the nation to which they immigrate. The challenge within American society today, both in political leadership and in the citizenry is the desire to hold to one of these principles while rejecting the other. Building the wall based on reasons of security and the common good of its citizenry is logical and reasonable; but if the wall's intent is to reject the required generosity of a prosperous nation to the downtrodden, then it is unjust. Similarly, if the immigrant is called to respect the immigration laws of a country and they do not, they also are not abiding by the laws of the receiving country. If those laws are unacceptably onerous to the immigrant, they too are unjust.[116]

The notion of institutional or systemic racism implies that even though the country is officially racially equal, there are still numerous manifestations of racism in different spheres of life. Although the laws of a country may explicitly denounce racism, the structure of social services may, de facto, favor or cause harm to minorities. Discrimination of racial minorities in education, political life, healthcare, employment, housing, or criminal justice is among the examples of institutional racism. For instance, sociologists assert that the disproportionately large proportion of African American and Latin American males in prisons is the consequence of institutional racism. The police and the courts tend to accuse, prosecute, and disproportionately punish men from these ethnic minorities of crimes more than other racial groups because of racial biases and prejudged opinions about their race. Furthermore, the fact that these racial minorities are socially disadvantaged through generations of poverty driven by racial inequality leads to higher crime rates within their respective communities.

The decision not to emphasize racial differences is also the manifestation of institutional racism. Sociologists define it as colorblindness. They described the problems connected with disregarding race in the following way:

> Embracing a post-race, colorblind perspective allows Whites to imagine that being white or black or brown has no bearing on an individual's or a group's relative place in the socioeconomic hierarchy… The color-blind perspective removes from personal thought and public discussion any taint or suggestion of White supremacy or White guilt while legitimating the existing social,

[116] Msgr. Charles Pope. (2019 Jan 9). "Is There a Catholic View on the Border Wall?" *National Catholic Register*. In www.ncregister.com. Retrieved February 14, 2022.

political and economic arrangements which privilege Whites.[117]

This example illustrates that institutional racism and concerns connected with race do not permit the American culture to become truly equal. There are different aspects of systematic racism that are difficult to qualify and quantify adequately, including colorblindness. For this reason, improving public awareness of these issues might help in eliminating racism on all levels of society and state.

3. The Relativism of Moral Beliefs and its Practical Consequences in Society

Morality is a set of rules or principles regarding behavior or conduct that distinguish whether an action of an individual or a group is right or wrong. Morality is the code of conduct that emphasizes the ethical basis of every action. Although some actions do not infringe on the rights of other people, they may still be amoral or immoral. The idea of amorality presumes that people do not understand that there is a set of ethical principles according to which their actions are evaluated. The idea of immortality, alternatively, supposes that the individual is aware of existing moral standards and yet opposes them consciously. Moral codes are not universal, rather they may be impacted by different belief systems, including secular and religious.[118]

The theory of moral relativism appertains to American society and presumes that there is no objective judgment about moral questions because good and evil are relativist concepts. The perception of good and evil is predicated on a particular situation and the perspective from which a person analyzes them, which implies that there is no objectivity in the evaluation of right and wrong. As a result, moral relativism presupposes that people should respect the behavior and the ideas of other members of the society regardless of their moral evaluation, which makes tolerance the central concept of moral relativism. It follows then that there are no right or wrong people because there is no universal norm that defines right from wrong on a particular question. From this perspective, morality must correspond to human purposes, so that it would be easier for people to satisfy their demands and to approach the ideal. The opportunity to move to the aim is the

[117] Charles A. Gallagher. 2003. "Color-Blind Privilege: The Social and Political Functions of Erasing the Color Line in Post - Race America," *Race, Gender & Class* 10 (4): 22.
[118] Patricia S. Churchland. 2011. *Braintrust: What Neuroscience Tells Us about Morality,* (Princeton, Princeton University Press): 31.

reflection of the action's value. In other words, any system of morality is worthy of attention if it helps the person to satisfy their own needs, or the end justifies the means.[119] The researchers agree that moral relativism permits secular people to be more tolerant towards others.[120]

a. Relativism in the Sphere of Ethics of Sexual Life

Moral Relativism can be seen in the perspective of the ethics related to sexual life. For example, freedom of speech and self-expression is indirectly connected with the idea of moral relativism. It is morally acceptable for Americans to divorce because there is a mutual misunderstanding between the couple; and most people respect their decision and are tolerant of it. If the United States were a radically religious country, divorce would not be an average procedure because the norms of religious morality would be more important than secular perspectives on moral relativism. The Catholic Church does not support the rationale that divorce should be permissible based on perceived irreconcilable differences alone, asserting that marriage is the sacred union of a man and women formed in the eyes of God for life. Despite this support for the permanence of marriage, the Church exercises the right to annul marriage officially in severe circumstances, if required by the situation. Unlike the moral relativist approach of unrestricted divorce, the Church does not compromise its teachings on marriage, requiring evidence that rationale for marriage dissolution is based on impediments from the inception of that marriage.

Moral relativism influences secular American culture because it promotes the idea of freedom. It promotes the idea that there is no absolute and objective truth in morality, which permits people to behave as they please, provided their actions do not harm other people directly. Moral relativism leads to the formation of the worldview where individual choices are the priority. The slogan of this ideology is connected with the idea that the truth for one person or culture is not the truth for another person or culture, which promotes tolerance and diversity in all spheres of human interactions.[121]

Moral relativists adopt egalitarian views on beliefs, practices, and ethical values. For them, all beliefs are equally correct, and it is not appropriate to doubt their legitimacy. Moral relativists

[119] Geoffrey Harrison. 1976. "Relativism and Tolerance," *Ethics 8* (2): 124.
[120] Ibidem, 134.
[121] James R. Beebe. 2010. "Moral Relativism in Context," *Noûs* 44(4): 691.

avoid negative judgments about other people's views and actions, which is connected with tolerance in a liberal society. Although moral relativists sometimes judge the beliefs and the actions of other people negatively and radically, the overall tolerant slant is the main characteristic of this ideology.[122]

Scholars explain the mechanism that makes moral relativists judge other people's beliefs negatively in the following way:

> The uncharitable interpretation also claims that the reason why relativists are more likely to make negative moral judgments when their metaethical views are not salient is simply that they forget or perhaps fail to properly understand that such judgments are ruled out by their metaethical commitments. Relativists are also accused of committing a naive logical error in thinking that purely descriptive facts about the diversity of ethical opinions and practices could ever establish normative facts about what is really right or wrong.[123]

These trends toward moral relativism emerged in Western society during the 1960s. The 1960s were the time of active secularization of the society that previously had adhered to Christian moral norms. Catholic scholars emphasize the impact of moral relativism in the change of public attitudes toward family, intimacy, and ethical choices in community life. The attitude of the modern Catholic Church toward moral relativism is biased, especially regarding questions connected with elective abortions and contraception. The division of sexual life of modern people from procreation is a concerning trend in society. Though this division is supported by moral relativists because it satisfies the needs and desires of people, it tears at the very fabric of Western society—the nuclear family.[124] A study by Dr Richard Fehring and colleagues noted that the use of any contraceptive methods for women were associated with a twofold increase of divorce and fourfold increase in the probability of cohabitation without marriage. Conversely, women who adhered to the practices of Natural Family Planning, reported 58% lower odds for divorce or separation.[125]

This opposition between traditionalist Christian morality and secular moral relativism

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[122] Ibidem, 691.
[123] Ibidem, 692.
[124] Josef Cardinal Ratzinger, Marcello Pera. 2006. *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, Christianity, Islam,* (New York: Basic Books): 11.
[125] Richard Fehring, Michael Manhart. (12 Jun 2020). "Natural Family Planning and Marital Chastity: The Effects of Periodic Abstinence on Marital Relationships." *The Linacre Quarterly, Sage Journals.* Journals.sagepub.com. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.

polarizes modern American culture. This polarization is evident in the present-day reality. Moral relativism promoted the idea that everything that is not harmful to others is permissible. As a *result*, it is difficult to talk about stable morality in the 21st century United States or to appeal to ethical rules that are indisputable truths for everyone. For instance, if an individual wants to change their gender because they feel that they were born in the wrong body, moral relativism supports their desire and society should not prohibit this transition. Transgenders do not harm other people nor the community in general with their decision. As the decision to transition is an individual one, it is permissible to transition one's gender without hindrance in the view of the secular culture and from the moral relativist perspective that is its basis. From the more traditional Christian perspective on morality, however, this decision is disputable.

The theory of moral relativism is often regarded as a synonym to the absence of morality, which makes the appeals to this perspective pejorative. The problem is that moral relativism has its normative terms that allow the proponents of this theory to make ethical judgments. Primarily, moral relativists apply the concepts like "impermissible," "permissible," "right," and "wrong." The evaluation of these concepts from the perspective of ethical norms depends on the context of the situation, and ethical standards that people in this context share.[126]

Almost six out of every 10 adults (58%) agree that "identifying moral truth is up to each individual; there are no moral absolutes that apply to everyone, all the time." Just one-third of adults (32%) disagree with that view…beliefs regarding truth are strongly related to whether a person has a biblical worldview. Nearly nine out of ten adults (85%) who have a biblical worldview reject the idea that moral absolutes do not exist and therefore people must create their own moral standards…Less than one-third of those aligned with the Catholic church accept the existence of absolute moral truths (31%).[127]

At the same time, the normative ethical judgment of moral relativists is based on the following ideas: "What's true (or right) for you may not be what's true (or right) for me. What's true (or right) for your culture may not be what's true (or right) for my culture."[128] These assumptions have an evident individualistic slant, which is the main peculiarity of moral

[126] James R. Beebe. 2010. "Moral Relativism in Context," 693.
[127] Cultural Research Center, Arizona Christian University. 2020. "American Worldview Inventory 2020—At a Glance: AWVI 2020 Results—release #5: Perceptions of Truth." *Cultural Research Center, Arizona Christian University.* In www.arizonachristian.edu. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.
[128] [128] James R. Beebe. 2010. "Moral Relativism in Context," 694.

relativism. It emphasizes the changeability of moral norms depending on the context and the person to whom they are applied. This malleability allows people to justify their actions when they cannot find support in traditional or absolute morality.

Moral relativism is theorized to be 'agent-centered.' The agent-centered nature of moral relativism makes the critique of the actions that an individual committed impossible, from the perspective of values that this person does not share. For instance, it is wrong from the philosophical perspective to criticize Hitler and the war crimes he committed if the person does not share Hitler's principles and values.[129] Beebe gives an example that illustrates this moral relativist hypothesis claiming that "Hitler's murder of millions of Jews was morally wrong, but no moral prohibition against murder applies to Hitler."[130] This view on morality might be shocking for people who have a stable set of moral rules where genocide and war crimes are indisputably evil actions that are not justifiable.

This example illustrates the attitude of moral relativism on the individual that is often used in contemporary American society. People do not justify Hitler's actions even from the perspective of moral relativism. At the same time, some things that used to be unacceptable several decades ago are now regarded as normal by most people. For instance, homosexuals are rarely criticized in public for their sexual orientation and decision to live as a couple in modern America. Those people who do not support this type of relationship might avoid criticizing them because it is not polite in the contemporary cultural discourse that is influenced by moral relativism. Several decades ago, open homosexuality was not morally acceptable in American culture, and homosexual individuals might be ostracized because of their relationships. This example illustrates the shift from traditionalist or absolute morality towards moral relativism and concentration on individual values that occurred comparatively recently in the United States.

Alavaro explains that the moral transitions seen in the cultural understanding of topics such as homosexuality, slavery and women's suffrage are more aptly considered examples of moral progress rather than moral relativism. He acknowledges that the definition of moral relativism is, "a meta-ethical theory according to which moral values and duties are relative to a culture and do

[129] Ibidem, 699.
[130] Ibidem, 698.

not exist independently of a culture."[131] He explains moral progress with the following:

> According to moral relativism, there are no absolutely right standards or absolutely wrong standards of morality. Considering my culture at present as an example, in the U.S. most people regard slavery as a barbaric and immoral practice of the past, while they value freedom and equality... But isn't it obvious that morally speaking we are better off today than we were prior to the abolition of slavery? Isn't women's suffrage a clear example of moral progress?[132]

Alvaro further asserts the following as explanation, in these scenarios, that acceptance and equality are actually attributes of moral progress toward equality rather than moral relativism with the following argument:

> If today's equality and democracy were neither better nor worse than yesterday's slavery and dictatorship, then one would have no qualms living in the past. But no one would every live in the past, that is, one would never trade equality and democracy for slavery and dictatorship. Therefore, today's achievements, such as equality and democracy are morally better than, and morally superior to, slavery and dictatorship. And since better implies progress, it follows that equality and democracy are examples of moral progress. In other words, equality and democracy are paradigms of morality toward which past cultures moved.[133]

Similar arguments illustrate how some societal changes, such as abolition and women's suffrage, and even, at minimum, treating members of the LGBTQ community with human dignity are evidence of cultural and moral progress toward equality. These dignities are not predicated on moral values and duties are exclusively retaliated to a specific culture, within a specific timeframe as implied by moral relativism, rather they transcend culture and time and speak to the innate dignity and equality that should be the natural progression of morality.

Homosexual relations, transgender, and same-sex unions were publicly disapproved of by the majority of Americans until the 1990s. Before this time, heterosexual relationships predominated the dialogue related to sexual relations in the United States. Premarital heterosexual intimacy was also not widely accepted until the 1990s despite the prevalence of sexual relations outside of marriage. Statistically, there is a growing acceptance and wider prevalence of non-heterosexual relationships and identities directly associated with the secularization of American

[131] Carlo Alvaro. 2020. "The Incoherence of Moral Relativism." *Cultura. International Journal of Philosophy of Culture and Axiology* 17(1): 21.
[132] Ibidem, 28.
[133] Ibidem, 29.

society. Furthermore, there is a concerted effort to normalize and promote these relationships and alternate gender identities in popular media, as well as a drive toward better education for the majority of American society facilitating increasing tolerance and relativist perspectives.[134]

Sociodemographic changes determine the attitude toward homosexuality, transgender identities, and other not traditional identities. This shift toward acceptance of homosexual relationships and variation in gender identity began with societal acceptance of non-traditional heterosexual relationships. It was easier for society to adapt the idea that not all women and men were ready to register their marriage, to live their entire lives without divorce, and to rear children because it was still in the context of a heterosexual couple. Accepting that perhaps the reason why individuals were not pursuing traditional marriage was because their desires deviated from the conventional social norm challenged society. These relationships often remained hidden, marginalized to the fringe of polite society. Homosexuality and public attention to alternative sexual identities, including transgenders, have remained shocking for many people who could not imagine living in this reality and who find these relationships and lifestyles unpalatable. It is critical to mention that there remained a social taboo on questions connected with sexuality, and the intimate life of people in American society, until recent decades. Discussing these issues was simply considered not polite in American society.[135] Prior to the 1970s, there was significant discrimination against members of the LGBQT+ community. Furthermore, being homosexual was attributed to mental illness and criminality. "In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from its list of mental diseases. This recognition that homosexuality is not associated with pathology has helped foster its acceptance."[136]

The liberalization of attitudes towards homosexuality and nontraditional identities is the consequence of changes in traditional gender roles in society. Societal change in industrialized democracies or developed Western countries permits for change of traditional gender roles in the family and in society. The traditional roles of women and men in the modern secular society are not obligatory for many people, which leads to the blurring of gender boundaries. This situation

[134] Judith Treas, Jonathan Lui, and Zoya Gubernskaya. 2014. "Attitudes on Marriage and New Relationships: Cross-national Evidence on the Deinstitutionalization of Marriage," *Demographic Research* 30: 1502.
[135] Zoya Gubernskaya. 2010. "Changing Attitudes Toward Marriage and Children in Six Countries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53(2): 148.
[136] Sam G. McFarland PhD. 2018. "How Psychology Has Helped Society Accept Homosexuality: Attitude change and acceptance have been facilitated through psychological science." *American Psychological Association*. In www.Apa.org/ed/precollege/ptn/2018/05/society-accept-homosexuality. Retrieved February 21, 2022.

leads to the shift in the public perception of masculinity, femininity, and morally acceptable sexual identities. This example shows that social and economic development contributes to the cultural change in such questions as sexuality and intimate relationships.

This changing view toward acceptance of homosexuality has been a driving force toward religious disaffiliation. As noted by political scientists Robert Putnam and David Campbell, "Young Americans came to view religion, according to one survey, as judgmental, homophobic, hypocritical, and too political."[137] This growing acceptance of homosexuality can be seen in the increasing support among Americans for same-sex marriage. Currently six-in-ten, or 62% of Americans now say that they favor allowing for same-sex marriage. This increase of acceptance can be seen across all demographic groups, though Democrats remain more likely than Republicans to support same-sex marriage.[138]

The American secular culture promotes the idea that people with different sexual orientation and sexual identity are equal, and they should be visible in society. This drive toward equality explains the active promotion of these topics among Americans. For example, there is increasing representation of homosexual couples in commercials, movies, and TV series, which normalizes homosexual relationships in society. Schools increasingly instruct students about diversity issues connected with sexual identity and orientation. Workplaces may ask job candidates to speak to their beliefs about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in job interviews. Gender studies that investigate the questions connected with homosexuality and transgender identity are part of educational programs in American universities, and institutions and businesses increasingly publish statements elucidating their participation in DEI. These details show that contemporary American culture regards the questions connected with homosexual unions, transgenders, and non-traditional gender and sexual identities as an urgent and evolving issue.

There is an increasing movement among American Catholic leaders to openly express support for nondiscrimination protections for LGBTQ+ people. In September 2021, more than 750 of the nation's leading American Catholic theologians and educators released a joint statement expressing this support. The statement acknowledged there remains an ongoing debate within the

[137] Robert D. Putnam and David E Campbell. 2010. *American Grace: How Religion divides and Unites Us.* New York: Simon & Schuster: 121.
[138] Pew Research Center. (5 Oct 2017). "The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grow Even Wider." In www.pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 11, 2022.

Catholic Church regarding whether same-gender relationships and transgender identities should be condoned or supported, but also stated "That is a vital discussion for the future of Catholicism, and one to which were are whole-heartedly committed…What we are saying in this statement, however, is relatively independent of that debate, and the endorsers of this statement may hold varied, and even opposing, opinions on sexual and gender matters."[139] Though this is not an official statement from the Catholic Church, nor the USCCB, it demonstrates that, among thought leaders in the American Catholic Church the secular call for acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community is being heard. The appropriate response by these leaders is to recognize and embrace the humanity behind the issue.

Sexual harassment scandals have become an issue that is widely discussed in the United States. The social media campaign #MeToo started in 2006, aiming at giving voice to the victims of sexual harassment and abuse. This campaign is still active, and sex abuse scandals continue to appear in the public media. For example, actresses and singers describe episodes when they were coerced to engage in sexual interactions with a producer or a director to get a job, which is an infringement of professional ethics. One such scandal involved Harvey Weinstein, a Hollywood executive, who was accused and convicted of sexual abuse involving multiple victims. Knowledge of this case sparked outrage and ignited a viral social campaign shedding light on his abuses and many others in positions of power in 2017. The media coverage led to the end of the career of many people who were accused of sexual harassment at the workplace.[140]

The social movement against sexual abuse and harassment is part of the empowerment movement attempting to achieve social justice. Social media campaigns demonstrate to the victims of sexual assault that other people support them. Moreover, it is regarded as an opportunity to make the workplace safe for the employees, especially the young and vulnerable who usually become the victims of abuse.

The #MeToo campaign is connected with several serious drawbacks. Among them are false accusations of people who are publicly charged with sexual harassment without evidence. In the judicial system, there is a presumption of innocence and guilt must be proved beyond a reasonable

[139] Lou Chibbaro Jr. (2021 Sept 15). "U.S Catholic theologians call for LGBTQ nondiscrimination protections." *Washington Blade*. In www.washingtonblade.com. Retrieved Feb 21, 2022.
[140] Nicole Smartt. 2018. "Sexual Harassment in the Workplace in A #Me-Too World," *Forbes.* In https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbeshumanresourcescouncil/2017/12/20/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace-in-a-metoo-world/?sh=19740d1b5a42 Retrieved February 18, 2022.

doubt. In the public sphere of social media and public opinion, there is no such criteria. The accused person must demonstrate that they are not guilty of this crime and in all cases, this accusation ruins their image. Furthermore, restoring their digital shadow on social media may be difficult and take years. There is also the evident overemphasis on certain cases, especially on those that are connected with well-known people. Moreover, the goals of the social movement are not quite clear. It has not demonstrably contributed to the decrease of sexual abuse cases. Instead, the activists claim that the movement aims at inspiring people to talk about their trauma.[141] This motivation is rather biased because it does not lead to rational results that change the real state of affairs related to sexual misconduct.

The most dramatic recent victim of at least exaggerated and perhaps unfounded claims advanced by the #MeToo movement was Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, a Catholic and apparently socially conservative jurist. Immediately prior to his confirmation hearing to the Court, two women accused him of sexual misconduct reported to have occurred in his teen and college years. No concrete nor verifiable evidence was presented from either case. The most notable was that of psychology professor Christine Blasey Ford, who reported recalling a sexual encounter amounting to an indecent exposure only after therapeutic hypnosis. The #MeToo movement only furthered the storm of outrage, and accusations of political motivation from both sides of the political spectrum.[142] To the supporters of Justice Kavanaugh, the accusations were tantamount to character assassination and appeared to be motivated by their liberal political views. For his supporters not proceeding with the investigation, despite the lack of evidence and plausibility, risked appearing misogynistic, however. The senators diligently listened to the testimony and, ultimately, the deciding vote was cast by a female senator, confirming the Justice to the high court.

The reputation of the Catholic Church has also significantly been influenced by scandals connected with the clerical sexual abuse, especially of minors. These cases have received much public attention that continues to harm the image of the Catholic Church. Although the number of clerics who commit these crimes is comparatively small, their actions are detrimental to all Catholics. These scandals make the Vatican and Catholics especially vulnerable to the topic of sexual harassment, despite the ongoing initiatives put forth by the Church to protect children and

[141] Ibidem.
[142] William Cummings and Bart Jansen. (2018 Nov 6). "'No evidence to substantiate any of the claims': Takeaways from report on Kavanaugh allegations." *USA Today www.usatoday.com.* Retrieved Feb. 21, 2022.

young people from abuse. It is critical to remember that compassion towards the victims of sexual harassment, and commitment to vigilantly monitoring and intervening on concerning behaviors, improves the situation regarding these abuses in the Catholic Church. The intent of these interventions is to provide survivors of these crimes adequate spiritual assistance and understanding.

> Tragically, the cases of sexual abuse of minors in the Catholic Church are not rare, and insidiously persisted for centuries spanning countries across the globe. Despite its perseverance, sexual abuse of minors in institutions like the Church is not indomitable, rather by approaching the crisis with firm resolve, diligently addressing both the causes and the consequences, this abhorrent exigency may find resolve. Vulnerable populations define the very 'least of these.' Failing to ensure protection of minors from sexual abuse, leading to their irrefutable harm, is failure of the Church to live its professed mission.[143]

It is imperative for American society that when crimes are committed, they are brought to light. These horrific crimes have left an indelible mark on their victims with lifelong negative consequences for these victims including moral wellbeing, psychological wellbeing, physical wellbeing and their ability to function in society. "Most Catholics [also] want the church's sins and corruption to be brought to light."[144]

> Sexual abuse of minors destroys the lives of children. Molestation of minors is an infringement of their basic human rights that has long-term negative influences on the child's psyche and ultimately their ability to integrate into society. Moreover, clerical molestation leads to incontestable spiritual harm, risking the destruction of their faith in God. Lastly, clerical sexual abuse of minors destroys the public image of the Catholic Church, and the failure to respond to this crisis has destroyed not just the image of the Church, but the moral authority as well.[145]

Unquestionably, the scandal related to sexual abuse of minors has damaged the credibility of the Catholic Church. The mark of this damage is indelible. Beyond the tarnished public opinion of the American public toward the Church, the scandal damages the perception of the conduct of priests in society, sowing the seeds of distrust and leaving many to feel insecure about children's

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[143] Grzegorz Rozborski. 2021. "Sexual Abuse of Minors in the American Catholic Church and the Pastoral Ministry of Safeguarding Minors." (Lublin, *The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin*): 6.
[144] Zac Davis. (22 Jul 2021). "Tabloids, scandal and spying: The US Catholic Church has hit a new, dangerous low point." *America, the Jesuit Review.* Americamagazine.org. Retrieved Nov 10, 2022.
[145] Grzegorz Rozborski. 2021. "Sexual Abuse of Minors in the American Catholic Church and the Pastoral Ministry of Safeguarding Minors," 6.

safety in the hands of the Church. The consequence of this mistrust, regardless of how founded it may or may not be, affects the ability of Catholic clergy, religious and laity to function in society. In response to this mistrust, parents hesitate to bring their children to the Church, judging it to not be a safe space for minors, without supervision. Moreover, the popularity of the Catholic Church decreased significantly after the news about molestation of children by clerics was published in the media.[146] The long-term effects on the decline in participation with the Church, over two generations, cannot be understated.

b. Effects of Moral Relativism on Marriage and Family

There are persistent tendencies toward the decline of public support for the traditional family and marriage. The traditional understanding of marriage is conventionally understood as a socially sanctioned union, between one man and one woman, with the intended purpose of establishing a family unit. At the same time, American society increasingly supports the public approval and acceptance of other types of non-conventional relationships that differ from the traditional definition of marriage. Cross-national studies demonstrate that these tendencies towards the devaluation of marriage as a social institution started in the 1980s. Contemporaneous dialogue acknowledges the diminished social status and moral value that was previously ascribed to marriage. [147] Marital alternatives are morally acceptable in contemporary secular society in the United States because they reflect the opportunities for choices in the moral relativist context.

Heterosexual marriage was once regarded as the only option for people who wanted to achieve emotional and sexual intimacy. As a result, such variants of relationships as unmarried cohabitation of partners, same-sex couples, and open relationships were unacceptable in accordance with traditional morality. The estimates demonstrate that these types of relationships substitute marriage in modern American society. Marriage became the civil instrument that permitted legal protections of the couple based on American legislation because other types of cohabitation were not deemed legal, although they were morally permissible.[148]

Shifting attitudes toward marriage is the illustration of social and cultural changes that have

[146] Jo R. Formicola. 2014. *Clerical Sexual Abuse: How the Crisis Changed US Catholic Church-State Relations* (Palgrave Macmillan US): 533.
[147] Judith Treas, Jonathan Lui, and Zoya Gubernskaya. 2014. "Attitudes on Marriage and New Relationships: Cross-national Evidence on the Deinstitutionalization of Marriage," *Demographic Research* 30: 1495.
[148] Ibidem, 1496.

occurred in American society. This social institution evolved with time and reflected the views of the majority of people on moral values. The researchers expand this hypothesis in the following words:

> If 'new relationships' are benchmarked against marriage, marriage has also been judged in the context of other relationship options… The growing acceptance of relationship alternatives is one indicator that marriage is undergoing a "deinstitutionalization," described as "a weakening of the social norms that define partners' behavior." This theme is also seen in the Second Demographic Transition's emphasis on individualism, the post-material valuation of self-actualization over conformity, the second modernity's "institutionalization of individualization" and "normalization of diversity," and the insistence in "pure relationships" on satisfying emotional needs.[149]

Hence, it shows that moral relativism that is an integral part of the secular American culture influences the attitudes of people and their interactions. Moral relativism contributes to the formation of the more tolerant attitude of society toward partnerships that does not correspond to traditional norms, including homosexual relationships or long-term cohabitation of people who do not register their union.

More American adults are delaying marriage or forgoing marriage altogether. Currently the share of Americans who have cohabitated, or live with their romantic partner rather, now exceeds those who have been married. The same study by Pew Research noted, however, that married adults are more satisfied with their relationships and more trusting of their partners than those in cohabitation. From 1995 to 2019 the share of married adults declined from 58% to 53%. Over that same time period, the share who are cohabitating increased from 3% to 7%. Those adults between 18 and 44 who have ever lived with an unmarried partner have increased to 59%, while those in that same age group that have ever been married is only 50%. Young adults, in particular, are accepting of cohabitation. Seventy-eight of those 18 to 29 years old report it is acceptable to live together, even if there are no future plans for marriage. Forty-five percent, however, acknowledge that society is better off if couples in long term relationships eventually marry. About 75% of Catholics and 76% of white Protestants say it is acceptable for an unmarried couple to live together, even if they do not plan to get married.[150]

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[149] Ibidem.
[150] Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Nikki Graf, Gretchen Livingston. (6 Nov 2019). "Marriage and Cohabitation in the US." *Pew Research Center*. Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.

Perspectives toward marriage influence the public perception of the family as the basic unit of society. Moral relativism and the secularization of contemporary American culture influenced the values that many people share. Scholars assert that such tendencies as individualism, feminism, and opposition to traditional patriarchal society formed the current attitude to the family that many Americans share:

> To explain a new regime of family behavior, the theory of the Second Demographic Transition points to the diffusion of a cultural ethos of individualism traced back to the Enlightenment. Reducing the need for supportive social institutions such as marriage and greater material security is said to foster post-material values that valorize personal fulfillment over conformity to societal expectations. Criticizing marriage as a site of patriarchal oppression, feminist theory demands that relationships be organized around a new moral foundation of gender equality. Consistent with cultural theories, marriage is no longer viewed as just a social obligation but rather as a tool of personal realization.[151]

As previously mentioned, moral relativism promotes an individualistic lifestyle and emphasizes the importance of personal values and moral principles. It also promotes the idea that there are no objective truths that all members of society should follow. For example, the traditional family, consisting of mother, father, and their children, was the socially and culturally acceptable norm in the recent past. At the beginning of the 20th century, a single American man or woman in their 40s was uncommon as the social norm encouraged individuals to pursue marriage early and rear children. In 21st century American society, a single middle-aged person is increasingly common and culturally acceptable, which illustrates that the American cultural discourse changed during the last decades. Moral relativism normalized the idea that having a family, being single, having children, and having no children are equally acceptable choices for individuals in the secular society. In other words, every person has the freedom to make their own choice about family life and dynamics in modern American society.

It is possible to state that the discussion of moral relativism and the discussion of utilitarian principles are interconnected. The person makes choices that correspond most to their values and priorities at a particular moment, which corresponds to the moral relativist and utilitarian theories. People prefer utility versus vague prospects connected with potential profit in the future. Family

[151] Judith Treas, Jonathan Lui, and Zoya Gubernskaya. 2014. "Attitudes on Marriage and New Relationships: Cross-national Evidence on the Deinstitutionalization of Marriage," 1500.

becomes the context that people usually cannot ignore because of personal connection, affection, and responsibility for their kin. As a result, family often changes the moral principles and values held by an individual. Stealing is wrong from the perspective of absolute morality. Though, stealing to feed one's own family is morally permissible because the lives of the members of one's own family are more important for the person than the universal good.[152] This example illustrates the hypothesis that the context changes the moral evaluation of actions and makes them relative.

The right of women to choose abortion is promoted especially by feminist ideology. The pro-choice argument asserts the right and reflects the desire of women to make decisions about their bodies and all decisions related to reproduction. The removal of a fetus is regarded as one of the safest medical procedures in modern medicine, especially in the earliest portion of pregnancy known as the first trimester. According to medical research, abortions done safely with appropriate medical supervision during the first trimester do not risk a woman's reproductive health.[153]

Even in those countries where abortion is prohibited, women still pursue it illegally. As a result, the death rate among women is comparatively high, and such surgery, done by untrained hands in unsanitary conditions, may harm women's reproductive health significantly. This example demonstrates that despite legal barriers and outright bans, there will always be those women who choose to abort unwanted pregnancies, and they will always find the opportunity to do it. [154] The idea of pro-choice supposes that women are the ultimate authority over their own bodies. As such, women should decide themselves whether they should carry a pregnancy to term and deliver their child or terminate the pregnancy, through abortion, because making decisions about their own body and their own health is the inherent right of every human. From the perspective of moral relativism, every person has their own motivation for abortion or for giving birth to a child, and civilized society should respect and not interfere with these opinions.

About 629 thousand legal induced abortions are provided annually in the US. Approximately 13% of all pregnancies end in abortion. The majority of women who undergo abortion are in their 20s; 62% of women who undergo an abortion report a religious affiliation,

[152] James R. Beebe. 2010. "Moral Relativism in Context," 708.
[153] Ann Farmer. 2001. "Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality in Britain: An Historical Perspective," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 90(358): 139.
[154] Ibidem, 140.

and 92.7% of abortions were performed at less than 13 weeks gestation. [155] The majority of Americans, 62%, believe abortion should be legal all or most of the time. Of this, 29% of Americans say it should be legal in all cases and 33% say abortion should be legal in most cases. About a third (36%) say abortion should be illegal--8% in all cases and 28% in most cases. There remain wide religious divides on the issue of abortion. Eighty-three percent of religiously unaffiliated Americans state abortion should be legal in all or most cases; 60% of American Catholics also state abortion should be legal. Protestants, however, are more divided, with 48% expressing abortion should be legal compared to 50% that state it should be illegal in all or most cases. Regarding the belief that life begins at conception, 72% of white evangelicals express this belief versus only 44% of Catholics. Overall, 38% of Americans agree that the statement 'human life begins at conception, so a fetus is a person with rights' reflects their belief 'extremely' or 'very' well.[156] Regarding those Catholics that attend church weekly and practice regularly, 68% regard abortion as morally wrong. Fifty-five percent of those who identify as Catholic, comparatively, view abortion as morally wrong.[157] Despite this moral objection, the Catholic opinion on the legality of abortion differs significantly. In addition, "only 31% of lay Catholics agree that politicians supporting abortion rights should be denied communion, while 66% say that they should be allowed access to the sacrament."[158]

Abortion is not prohibited in the United States, even though there are certain restrictions concerning access to it in different states. It is necessary to recognize that the United States is, in fact, a republic in which each state may determine the limitations on abortion. Abortion remains a controversial topic that polarizes American society, and it is often used in political campaigns because of promises by political parties to either support or impede access to abortion. The states that traditionally vote for conservatives promote comparatively strict regulations of abortions while predominantly liberal states do not support the pro-life agenda. Instead, the more liberal states insist that abortion is the personal decision of every woman because it is her body. It is

[155] Centers for Disease Control. 2019. "CDCs Abortion Surveillance System FAQs." *Centers for Disease Control and prevention.* CDC.gov. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[156] Carrie Blazina. (15 Jul 2022). "Key facts about the Abortion Debate in America." *Pew Research Center.* Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[157] Russell Heimlich. (27 Feb 2012). "Few Catholics See Contraceptive Use as Morally Wrong." *Pew Research Center.* Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[158] AP-NORC. (3 Jun 2022). "Most Catholics Americans Disagree with Hardline Positions of Church Leadership." *APNORC at the University of Chicago.* Apnorc.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.

possible to hypothesize that abortion is a biased topic for Americans because it represents two completely different worldviews and perceptions of life. In general, the biases connected with abortion might not disappear because American society is ideologically divided.

As for the 1973 decision regarding abortion, women have the constitutional right to abortion based on an implied right to personal privacy emanating from the Nineth and Fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Furthermore, the court asserted that the fetus is not a person, but a "potential life" and, as such, does not have constitutional rights. The court further stated that the states themselves maintain the right to regulate abortion. Later cases limited abortion to pre-viability versus post viability, limiting the States' Rights to further limit abortion.[159]

Currently, abortion is being actively litigated in the American court systems. In the state of Mississippi, for example, a law banning most abortions after 15 weeks was written. This state's only abortion facility challenged the law as being too restrictive. The Supreme court upheld this law, thereby overturning the understood constitutional protection for abortion through Roe Vs Wade and returning the decision on abortion to each of the 50 individual states. The primary argument for further restriction on abortion is the understanding, through improved science over the past 50 years, that fetuses do, in fact, feel pain, are moving, and have fully formed organs. This argument negates the initial premise that a fetus is merely "potential life," rather, as noted by Justice Alito, the fetus also has an interest in life, not just the women.[160]

A second case is currently under litigation in the court system. This law, written in the state of Texas, has a peculiar and unprecedented structure in which any Texas citizen can sue an abortion provider for performing abortions after the fetal heartbeat can be detected, around 6 weeks gestation. The challenge with this law is, rather than government enforcement, the law essentially 'deputizes' private citizens, incentivizing them to sue abortion providers for $10,000. Many pro-life advocates judge that this is not an effective way to advance the cause and is more likely to be detrimental. At this point, the US Supreme Court has declined to hear the case insisting, rather, it be litigated at the State level first, noting in the words of Chief Justice John Roberts that the law

[159] USCCB. 2022. "Pro-Life activities: Summary of Roe vs. Wade and other key abortion cases." *USCCB.* https://www.usccb.org/ Retrieved Feb 19, 2022.
[160] Julie Asher, Catholic News Services. (2021 Dec 2). "By toppling Roe v. Wade, Supreme Court could finally end 'tragic trail of human carnage,' pro-life advocates say." *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. retrieved Feb 19, 2022.

is, "not only unusual, but unprecedented."[161] These two cases illustrate that the movement to restrict abortion is presently more than any other time in recent American history. Time will judge the success of this movement in an increasingly secular society.

Contraception, or birth control, is the deliberate use of artificial methods or techniques intended to prevent pregnancy. Throughout the 20th century, a multitude of mechanisms have developed to effectively prevent pregnancy, through contraception, that ensure the safety of sexual relationships and reduce the probability of conception. These modalities include barrier, spermicidal, hormonal, long-acting implantable devices, emergency contraception and surgical sterilization. The most effective and irreversible contraception is surgical sterilization, through tubal ligation for women and vasectomy for men. Among these comparatively safe methods of birth control, the most commonly used are hormonal pills for women and barrier contraception, such as condoms, that also protect people from sexually transmitted diseases. These methods of contraception, combined with sex education, are effective means of reducing the level of teenage pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies.[162]

Few US Catholics regard the use of contraception as morally wrong. In fact, only 15% report the belief that use of contraception is morally wrong and 41% state that it is not morally wrong. Additionally, 36% state that the use of contraception is not a moral issue. Even for those Catholics who attend church weekly, just 27% state that its use is morally wrong.[163]

The secular society promotes the idea that contraception should include a barrier method because its use reduces the risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. The Catholic Church, conversely, advocates for abstinence outside of marriage and renounces the idea that sexual freedom and promiscuous sex are positive aspects of human sexuality. As a result, the Church emphasizes the importance of education about morality and appropriate behavior, especially among young people because sexual relationships, without emotional connection and true commitment, may be harmful to the adolescent's psyche. Given the stark difference in approach toward human sexuality, it may be difficult for religious people to find the balance between secular

[161] Brian Fraga. (2021 Sept 16). *"*Even Some Catholic Pro-lifers Have Concerns About Texas' Abortion Law.*"* *National Catholic Register*. In www.ncregister.org. Retrieved Feb. 21, 2022.
[162]Ann Farmer. 2001. "Feminists, Abortion and Sexuality in Britain: An Historical Perspective," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 90(358): 142.
[163] Russell Heimlich. (27 Feb 2012). "Few Catholics See Contraceptive Use as Morally Wrong." *Pew Research Center.* www.pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.

culture and Christian norms of behavior. Perhaps, the most challenging task facing the Catholic Church, and other like-minded religious organizations, is addressing adolescents in their religious communities who are tempted by the dominant secular culture in the United States and who strive for the character strength to live according to their faith.

There is much emphasis on sex education in American schools. Adolescents are instructed about safe sex and contraception in the prepubescent and pubescent years. This education is touted as a means to prevent teenage pregnancies. At the same time, some parents oppose sex education aimed toward this age group, noting that 13 years as too immature to comprehend information pertaining to pregnancy prevention and sexual health. These initiatives aimed at providing education about contraception and sexual disease prevention include providing free barrier contraception, including condoms. Some parents argue that providing this access may elicit an interest in sexuality that not all adolescents might have at this age. This proactive approach toward sexual education is the direct consequence of the dominance of the secular culture that features the idea that sex should not be taboo in a progressive society. Hence, it is critical to educate children about contraception and rules of behavior in sexual life.

Beyond these concerns related to sexual education, the governor of the state of Florida, Ronald DeSantis, advocated to further protect parental rights regarding what is taught in sexual education in public schools, and at what grade level these conversations are permitted. He and the Republican legislators within the state of Florida, passed a law specifically prohibiting instruction that is not age appropriate, described as children from kindergarten through grade 3 (typically 7-9 years of age). This law specifically targeted discussion related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Furthermore, the law requires that the parents of children be notified if there is a change in a child's mental, emotional, or physical health or well-being.[164] This law demonstrates the conservative drive to return the conversation related to sexual education to parents. Since its proposal and passing, there has been much media attention, both in support and against this law, further highlighting the plurality regarding sexual education of youth in American society and the extent to which moral relativistic views have pushed the conversation related to sexual education, even with children.

[164] Staff of Governor Ronald DeSantis. (2022 Mar 28). "Governor Ron DeSantis Signs Historic Bill to Protect Parental Rights in Education." *Florida.gov*. In www.flgov.com. Retrieved October 17, 2022.

c. Relativism in the Sphere of Order and Organization of Social Life

Moral relativism is neither individualistic subjectivism nor collective subjectivism. Individuals often make this logical mistake when they confuse their subjective perspective with moral relativism that presupposes those moral values and principles depend on the person's view, culture, and overall context. Philosophers assert that moral relativism is likened to a country's law. The ubiquitous theme between the law and moral relativism is that they are both applicable to a particular society. When the person whose perspective differs from the opinion of the majority, one must be ready to defend one's view on the terms that society finds acceptable. In other words, moral relativism permits the person to have their own values and beliefs, but it infers that these values are not radically opposed to the ideas held by most people in the community. The person who chooses moral relativism agrees to argue with society even though this theory supposes that people should accept these views and not criticize them.[165]

This perspective corresponds to the basic principles of moral relativism that are described in the following assumptions:

> Normative ethical propositions that are true when assessed by you (in certain contexts) may be false when assessed by me (in other contexts). Normative ethical propositions that are true when assessed by members of your culture (in certain contexts) may be false when assessed by members of my culture (in other contexts).[166]

Moral relativism made American society more individualistic and diverse because it promotes the idea that the values of every person are unique. The absence of objective moral truths makes it more diverse because people do not try to correspond to the static and traditional roles that are ascribed to them by society. It is possible to state that moral relativism made society more oriented toward self-expression and emphasizes freedom in individual choices. Beebe writes:

> There are no absolute moral truths. What's right for your culture may not be what's right for my culture. There are absolute truths in science and mathematics. Moral relativism is true for everyone at all times and at all places. No set of moral values, practices, or beliefs is any better than any other.[167]

[165] Philip E. Devine. 1984. "Relativism," *The Monist* 67(3): 406.
[166] James R. Beebe. 2010. "Moral Relativism in Context," 704.
[167] Ibidem, 707.

It is difficult to evaluate the long-term consequences of moral relativism on American society at large. From one point of view, it is the culmination of the secularist culture and the apogee of diversity because it expands liberal trends on all spheres of life that were unchangeable for a long time due to moral constraints. From another point of view, the absence of moral rules and ethical judgments is a biased phenomenon that might lead to the loss of moral orientation that helps many people to make decisions in life. This position is often used by the Catholic clergy and believers who think that moral restrictions are critical in the adequate formation of the person. It is especially difficult to form one's identity in childhood and adolescence when a young person may not discern right from wrong. It is possible to hypothesize that future generations of young people might struggle to understand the context necessary to make moral choices.

Moral relativism asserts that people from different cultures may develop divergent attitudes toward the same ideas. The cultural context in which an individual is born, raised, and resides will influence their identification and determine their worldview. For instance, the views of a woman from the Catholic Latin American family on marriage and childbirth likely differ significantly from the views of an atheist secular woman from the United States. The Catholic Latin American woman might perceive the traditional family with several children and residing with elderly parents as the cultural norm. This familial construct might be strange for an atheist American woman who thinks that cohabitation with a long-term partner without children is acceptable.[168]

These cultural differences demonstrate that people form their moral values based on their upbringing, social and cultural background, religious or ideological views. These influences help them to form their identities. These aspects contribute to society's diversity, and the theory of moral relativism that remains actively promoted in the 21st century United States justifies this diversity. Gubernskaya writes that these social and cultural changes that are evident in all spheres of life are determined by the shift from traditionalist and materialist values to secular-rational and post-materialist values. Among post-materialist values are tolerance of people to distinct views, homosexuality, divorce, abortion. The change is dramatic when post-materialist values are compared to materialist values that promote traditional gender roles, make dominance in the patriarchal society, and the importance of children and family in human life. These tendencies are

[168] Zoya Gubernskaya. 2010. "Changing Attitudes Toward Marriage and Children in Six Countries," *Sociological Perspectives* 53(2): 180.

global and contribute to international cultural and social change.[169]

The question is whether these cultural changes are negative or positive. The evaluation of moral relativism's impact on society is biased. Both traditionalists and liberals cite evidence that supports their position. The Catholic Church regards moral relativist tendencies as potentially dangerous ideas that ruin people's ethical thinking and popularize sinful behavior as the morally acceptable norm. Traditional and materialist values have allowed human civilization to survive for centuries and to improve the overall level of life. It is possible to assume that the consequences of the post-materialist values, and the popularization of the ideas of moral relativism, will become clear to future generations because they are still relatively innovative for American society.

Contemporary moral social and cultural discourse is based on the principles of moral relativism. It assumes the absence of an objective and stable set of moral rules, individualism, and emphasis on the unique system of values that are intrinsic to the individual person. Globalization, secularism, and moral relativism are interconnected because all three components demonstrate the movement from traditional morality to a more flexible ethical view on reality and human interactions in society.

Articulating ethical principles according to which contemporary society lives is challenging as is accurately describing the norms of morality. It is not right to introduce the notion of the new set of moral rules that are based on the denial of all rules. Society cannot function adequately when all individuals live according to their norms of morality. Laws regulate the things that are acceptable in the contemporary American community. At the same time, the views on questions connected with personal identity and individual choices are diverse and liberal.

It is possible to assume that the contemporary moral, social, and cultural discourse is still progressing through the stage of active formation. This discourse aims at making American culture and society more inclusive for all people regardless of their differences and their ability to correspond to artificial norms imposed by the traditionalist society. Many changes in the past decades reflect natural and appropriate moral progression rather than moral relativity. Rightly, these changes also focus on promoting social justice principles such as equality. The new morality attempts to facilitate satisfaction and happiness with life circumstances, which makes this

[169] Ibidem, 181.

motivation similar to the traditionalist perspective. The divergence between traditional and liberal approaches to morality, and the means by which happiness is achieved, differs. Traditional morality imposes rules, while contemporary secular morality views rules as unnecessary limitations and works toward reducing or eliminating them. The question posed to the Catholic Church is whether it should attempt to intervene in the evolution of popular culture, by popularizing religious views on the same issues as discussed by secular society.

Capital punishment is another example of a morally biased question in which the secular and the religious perspectives differ completely. From the Christian point of view, people cannot decide whether the criminal has the right to live, or whether they must die. While society is morally obliged to protect its citizenry, condemning a criminal to death impedes the possibility of repentance and forgiveness. Although the use of the death penalty is gradually decreasing in the United States, most Americans favor keeping the death penalty but are concerned about its administration. In a Pew Research survey reported in June 2021, 78% of Americans note concerns with the possibility that innocent people may be put to death. This study additionally noted that since 2019, American opposition to the death penalty has been increasing, from 34 to 39%, even for those convicted for murder. Conservative Americans, or those that lean Republican, favor the death penalty for capital crimes more than liberal Americans, or those who lean Democrat; with both groups this favoritism has been declining over the past few years. In 2019, 84% of Republicans favored the death penalty, this decreased to 77% in 2021. For Democrats, this decreased from 49% in 2019 to 46% in 2021.[170]

Capital punishment continues to be legal and enforced in many American states; while in other states, it remains prohibited. This dichotomy demonstrates that the death penalty is a disputable issue in secular American society, and the perspective on its legitimacy differs depending on a particular state. In addition, the federal government may impose the death penalty in the federal penal system. Among the crimes that warrant the death penalty by the United States federal government are: murder, drug trafficking, state treason, terrorism, espionage, rape of a child, etc. Although the death penalty may be imposed for the aforementioned crimes, it is exclusively enforced for murder in the United States. Interestingly enough, some countries like

[170] Pew Research Center. 2021. "Most Americans Favor the Death Penalty Despite Concerns About its Administration." In www.pewresearch.org. Retrieved October 26, 2022.

Saudi Arabia, Iran, or China, in addition to murder include other crimes such as separatism, economic crimes, and unlawful sexual behavior as crimes punishable by death. Punishment by death for these crimes is considered excessive from the perspective of the modern United States.[171] This example illustrates the lack of unanimous view on the severity of crimes that warrant capital punishment. This variation makes defining what crimes warrant the death penalty rather subjective.

Both believers and atheists, question the validity of the death penalty as an acceptable form of punishment in modern society. Those who support capital punishment assert, in certain cases, that capital punishment is the only means to adequately provide sufficient retribution for the evil of the crime. An illustration often offered justifying the death penalty is a crime that involved an extreme loss of human life. In this example, condemning a criminal such as a terrorist whose actions resulted in the violent deaths of hundreds of innocent people, seems inadequate, especially if indisputable evidence of guilt was known. At the same time, the crimes that deserve the death penalty, are different in various countries, which affirms the effects of moral relativity related to capital punishment. The lack of consensus on capital punishment calls into question the capacity of society, both secular and religious, to rightly and justly determine which crimes warrant death and ensure only the guilty are punished in this way.

The COVID 19 pandemic raised several ethical dilemmas connected with vaccine mandates; all of these dilemmas represent different sides of a moral problem. The first dilemma related to the vaccine presented at the onset of its availability. There were people who wanted to be vaccinated but, because there was a shortage during the pandemic, the medical systems and governments were required to ration available supplies and prioritize its administration based on risk and benefit. For example, administration of the vaccines prioritized elderly persons with chronic diseases over a younger adult based on their risk for severe illness, hospitalization, and death due to their weakened immune system. Comparatively, adults with no prior health issues were vaccinated only once all vulnerable groups of citizens were vaccinated or offered vaccination. The second ethical dilemma concerning the vaccine is obligatory vaccination of certain categories of employees who work with the public, such as healthcare workers, and their risk of losing

[171] David F. Greenberg, and Valerie West. 2008. "Siting the Death Penalty Internationally," *Law & Social Inquiry* 33(2): 297.

employment for declining that vaccination. Some of these workers might oppose obligatory vaccination, deeming mandatory vaccination to be an infringement of their rights to make decisions about their own health freely. The third ethical dilemma centers around an individual's own moral obligation to be vaccinated for the benefit of society. Vaccination demonstrates caring for another people's health. Even if an individual is not destined to become seriously ill from infection, vaccination reduces transmission. As a large proportion of society becomes vaccinated, the nation develops herd immunity and, through this immunity, fewer people will become infected and suffer from COVID.[172]

These ethical dilemmas show that there is a serious division in American society. Not all Americans agree that the life of another person is as valuable as their own, nor that every member of the community is obliged to do everything possible to protect vulnerable populations. Furthermore, there is a profound amount of conflicting information readily available to the public that perpetuates confusion and mistrust of the vaccines. Both this relentless individualism and tide of misinformation have led to the spread of the *anti-vaxxers* movement. Members of this movement purport that refusing to vaccinate and to wear masks is their right. At the same time, anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers do not acknowledge that these decisions infringe on the rights of other Americans who do not share their principles.[173]

There is conflict between the personal rights of the individual and the perception of the common good regarding the situation with COVID-19 pandemic and vaccination. It is critical to recognize that COVID-19 is an aggressive virus with airborne transmission via small respiratory droplets. As a result, failure to wear a mask and to preserve social distancing potentially endangers the health of others. From one point of view, the decision to vaccinate and to wear a mask is personal because individuals have the right to make their own decisions concerning their own health. Alternatively, the airborne infection endangers the common good, which means that the refusal to wear masks and to vaccinate is the egoistic desire of the individual who disregards the needs of the community. The government cannot universally and indefinitely make these preventive measures obligatory because doing so would be against the norms of democracy, which

[172] Kasper Raus, Eric Mortier, Kristof Eeckloo. 2022. "Ethical reflections on Covid-19 vaccines." *International Journal of Clinical and Laboratory Medicine* 77(3): 600. In https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17843286.2021.1925027. Retrieve February 21, 2022.
[173] Ibidem, 601.

advocates for individual rights, allowing people to decide for themselves.

The Catholic Church has been consistent in its support of vaccination from COVID. This vaccine support mirrors its stance for this and other public health decrees that prioritize saving lives, even if there is potential conflict with other Catholic doctrine. Such was the case with the COVID vaccines. It is known that cells obtained from fetal material were used in the testing, and in some cases the production, of vaccines. In the absence of a vaccine made without these concerns, "Catholic doctrine enables this judgment, because it distinguishes between 'material' vs. formal cooperation with evil when it can be justified 'for proportionally serious reasons'—in creating lifesaving medicines. Francis has also encouraged the Catholic faithful to get vaccinated, calling it 'an act of love.'"[174]

Civil law is the key aspect in the formation of the secular society. It regulates interactions of citizens while remaining indifferent to religious norms, which makes all people in the country equal, regardless of their religious affiliation. In 1991, many American states revised their original constitutions. These revisions modernized the existing legislation thereby allowing policymakers to adapt the law to the requirements of contemporary society. Therefore, civil law contributed to the political and social stability in the United States. This civil law constructed within the framework of the Constitution allows all people to live according to one set of rules.[175]

Historically, American states acquired their legal systems from European countries that settled colonies on the new continent. Prior to the American Revolution, all states lived according to the common law, which was the heritage of the European tradition. Each state's laws were nuanced based on that region's character. Following the formation of the Republic, the founding fathers drafted the Constitution which provides the framework for federal law and its interaction with the states. Common law and civil law have different functions, which demonstrates that the choice of the legal system needs to satisfy the requirements of modernity and the overall social and political context. The researchers describe this difference in the following words:

> Civil law codes provide the core of the law - general principles are systematically and exhaustively exposed in codes and particular statutes complete them… Common law statutes, on the other hand,

[174] Susan Breitzer. (2021 Oct 21). "The Catholic Church's embrace of coronavirus vaccines is consistent with past practice." *The Washington Post.* www.washingtonpost.com. Retrieved Feb 21, 2022.
[175] Daniel Berkowitz, and Karen Clay. 2005. "American Civil Law Origins: Implications for State Constitutions." *American Law and Economics Review* 7(1): 62-63.

> complete the case law, in which the latter contains the core of the law expressed through specific rules applying to specific facts… This difference in style is linked to the function of statutes. Civilian statutory general principles need not be explained, precisely because they are not read restrictively (not being exceptions) but need to be stated concisely if the code is to be exhaustive. Common law statutory provisions need not be concise, because they cover only the specific part of the law to be reformed but must be precise because the common law courts restrict rules to the specific facts they are intended to cover.[176]

It is possible to conclude that civil law proposes all members of the society have equal rights and imposes the same obligations on them. These rules are especially important in the secular society, where the ideas of moral relativism predominate. Civil law provides the boundaries and the constructs dictating which actions are unacceptable. Civil law is unrelated to religious law, such as the canon law that regulates the lives of religious people. The Catholic Church does not oppose civil law and regards it as the optimal solution in regulating the secular society where there are people who belong to different confessions or are not religiously affiliated. Civil law permits the government to preserve order and peace, which are essential in community life.[177] It is possible to conclude that religion makes people law-abiding and oriented to a moral lifestyle, which are the basic characteristics of the person who supports the order in society. Civil law, in turn, promotes the same ideals, which demonstrates that is the necessary component in promoting decent and regulated behavior among secular individuals.

4. The Technological Revolution and its Impact on Religious Life

The technological revolution is defined as an era of accelerated technological progress characterized by new innovations whose rapid application and diffusion through society results in abrupt and significant change. It is the process of changing older lifestyles and habits by implementing new technologies into the lives of people, which leads to the change in the society on the cultural level. Technological revolution implies the improvement of the level of life in the country, an increase of human efficiency and overall productivity. It is the formation of new means of production that require new skills from people. Moreover, technological revolution invariably

[176] Daniel Berkowitz, and Karen Clay. 2005. "American Civil Law Origins: Implications for State Constitutions." *American Law and Economics Review* 7(1): 65.
[177] Brian J. Benestad. 2011. "Civil Society and the Church." In *Church, State, and Society: An Introduction to Catholic Social Doctrine",* 215-53. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press): 216.

influences other spheres of human activity, including the economy, political life, society, and culture.

a. Historical Context of the Technological Revolution in the USA

There were several technological revolutions in the history of humanity. For example, the Industrial revolution of the 19th century changed manufacturing with factories and more efficient production means, which increased the output and facilitated the work process. The appearance of personal computers and their expansion in the 1990s was also a technological revolution transitioning the world from analog to digital. This process was gradual, initially hindered by limited access to personal computers in the early half of the 1990s. This hindrance persisted because personal computers were very expensive, generally difficult to use, and had comparatively narrow functions.[178]

The 21st century, contrarily, is marked by the rapid development of technologies that affect the daily lives of all people. Presently, it is impossible to imagine life in modern American society without using the Internet and smartphones that allow people to access the information they need easily and to seamlessly contact people who live in other countries. The smartphone permits people to communicate, work, buy products and services, receive an education, take photos, watch live-streamed videos, etc. In other words, easy access to the Internet and personal gadgets revolutionized the way people live dramatically.

The digital or technological revolution initiated its foothold in the sphere of telecommunications and information in 1975; it is still happening today. This technological revolution is characterized by the shift from analog and mechanical electronic technology to the digital format of technology. Moreover, the technological revolution has resulted in the mass production of these innovative products. For example, at the beginning of the technological revolution, people could buy cassette tapes and vinyl records to listen to the music of their choice. In the 1980s, these formats were replaced by compact discs and then digital recordings, in the form of MP3 files, that are stored in their personal computers.[179] This change made music easier to

[178] A. Walter Dorn. 2016. *Smart Peacekeeping: Toward Tech-Enabled UN Operations. Report*, (New York: International Peace Institute): 2.
[179] Carol A. Corrado, and Hulten Charles R. 2010. "How Do You Measure a 'Technological Revolution'?" *The American Economic Review* 100(2): 100.

access for many people and more convenient to store, which illustrates that the technological revolution makes processes less complicated.

In the 1970s, the first computers and game consoles appeared. The first large public uses for these technologies were business and entertainment. This technology revolutionized the business sphere because people could transmit business information including invoices, records, analysis into the digital format. Moreover, it introduced new opportunities for leisure because people were able to play video games at home and read books on their personal computer. In the 1980s, personal computers had become more widespread among largely upper-middle class Americans, and with this people received the opportunity to listen to electronic music, to watch movies on computers. According to statistical information, in 1989 approximately 30% of households with children had personal computers. It was a sign that young people adopted new technologies with enthusiasm.[180]

By 2000, more than 65% of households in the United States had personal computers and Internet access, and by 2005 the number of people who used the Internet regularly increased dramatically. Even television changed the format of broadcasting from analog to digital. According to recent estimates, almost 70% of Americans have a smartphone and use it actively, which illustrates that technologies have become an integral part of life for the majority of modern people.[181] Technological progress in the United States was gradual and stable. Americans were exposed to new technology year by year, and the change of their lifestyle was comparatively mild.

In general technology users are more likely than non-users to be involved in almost all kinds of groups—this includes religion. Seventy-nine percent of Americans who were active in religious and spiritual organizations use the internet. This is actually greater than those who are not involved in religion, at 76%. Of these, comparatively, 58% of those active in religion groups also regularly use social networking platforms, while 64% of those that do not partake in religious groups are active in social networking platforms. This difference is thought to correlate with age; those Americans that are active in religion or spiritual groups tend to be older. These statistics demonstrate that those active in religious or spiritual groups are using technology at similar rates to the overall population. Interestingly, cell phone users who attend religious services monthly

[180] Ibidem, 101.
[181] Ibidem, 101-102.

were heavy users of their cell phones for such tasks as texting, accessing the internet, instant messaging and emailing.[182]

The prevalence of internet use is particularly concerning for religious institutions when one considers the work of Allen Downey, a computer scientist at the Olin College of Engineering in Massachusetts. His analysis noted that while religious disaffiliation is a result of several factors, the most controversial of these is the rise of the internet. His data comes from the General Social Survey, produced by the University of Chicago, of nearly 9000 people annually since 1972. Specifically, when analyzing the questions, "what is your religious preference?" and "in what religion were you raised, and controlling for such factors as age, level of education, socioeconomic group, and other social determinants, including religious upbringing and education level, he noted that the increase in internet use from 1980 to present directly matched the decrease in religious affiliation, an approximate 25% drop. This research implies that since 1990, the increase of internet use has indeed had a significant influence on religious disaffiliation. He additionally noted two other factors contributing to the collective increase in religious disaffiliation—drop in religious upbringing and increase in college-level education, collectively accounting for 50% of decline in affiliation.[183] This data demonstrates that although the faithful may use these technologies to remain connected in this digital age, as noted above, the prevalence of this technology has also had a profoundly detrimental impact on religious affiliation.

Beyond digital technology, there is a strong relationship between levels of religious commitment and views on biotechnology, especially as it pertains to gene editing. Specifically, a survey of Christians, including Protestants and Catholics, noted if the development of gene editing required the use of embryonic testing, that would be considered taking this technology too far. [184] Unquestionably, if this decline in religious affiliation continues and, by extension, change in beliefs due to moral relativism, these views will likely change too.

[182] Jim Jansen. (2011 Dec 23). "The Civic and Community Engagement of Religiously Active Americans" *Pew Research Center.* Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[183] Emerging Technology from the arXiv. (4 April 2014). "MIT Technology Review: How the Internet is Taking Away America's Religion." *MIT Technology Review.* Technologyreview.com. Retrieved November 11, 2022.
[184] Courtney Johnson, Cary Lynne Thigpen and Cary Funk. (9 Feb 2021). "On the intersection of Science and Religion." *Pew Science and Religion.* Pewtrust.org. Retrieved March 23, 2023.

b. The Use of Technology in the Improvement of Human Existence

Technology made access to information and communication easier, which contributed to equality in education. Through an online platform, technology facilitates access to multiple educational resources that are readily available regardless of location. Moreover, this technology also facilitates communication with others with similar academic interests. An example of this access to information for research and information become especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, through cyberspace, people can get free and consistent access to content, like streaming videos or audio, and even educational resources. Hence, personal development and education become easier to access for everyone, which facilitates academic endeavors when physical access to these opportunities are limited due to location or time constraints. The significant increase in online education, including that in the realm of higher education or university, has permitted large swaths of the population to obtain specialization of their choice.[185]

The popularization of social media has allowed people to communicate more easily regardless of distance. This access has permitted families to remain in real-time contact across the globe. Additionally, social media allows individuals to find a community of friends online, which potentially may reduce isolation and loneliness. For example, a person who lives in a remote village can join the church community on Facebook and connect with like-minded individuals participating in dialogue regarding life and faith. This access to others through social media has the potential to enhance feelings that they are not alone and reassure them that their opinions and participation are valuable.

It is necessary to mention that technologies improve the daily lives of people on other levels that are not connected with communication and education. The appearance of "smart" house technologies makes the actions that people perform every day automatic. For example, the robot vacuum cleaner makes human life easier and saves people much time since it can be programmed to perform the function of cleaning. The development of artificial intelligence allows robots to be used in places where human lives might be endangered as well. The military, firefighters, and other rescuers use robots with artificial intelligence to help them perform their work, especially if that

[185] Richard Silberglitt et al. 2006. *The Global Technology Revolution 2020, In-Depth Analyses: Bio/Nano/Materials/Information Trends, Drivers, Barriers, and Social Implications,* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation): 13.

work has the potential to endanger their lives or those of others. This benevolent use for technology, in different spheres, improves and protects human life.

c. Humanization and Dehumanization of Technology

The majority of Americans use smartphones to check social media and messengers regularly. Although there is significant value in being connected, there is a dark side too. This constant connection to social media is distracting and interferes with an individual ability to concentrate on their thoughts, emotions, and life. Scrolling the news on Facebook or Instagram does not allow people to concentrate on their work because it is difficult to shift attention from one source of information to another. Moreover, this information is passive. The active participation of the person who consumes this content is not assumed. As a result, the person does not truly interact with other people through these platforms, and social media gives them only the illusion of communication and human connection. Some scholars assert that Internet communication does not establish an emotional connection between people, which makes interaction unempathetic.[186] The loss of empathy is the primary manifestation of dehumanization through technology in modern society.

Contrarily, technology increasingly displays anthropomorphic attributes. By taking on these attributes, developers intend to use technology to serve the needs of its users. An issue connected with the humanization of technology is the personal connection that people feel towards their gadgets. Individuals often find it difficult to control the time they spend on social media, checking the news and uploading new photos, for example. Social media often becomes an obsession that people cannot substitute with prolific work or self-improvement. With the need to remain connected, users display behaviors seen in other addictions. As a result, they feel anxious without their smartphone and access to the Internet. This problem is especially widespread among adolescents, which harms their intellectual, physical, and emotional development. Often, they prefer to live online instead of 'in life.' At the same time, adults also develop such addictions that take much time from the normal and necessary functions of adult life.

The proliferation of the use of technology and its prolific consumption of time is of great concern as well. As of 2021, 31% of Americans note that they are 'almost constantly' online,

[186] Ibidem, 15.

compared to 21% in 2015. Furthermore, more than 85% of Americans are online at least daily. Adults under the age of 50 are, not surprisingly, the most connected. Forty-four percent of 18 to 49-year-old American adults report that they go online nearly constantly, compared to 22% of those ages 50 to 64 years.[187]

At the same time, it is possible to have healthy communications through social media. The type of communication depends on the person and their choices. It is possible to participate in discussions using one's own name in the trusted community in social media, intentionally engaging in conversion rather than just passively scrolling through posts, feeds, or the news. In this case, Internet communication will have all the positive characteristics of real-life communication and thereby avoid its dehumanization attributes.

d. Dangers Arising from the Misuse of Digital Technology/Dependence on Technology

New technology contributed to the appearance of new dangers that reflect the modern digital agenda. For instance, there are options for surveillance that nefarious individuals, organizations, and governments use that infringe on human rights that are not regulated by contemporary legislation, because the precedent is new. Many spheres of human activity have become digital, which makes it problematic to control them. For example, the popularization of cryptocurrencies allows people to have unregistered income, elude paying taxes, and to buy prohibited things like weapons or drugs in the Darknet because there is no technical opportunity to find the owner of the cryptocurrency. It also makes such illegal spheres as drug dealing, terrorism, selling and buying weapons, and human trafficking possible and impossible to control.[188] As a result, these technologies have enabled an increase of uncontrollable criminal activity.

Another critical aspect associated with the misuse of technologies include criminal enterprises that target technologies used by many for commerce. Many individuals use web-based technologies to pay bills and make purchases with their credit cards. In doing so, they disclose much personal information on the Internet. Unfortunately, it has become easy to target and steal

[187] Andrew Perrin and Sara Atske. (26 Mar 2021). "About Three-in-Ten US Adults Say They Are 'almost constantly' Online." *Pew Research Center.* Pewresearch.org. Retrieved November 10, 2022.
[188] Richard Silberglitt et al. 2006. *The Global Technology Revolution 2020*, 17.

this data and ultimately misuse it; and this situation happens regularly. In general, the 21st century is marked by a significant increase in cybercrimes, and this sphere is still developing.[189]

It is necessary for people to understand that communication on the Internet is not different from real-life interactions. Technological development and popularization made fraud easier for criminals to anonymously capitalize on current privacy protections on the Internet. Additionally, people are often careless about their private information when they buy products or services online or send personal information to others. Although many friendly people communicate on the Internet, some criminals can use the private information of other individuals, blackmail, use access to other people's credit cards to steal money, etc. As a result, caution is warranted when private information may be exposed online because it can be misused.

Sometimes, it is easy to insult the person on the Internet, writing comments that this person might not say in person. Most concerningly, are the reports of cyberbullying and aggressive attacks perpetrated through social media on individuals. These include reports of increased depression and even, tragically, suicide. Understanding that there is no significant difference between Christian behavior online and offline is one of the things that the faithful should remember when they use the Internet.

An increase in digital awareness is necessary. Everyone who lives in modern society should understand how technologies function and the implications of their misuse. Even when the person does not use the computer or the Internet for work, they use technologies in other spheres of life, which makes technological awareness necessary. The Catholic Church promotes the idea that believers should integrate into contemporary society and feel that they are its integral part. For this reason, promoting education about the responsible use of technology is among the priorities of the Catholic Church in the United States. Doing so demonstrates care for its congregation and a genuine desire to protect its congregants from harm resulting from its misuse and abuse.

At the inception of the twenty-first century, we are witnessing dynamic social and cultural processes in American society. The first part of this dissertation illustrates the main directions of cultural evolution in the fields of secularization, globalization, moral relativism, and modern digital technologies. The data presented conveys that these processes have had significant impact

[189] Ibidem, 16.

on the religious life of Americans. The Catholic Church in the USA, which wishes to reach not only Her followers but also all people of good will with Her message of salvation, cannot ignore these cultural and social processes in Her pastoral strategy, because these processes constitute both positive and increasingly perilous implications on the development of faith and communion with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. How the Catholic Church in the United States perceives and evaluates the above cultural processes, and how it tries to respond to the challenges arising from them, will subsequently be presented in the second and third parts of this dissertation.

II. The Teaching of the Church in the USA and Theological Evaluation of Social and Cultural Changes

Part II of this dissertation makes a theological assessment of social and cultural changes in the United States' society in the 21st century in light of the teaching of the Church – prioritizing the Catholic Church in the United States. This follows the methodical paradigm, See-Judge-Act, as proposed by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, known by the paradigm as "Judge". Stemming the tide of societal change is not an attainable objective by the Catholic Church nor any other institution; how the Church responds, mitigates, interacts with the impact of these changes is within the purview of the Church. Failure to do so is to the Church's detriment. The evaluation of the ways in which the Catholic Church faces secularization, globalization, moral relativism and the technological revolution is paramount.

The first section of Part II assesses the Church's teaching on secularism and its theological evaluation. This part evaluates the Church's assessment of the pluralism of the organization of social life, interpretation, and evaluation of the manifestations of cultural pluralism, assessment of the dangers of religious indifferentism, and the positive and negative manifestations of doctrinal discourse in the community of the Catholic Church. The next section of Part II evaluates the Church's position on the phenomenon of globalization, assessment of the different manifestations of social disintegration, the Church's teaching on social and economic exclusion, the Church's approach to consumerism as a lifestyle and the Church's response to poverty and its causes. This is followed by an analysis of the Church's teaching on moral relativism and its influence on the religious life of the faithful, including a criticism of moral relativism related to the sphere of ethics of human sexuality, Catholic principles of married life and caring for the stability of the family, and assessment of relativism in the sphere of order and organization of social life. The final section of Part II undertakes a theological assessment of the digital revolution and its impact on the religious life of the faithful including the Church's general stance on the digital revolution, assessment of the risks arising from the use and abuse of digital technologies, the Church's guidelines for the positive use of digital technologies, and the positive and negative impact of the use of digital technologies in the pastoral ministries of the Church (including improving

efficiencies, worship and function of the Church, representation of the Church through the media or other technologies, and the disadvantages therein).

Understanding the theological response of the Church as predicated on Biblical teachings concerning secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and the humanistic impact of technological advancements that has been presented through papal teachings, the catechism of the Catholic Church, and other Church documents, is critical to analyzing the adequacy of response thus far. Understanding the Church's role in such topics as advocating for social justice, helping the poor and organizing institutional charity, as well as stewardship of the earth, permits analysis of the Church's response. The critique of these Catholic documents permits a comprehensive evaluation of the religious perspective toward the social and cultural changes of the 21st century.

1. The Church's Teaching on Secularism and its Theological Evaluation

The Catholic Church has a comparatively long tradition of interacting with the secular society. The authority of the Church in political and social life was doubted from the end of the 19th century in the Western world, which marked the beginning of the secularization of political, social, and cultural life. The United States was initially a secular state, even though Christianity was the dominant religion that established the moral code of behavior and formed socially acceptable traditions.[190]

a. Assessment of the Pluralism of the Organization of Social Life

Catholic scholars divide positive and negative attributes of secularism, asserting that there is a dramatic difference between the militant and the conciliatory approaches promoted by atheist and secularist movements that exist in the contemporary United States. Those groups which advocate societal transition to a radical or militant form of secularism strive to abolish or eliminate religion as a social institution. At this time the number of radicals is smaller than the number of secularists who have moderate conciliatory views on this topic. Interestingly, this division shows that secular American society is disintegrating, and there is no single opinion about the goals and

[190] Joseph Langston et al. 2017. "Inside the Minds and Movement of America's Nonbelievers: Organizational Functions, (Non)Participation, and Attitudes Toward Religion." In *Organized Secularism in the United States*, ed. R. T. Cragun, C. Manning, & L. L. Fazzino. (Boston: De Gruyter): 191-220.

the methods of secularism. The legal level of accommodation toward religious beliefs in modern secular society in the United States remains high, which should contribute to a peaceful co-existence of the Catholic Church and the secular culture; however, the social acceptance of religion has become increasingly hostile. Within secular culture, the true meaning of separation of Church and state is misconstrued. As Bishop Thomas J. Olmstead from Diocese of Phoenix describes:

> The separation of Church and state all too often is used as an excuse to silence people of faith and to discourage them from legitimately participating in the public square. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution, of course, does not advocate for a separation of Church and state at all, but rather the protection of religious freedom from the state. Our founding fathers intended all persons to have the equal right to voice their opinions, including those based on religious convictions. Even more, they understood that it was imperative that the state not infringe upon the religious beliefs of its citizens. The Constitution is aimed at allowing all people to have a voice in the government, including those whose voice is distinctively religious. In other words, there is nothing in the Constitution excluding people from bringing their faith to the public square.[191]

In his assessment on the pluralism of the organization of American social life, in the forward to Bishop Olmstead's above work, Archbishop Jose H. Gomez of Los Angeles stated:

> In twenty-first century America, the Church confronts a highly secularized and ethnically diversified society shaped by the economic forces of globalization, a technocratic mentality, and a consumeristic lifestyle. Our society is centered on the individual self—with an often-exaggerated preoccupation for individual unlimited rights and their freedoms for self-definition and self-invention. Happiness and meaning in American life are defined increasingly according to individualistic concerns for material pleasure and comfort. And we see many signs that, as a people, we are becoming more withdrawn from our communities and from the duties of our common life. More and more we seem less able to have empathy for those we don't know […]. In America and abroad, the people of our globalized society seem to tolerate a growing list of injustices and indignities. To name just a few: widespread abortion; the "quiet" euthanasia of the old and the sick; birth control policies targeting the poor and "unfit"; racial discrimination; a widening gap between poor and rich; pollution of the environment, especially in poor and minority communities; pornography and drug addiction; the death penalty and scandalous conditions in our prisons; the erosion of religious liberty; and a broken immigration system that breaks up families and leaves a

[191] Thomas J. Olmstead. 2016. "Catholics in the Public Square" *A Catholic Bishop Teaches…Shepherd's Voice Series.* (Revised, 4th ed). (Charlotte, NC, Saint Benedict Press): 235.

permanent underclass living in the shadows of our prosperity.[192]

Secularism is centered not on God, rather it is a system of practices and doctrines based on a humanistic view in which morals are human centered. In a purely secularistic society, education, government, criminal and civil law, media and entertainment do not have a religious base, and therefore are subject to changing ideologies. Secularism promotes the idea that religion is nothing but a historical reflection of past ideologies. The more our nation embraces secular ideologies, the more it fails. As the Bible taught of Israel, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25) wickedness, perversion, and sin became the norm. Without religion, without God, without a moral compass, society degrades because the will of individuals supersedes the common good. As residents of a secularized society, it is critical to recall that, though we are *in* the world, we are not *of* the world (Romans 2:2; James 4:4, 1 John 2:15). As such, we must "become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom [we] should shine as lights in the world." (Philippians 2:15).

Vatican II marked the transition from the opposition of ideals between the Catholic Church and the secular society to a more open dialogue. The outcome of the Council was opposed by Catholic traditionalists who resisted pivoting from tradition. Initially, the traditionalists did not concede to the need to capitulate to the secularist Western cultural discourse that opposed religion. Despite initial aversion to discourse, the Council marked the change in the posture of the Catholic Church toward other religions and ideologies. According to the teaching of Vatican II, non-Christian moral and spiritual values are regarded as equally worthy of attention and respect. It is possible to find the evidence that illustrates this idea in such documents as "The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium," "The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, Ad Gentes," "The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, Nostra Aetate," and "The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes."

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, "Lumen Gentium" emphasizes the role of the Church in salvation and the sanctification of people, asserting that fulfilling the Christian mission is impossible without the Church. This topic was further developed in "Dominus Jesus," declared by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, reaffirming "the unicity and salvific

[192] Ibidem, 75.

universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church."[193] This dogma presupposes that non-Catholics and non-Christians have a chance for salvation. The Church states in this document:

> With the expression subsist in, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that 'outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and truth.'[194]

"The Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, Ad Gentes" focuses on the missionary activity of the Catholic Church. The document emphasizes the importance of participation of the Church in the life of the secular society. For example, charity for the poor is among the priorities for Catholics. Evangelization is also critical in secular society because it allows the Church to promote its views and to spread God's work among people. "Ad Gentes" states that the Christian community is the representation of the divine presence in the modern world, and interactions of believers with the secular society help to spread God's wisdom and blessing among those who are not part of the Catholic community. As it is written in the document, "The church has not been really founded, and is not yet fully alive, nor is it a perfect sign of Christ among men, unless there is a laity worthy of the name working along with the hierarchy."[195] This excerpt expresses that the Catholic congregation constitutes the most valuable resource of the Church that makes it function.

In the document "The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, Nostra Aetate" the Second Vatican Council further emphasized the importance of dialogue between the Catholic Church and non-Catholics. As the declaration delineates, all people share the same origin and God's spirit, which means that neither their physical differences nor their ideological distinctions should influence their communication with the Catholic Church. Specifically, the Second Vatican Council stated, "No foundation, therefore, remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned."[196] True respect for people who have other views makes Catholics true Christians who follow the example of Jesus who loved everyone regardless of their differences.

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[193] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. "'Dominus Jesus': on the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, 3 (6 Aug 2000).
[194] Ibidem, 16.
[195] "Decree Ad Gentes on the Mission Activity of the Church, 21 (7 Dec 1965).
[196] "The Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, "Nostra Aetate," (28 Oct 1965).

"The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes" is the general description of the position of the Catholic Church in the contemporary world. Many complexities make the interaction between the Church and secular society challenging. Moral values change quickly, and the Church needs to prepare responses, without compromising Her own values, to these shifting paradigms. Therefore, it is critical for the Church to preserve its traditional doctrine and to fit into the contemporary secular social and cultural life. Helping people spiritually, trying to eliminate poverty and social injustice are among the priorities of the Catholic Church in the secular world, which correlates with secular principles of humanism.

The publication of the Catechism in 1992 was the reaction of the Catholic Church to the changing cultural and social discourse in the secularized Western world, especially in the industrialized countries. The Catechism unequivocally states that human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.[197] This precept determines the attitude of the Holy See toward all morally biased questions. The Catholic Church's stance is resolute on the value of human dignity.

Pope John Paul II expressed, and this was further echoed by Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, that there is an imperative need for the transformation of the Catholic Church to facilitate its keeping pace with the changing secular society. He considered secularization a dangerous phenomenon that is wrought with the potential for negative consequences. He further expressed that there was a vital need in opposing secularism that destroys human lives, ruins destinies, and distorts the perception of morality and ethics. The negative consequences of secularization are prolonged, and it is difficult to quantitate the long-term effects of secularization on human dignity and life.[198]

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) assesses the most current trends in American society, including the attitude toward secularization, and responds to these trends with guidance. As secular ideologies predominate culture, the obligation to respond amplifies. An example of this assessment and call for response is illustrated in Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles' presidential address to the USCCB. The archbishop articulates the urgent need for the Church to face the cultural secularization of the United States in the following:

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[197] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2258.
[198] Kenneth S. Zagacki. 2001. "Pope John Paul II and the Crusade against Communism: A Case Study in Secular and Sacred Time," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4(4): 689-690.

> The challenge of ministering at this moment is how to maintain some kind of perspective. We live in a noisy, distracted media culture. And our society has moved hard and fast toward an uncompromising secularism; traditional norms and values are being tested like never before […], the trials of this age are spiritual. There's a struggle going on for the human heart. This change of age is an apostolic moment, it's a new opening for the Gospel. All of us are being called to step up and to open every door for Jesus Christ, to shine his light into every area of our culture and society; to bring every heart to a new encounter with the living God. […] Now more than ever, the Church needs a bold pastoral strategy to communicate the Gospel, to use every media platform to turn hearts and minds toward Christ, to call our people to be great saints.[199]

As published on the USCCB website, Robert J. Spitzer, SJ, PhD, former president of Gonzaga Jesuit University and president of the Magis Center of Reason and Faith, describes ways to confront the secularization of modern society, claiming that it has destructive consequences on morality. He writes that God calls people to achieve high moral standards, while the secular culture, that is dominant among young people, leads to the abandonment of their faith in God. The future of American morality depends upon the ability of people to preserve their faith and to promote God's wisdom. At the same time, the increasing number of unbelievers illustrates that Christianity is presently failing to satisfy the spiritual needs of people who live in contemporary industrialized countries like the United States.[200]

Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York noted in his address at *Fordham Law School's Institute on Religion, Law & Lawyer's Work*, that the solution to the uncompromisingly secular movement and its misplaced compassion that erroneously promotes the culture of death is to "recapture the essential relationship between the civil law and the moral law, and to foster a culture in which all human life is valued and authentic human development is possible."[201] To illustrate this culture of death, where secularistic the ideologies of pragmatism, utilitarianism, and consumerism, "[…] chisel away at the 'Culture of Life,' forces that seem to be ascendant in culture

[199] Archbishop Jose H. Gomez. (17 Nov 2022). "Archbishop Jose H Gomez of Los Angeles' Presidential Address to USCCB at their annual fall assembly in Baltimore. MD on Nov 15, 2022. "Recap of US Bishops' Annual Fall Plenary in Baltimore." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved January 31, 2023.
[200] Robert J. Spitzer. 2019. "Confronting Secularism Today," *USCCB*. In https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/catechetical-sunday/enlisting-witnesses/confronting-secularism-today. Retrieved February 10, 2023.
[201] Cardinal Timothy Dolan. (24 Jan 2012). "Law & the Gospel of Life: Inaugural Address in the Law and Gospel of Life Series." Fordham University School of Law. Retrieved from catholicculture.org February 10, 2023.

and normative in making laws"[202] Cardinal Dolan uses the following example:

> Life is basically about 'being,' and law's most noble purpose is to safeguard the 'being' of life from the rawest preferences of 'having' and 'doing.' Take, for example, the fact of the 'being' of the baby in the womb. That 'being,' that life, trumps the values of usefulness, efficiency, convenience, privacy, or satisfaction of one's needs. A culture of life with supportive laws guarantees this. A baby is useless and impractical from a raw, pragmatic, utilitarian, or consumeristic view […]. We have babies, if at all, to satisfy our desires, not to sacrifice for theirs; to fulfill our needs, not to invite us to spend the rest of our lives fulfilling their needs; to reward us, not because we want to give to them […]. We recognize that we humans are at our best when we give ourselves away in selfless love, and live no longer for ourselves, but for another […]. And nothing obeys the law of the gift more than a baby; nothing transforms from selfishness to selflessness more than a baby; nothing calls us from narcissistic self-absorption in a universe of one to a world of solidarity more than a baby. And nothing threatens a culture of civility, a civilization of love, a society of virtue and justice, nothing trespasses the law of the gift more, than a culture of death bolstered by laws which threaten rather than protect the unborn baby.[203]

The USCCB discusses reconciling Catholic ethics and secular ideology in the United States. The divergence of changing secular ideology from Catholic ethics continues; the chasm from this divergence leads to increasing conflicts between the Church and secular society. This chasm is especially apparent in the following: Life issues, including contraception, sterilization, abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment; the changing realities related to human sexuality including homosexuality, same-sex unions and gender ideologies; parenteral rights especially as it pertains to religious freedom, involvement in medical decisions related to their children, and the education of their children especially related to religious beliefs and the impact of secular ideologies on these beliefs. Although all of these topics will be discussed further in subsequent sections including *The Church's Teaching on Moral Relativism and Its Influence on the Religious life of the Faithful*, these topics are also discussed here to illustrate the conflicts between the Church and secular society, the evolving realities of this secularization, the widening chasm between the church and society, and the Church's assessment and response, in particular that of the USCCB and bishops to these urgent issues.

[202] Ibidem.
[203] Ibidem.

For example, Catholic healthcare professionals are compelled to compromise their views on euthanasia and abortion with the secular agenda. It is possible to illustrate this moral dilemma with the following lines from a statement by the USCCB Committee on Religious Liberty, published during Religious Liberty Week in 2021, regarding "Conscience Rights for Medical Professionals":

> In recent years, activists have sought to undermine the Church's mission by forcing Catholic hospitals to perform procedures that destroy human life and undermine human flourishing, such as sterilization, gender reassignment surgery, and even abortion. And not only do some activists sue Catholic institutions, but individuals who work in secular institutions may also find that their conscientious objection to abortion does not receive respect. A nurse in Vermont was forced to choose between her job and her faith when she was told by her employer that she had to participate in an abortion. It is unthinkable that we would undermine our mission to heal by destroying innocent life and harming the persons for whom we are called to care.[204]

Following the historic Supreme Court decision to end their previous decision known as Roe versus Wade, which provided protection for abortion access at the federal level USCCB Chairmen for the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Bishop Paul S Coakley, Pro-life Activities, Bishop William E. Lori, Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, Bishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, and on Migration, Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, signed and sent a letter the United States congress urging action on policies to stand in 'radical solidarity' with women, children and families. The responsibility to life is not limited to the issue of abortion. Respect of life, and respect of human dignity begins with conception, but extends throughout life. The US bishops acknowledge that support for women, children, and families should be priorities for the flourishing of society. In their letter to Congress, the bishops noted, "the post-Roe world presents uncertainties yet, amid them, an historic opportunity to redouble efforts toward a culture of life that respects and supports the dignity of every person at every stage […]. We implore you to place a high priority on policies that advance the health, safety, and flourishing of women, children and families." In this letter, they shared their vision for "an authentically life-affirming society that prioritizes the well-being of families," the bishops also appended, "specific policy recommendations to assist you [congress] in developing legislation to advance these goals."

[204] USCCB Committee on Religious Liberty. 2021. "Conscience Rights for Medical Professionals," Statement published during Religious Liberty Week, Jun 2021. *USCCB*, 2021. In https://www.usccb.org. Retrieved Feb 1, 2023.

Specifically, the bishops stated that they were "praying and working for changes in hearts and minds, circumstances and policy, that will help everyone to treasure each and every fellow human being in a society oriented to supporting children and their parents. In other words, we hope for the day when abortion is unthinkable because society has successfully reckoned with the challenges of raising children in the modern world and has decided to make the full flourishing of children and their families the highest goal, without anyone being excluded."[205]

The quote above illustrates that the secular American society does not usually compromise its values because they are the official position of the secular state. At the same time, a secular state guarantees all citizens freedom of religion. This opposition shows that when people need to decide which side they want to take in a biased situation, the priority often belongs to the secular perspective.[206] The concern to Catholics is that a hospital may not be able to refuse to provide abortion-because reproductive rights, or the right to abortion and birth control, are guaranteed by the secular government. Furthermore, for those hospitals and clinics choosing to permit abortions, the compromise for religious freedom reasoned by these hospitals is to permit religious objection to participating in the abortion procedure for staff members, such as a Catholic nurse or physician. The courts, thus far, have consistently protected the right of religious minorities to conscientiously object and abstain from participating in acts that they consider to be amoral.

The concern of conscientious objectors is, at the behest of their employers, that individuals may be coerced into participating in activities that they find objectionable. Religious objectors, such as Catholics, may not be guaranteed that their right to religious views will always be respected without a significant judicial battle. The simple fact that an employee might be compelled to participate in activities they find morally objectionable, or face a legal battle to defend their position, demonstrates that there is a serious imbalance between the tolerance of rights by secular people and respecting the rights of religious people in modern America. This concern regarding secular policies changes and their impact on religious freedom is an ever-present reality for the

[205] USCCB Chairmen, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Paul S Coakley, Chairman Committee on Pro-life Activities, William E. Lori, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, Salvatore J. Cordileone, Committee on Migration, Mario E. Dorsonville. (26 Oct 2022). Letter to US Congress, "Bishops Call for 'radical solidarity,' promoting the welfare of women and families." In www.sfarchdiocese.org. Retrieved Feb 1, 2023.

[206] Timothy Dolan, 2021. "Correcting the Narrative: Keynote Given at University of Notre Dame Religious Liberty Summit by Cardinal Timothy Dolan," *USCCB,* 2021. In https://www.usccb.org/committees/religious-liberty/cardinal-dolan-keynote-given-university-notre-dame-religious-liberty. Retrieved Feb 1, 2023.

Church in the United States. This collision between the Catholic Church and secular society's changing acceptance towards religious liberty is illustrated in the Bishops' response to the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) proposed regulation revisions to "Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, which would force health care workers to perform gender transition procedures, require health insurance issuers to cover them, and entertain a mandate to perform elective abortions. In response to the proposed changes and representing the USCCB Archbishop William E. Lori, Archbishop Paul S Coakley, Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan released the following statement:

> Catholics have been called to care for the sick since the earliest days of our faith. Today, the various agencies and social service ministries of the Catholic Church taken together are equivalent to the largest nonprofit health care provider in the country. We do this work in fulfillment of the direct command of Jesus Christ and in imitation of his divine ministry here on Earth. Catholic Health care ministries serve everyone, no matter their race, sex, belief system, or any other characteristic. The same excellent care will be provided in a Catholic hospital to all patients, including patients who identify as transgender, whether it be for a broken bone or for cancer, but we cannot do what our faith forbids. We object to harmful procedures, not to patients.[207]

In addition to issues regarding respect of human life, secular society's rapidly changing views regarding human sexuality requires the Church to advocate for the protection of religious freedoms, while respecting the humanity of transgender individuals, their families and their loved ones. Although this topic will be discussed further in the following section on Moral Relativism, the following paragraphs on this topic illustrate the recent history related to changing ideologies on gender in secular society and the effect and necessary response of the Church.

In its formal statement *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, the USCCB does not specifically address the issues related to transgenderism. The statement does, however, advocate for the respect of human dignity, acknowledges "the place of sexuality within God's plan for humanity, referencing "the complementary sexuality of man and

[207] USCCB, Joint statement of chairman of USCCB Archbishop William E Lori, USCCB Committee on Pro-life Activities, Archbishop Paul S. Coakley, Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone, Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth, and Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, committee for Religious Liberty. (27 July 2022). "Bishop Chairmen Condemn Harmful Regulations Forcing Gender Ideology and Potential Abortion on Health Care Workers and Religious Hospitals". USCCB.org. Retrieved Feb 6, 2023.

woman as a gift from God and ought to be respected as such."[208] Despite its relatively recent publication in 2006, the guidance fails to address the more recent and pervasive rise of transgender ideology in secular society and the intrusion of this ideology into the American educational system; rather the document more colloquially refers to "gay subcultures"[209] inadvertently missing the rate at which secularized society would attempt to mainstream these ideologies thus garnering acceptance.

The US Bishops do not rely exclusively on their collective opinion alone in assessing the changes in secular society and the potential impact of these changes related to the Church in the United States and the impact of these changes on the Church and the faithful. They utilized the assistance of ethicists and scientists as well. One such resource that provides assessment, guidance, and participates in the crafting of the US Bishops' response to the changing realities in American society is *The National Catholic Bioethics Center*. The mission of *The National Catholic Bioethics Center*, is to provide "education, guidance, and resources to the Church and society to uphold the dignity of the human person in healthcare and biomedical research."[210] The role of this organization is to provide guidance to clergy, religious and laity, especially regarding topics in human health care "as they face challenges in the care and the treatment of patients […]. The Center's mission transcends religious boundaries in its application of ethical reflection consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Magisterium to society-at-large as well as grapple with the complex issues posed by the rapid developments in medicine, science and biotechnology. The Center also pledges its fidelity to the magisterial teachings of the Church and to the bishops who [in turn] provide leadership and pastoral guidance to clergy and laity on complex bioethical issues."[211] Beyond the respect of human life, the changing realities surrounding gender ideology requires such assistance in the assessment and resultant guidance provided by the US Bishops. The rate by which secular society adapted from recognizing gender dysphoria as a mental disorder requiring psychiatric care to an accepted state of being necessitating medical assistance, is astonishing. This transition has placed the teachings of the Church squarely at odds with what has been now re-defined as health care. As noted by ethicist and director of publications at *The*

[208] USCCB. (14 Nov 2006). "Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In www.usccbpublishing. org. p. 1-2. Retrieved Feb 6, 2023.
[209] Ibidem, p. 22.
[210] The National Catholic Bioethics Center (n.d.). NCBC news. In www.ncbcenter.org. Retrieved March 31, 2023.
[211] Ibidem.

National Catholic Bioethics Center, Edward J. Furton, PhD:

> The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is the guidebook for psychiatric practice in medicine. In the fifth edition (DSM-5), published in 2013, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) significantly revised the section on gender identity disorder, which it renamed gender dysphoria. In previous editions, the conviction that one's sex did not match one's gender was treated as a mental disorder in need of psychiatric treatment. In DSM-5, the remedy for that same conviction was changed to hormonal and surgical procedures to give the patient the appearance of the opposite sex […] given the limited amount of medical evidence and the troubling character of what little there is, one has reason to think that the change in DSM-5 was motivated by social and ideological considerations rather than an analysis of relevant medical and epidemiological facts.[212]

Furton further makes the important distinction between gender dysphoria, that is "individuals with normal sexual physiognomy"[213] and persons born with physical ailments that distort their outward sexual characteristics, known as intersex:

> Those who are convinced that they are members of the opposite sex must be sharply distinguished from others who have physical abnormalities in sex development. The sexual identity of an intersex individual is ambiguous at the biological level, although there is almost always compelling genetic evidence one way or the other […]. Intersex conditions affect the body. Gender dysphoria affects the mind.[214]

The precarious positions in which the Church finds itself in regarding the 'medically' redefined management gender dysphoria (that being surgical and hormonal management rather than psychiatric care) and the increasing tendency of an uncompromisingly secular society to relegate abortion away from an issue of life and toward being accepted as 'merely' an aspect of women's health places it in direct odds with secular society. As noted above by the bishops representing the USCCB, collectively the Church is the largest not for profit health care provider in the United States. The argument of the secularists, as reframed in the context of providing health care, in refusing to provide these medical services the Church is denying access to health care to patients, and, as an insurance provider, denying access to its own employees as well. With this

[212] Edward J. Furton. 2017. "A Critique of 'Gender Dysphoria' in DSM-5." *Ethics & Medicine: A commentary of the National Catholic Bioethics Center on Health Care and Life Sciences* 42(7): 1.
[213] Ibidem, 1.
[214] Ibidem, 1-2.

argument, the secularists reframe the argument against the Church--away from a conscientious religious objection and toward one which, on its surface, makes the Church to appear as the entity lacking compassion for both the LGBTQ community and lacking compassion toward women by denying what has been redefined as 'basic' and 'necessary' health care. Society, in turn, is encouraged to be increasingly inclusive of these marginalized communities. Not accepting and using one's preferred pronouns, or allowing them to change their phenotypic appearance to match that gender with which they identify, is relegated to discrimination. Furthermore, not permitting abortion is relegated to 'abuse' of women by 'forcing' them to endure a pregnancy not of their desire.

Bishop Michael F. Burbidge of the Diocese of Arlington further expounds on the call to a compassionate response to transgender ideology without compromising the truth in the following:

> In the past decade, our culture has seen growing acceptance of transgender ideology—that is, the claim that a person's biological sex and personal identity have no necessary connection and could in fact contradict each other. According to this view, "human identity" is self-defined and "becomes the choice of the individual." Consequently, our culture is experiencing a rapid rise in the number of persons claiming an identity contrary to their biological sex. Attempts to accommodate such claims already have resulted in tremendous upheavals in our social, legal, and medical systems. This situation presents a serious challenge for all members of the Church because it presents a view of the human person contrary to the truth. It is of particular concern for our young people […]. Situations involving gender dysphoria must always be addressed with pastoral charity and compassion rooted in the truth […]. Indeed, charity always requires a clear presentation of the truth.[215]

In response to this furthering of transgender ideology in secular society, Archbishop Jerome Listecki of Milwaukee presented the following policy as a "guidance in applying the Church's moral teachings regarding the challenges presented by 'gender theory.'"[216] This policy was intended for use in parishes, organizations, and institution of the Catholic Church specifically in for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, but offered as a framework for other diocese as well, stating

[215] Michael F. Burbridge. (12 Aug 2021). Letter by Bishop Michael F. Burbridge on "A Catechesis on the Human Person and Gender Ideology." *Catholic Diocese of Arlington.* In www.arlingtondiocese.org. Retrieved February 6, 2023.
[216] Jerome Listecki. (Jan 2022). Guidance and Policy by Archbishop Jerome Listecki of Milwaukee, "Catechesis and Policy on Questions Concerning Gender Theory." In www.archmil.org. Retrieved February 6, 2023.

"as a general rule, in all interactions and policies, parishes, organizations, and institutions are to recognize only a person's biological sex. This policy applies, but is not limited to, all Church employees, personnel, volunteers, and those entrusted to the care of the Church, including all contracted vendors when they are on-site and may have contact with those entrusted to the care of the Church."[217] The policy specifically addresses the use of designations and pronouns other than that associated with one's biological sex and the use of 'preferred pronouns' as well as the use of facilities, such as restrooms and locker rooms, attire, athletics and extracurricular activities for students, single gender schools, medications if administered for the purpose of gender-reassignment, and the respectful approach to those who may be experiencing "tensions of concerns about their biological sex."[218]

An additional concern for the Church in the United States is that secular ideas are promoted among children and are part of the public-school curriculum, which is the basis for the domination of secularism in the United States. Children learn about different sexual and gender identities, safe sex practices, and other related topics under the guise of inclusion and public health, without the input of their parents and at ages younger than commonly accepted as the age of reason for a child. As a result, they have no opportunity to form their own perspective on these questions because they are exposed to information at an age earlier than life's experience would commonly demand. They form their perception of sexual life and gender identification based on the secular morality that is taught in public schools. The Catholic Church regards exposing youth to these preformed notions as potentially destructive and emphasizes the importance of moral Christian upbringing of children because the worldview is formed in childhood and adolescence.[219]

Bishop Michael Burbidge of the Diocese of Arlington further notes as it pertains to gender ideology and our youth, "Sexual difference is at the heart of family. Children need, and have a right to, a father and a mother […]. These truths about the human person, accessible to natural reason attain an extraordinary dignity and calling in the Christian view of the world. The body is not a limitation or confinement but one with the soul in the life of grace and glory to which the human person is called,"[220] He further notes "At its core, this belief in a 'transgender' identity

[217] Ibidem.
[218] Ibidem.
[219] USCCB Marriage and Family Life Ministries. 2021. "Walking with Families During the Year of Amoris Laetitia." *USCCB*. In https://www.usccb.org. Retrieved February 6, 2023.
[220] Michael F. Burbridge. (12 Aug 2021). Letter by Bishop Michael F. Burbridge on "A Catechesis on the Human

rejects the significance of the sexed body and seeks cultural, medical, and legal validation of the person's self-defined identity—an approach called 'gender affirmation.' Culturally, these claims have brought challenges to law, medicine, education, business, and religious freedom. They also raise significant pastoral challenges for both the shepherds and the faithful of the Diocese."[221]

Children are not raised in a protective bubble, separate from secular society; they are raised within the same pluralistic, secularized world in which the Catholic Church exists today. Just as a parent would dress their child before exposing them to the elements, so too must parents prepare their child to interact with the world in which they reside. In this way, Bishop Burbridge encourages parents to prepare their children to face the realities of secular society:

> You are the first and best teachers of your children. They will believe, pray, and love according to what they see, hear, and experience in your home. From you they will learn the truth of who they are, the dignity of the human body, the meaning of human sexuality, and the glory of their being children of God. Nothing can substitute for the school of the family. Still, you cannot fulfill this vocation by yourselves. The Church provides her teachings and pastoral care so that you can draw upon her wisdom and grace in teaching and caring for your children.[222]

Education of children, and the parental rights and responsibilities therein, remains essential in mitigating the effects of secularization in a pluralistic society. The USCCB stresses the importance of education for all children, but also the right for this education to be unimpeded by discrimination. In the USCCB publication *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States,* the USCCB emphasizes the right of parents as the "first and most important educators of their children" and they further note that parents "have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private, and religious schools." The USCCB also asserts that it is the government's responsibility to "help provide resources for parents, especially those of modest means, to exercise this basic right without discrimination. Students in all educational settings should have opportunities for moral and character formation consistent with the beliefs and responsibilities of their parents." In addition, the USCCB stresses the right to quality education, for all young people—including the poor and disabled—noting that they "need to have the

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Person and Gender Ideology." *Catholic Diocese of Arlington.* In www.arlingtondiocese.org. Retrieved February 6, 2023

[221] Ibidem.

[222] Ibidem.

opportunity to develop intellectually, morally, spiritually, and physically, allowing them to become good citizens who make socially and morally responsible decisions."[223]

Catechesis is critical to combat the secularization of our children. As Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas notes, "To really be Catholic from the basement to the pinnacle of the roof, every aspect of everything that a Catholic school does needs to be imbued with the beauty of the Faith. Sadly, too many Catholic schools today are more imbued with secular culture. They're compromised, lukewarm; they have faculty living and teaching contrary to the Faith. They indulge the same educational fads and political enthusiasms that the state schools do […] an audience is moved more by someone who is living the truth, not merely speaking it. This goes for young people especially […]. At every level, Catholic education needs to embrace that supernatural truth more. We've got to be authentic and teach real, orthodox Catholic truth and not compromise out of a false sense of respect for other beliefs. Certainly, we should never show disrespect for anyone, but we must remember that the greatest respect is to bring people to the truth."[224]

The USCCB Marriage and Family Life Ministries further supports and advocates for the role of parents in the education of their children and the valuable role they play in their children's' education as illustrated below:

> Understanding the love and valuable roles of a mother and a father, a child's right to receive that love, the importance of marriage, balanced parenting, the ethical formation of children, particularly in human sexuality, and more. Family life is the primary educational setting, especially in hope, for our journeys' end in Heaven.[225]

The Christian upbringing of children and adolescents is a major factor in the formation of the Catholic person. These age groups, in particular, reflect a developmental time frame when individuals form their perception of morality and understanding of ethical principles. For this reason, the USCCB describes the formative years, during which children and adolescents are receiving their primary and secondary school education, as the critical stage in spiritual upbringing and that that the faithful should be opposed to the indoctrination of the youth with purely secular

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[223] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, 39 (#82-83).
[224] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the laity in the Twenty-first Century.* (El Cajon, CA: Catholic Answers Press): 36-37.
[225] USCCB. Marriage and Family Life Ministries. 2021. "Walking with Families During the Year of Amoris Laetitia," p. 2. In https://www.usccb.org. Retrieved Oct 15, 2022.

views on morality that public schools in the United States promote. It is possible to conclude that social orientation and focus on young believers is among the priorities of the Catholic Church in the United States because adolescence and childhood are critical periods in personality formation. Young believers require more spiritual support than adults who have already formed their worldviews. Youths often experience a crisis of identity formation, which makes the work with students paramount for the American Catholic Church.

Christian and societal pluralism has come a long way, especially in the Catholic Church's laws, practices, and beliefs. The concept of Christian pluralism was foreign to Catholic belief until 1965, due to the conservative maturity of the Church, especially before the twenty-first century.[226] However, the contemporary societal organization enjoys Christian pluralism, especially after the Dignitatis Humanae of 1965 during the Second Vatican Council.[227] According to the "Dignitatis Humanae," a document on the Declaration on Religious Freedom on the Rights and Civil Freedoms in Matters Religious, the Counsel Fathers espoused the American model of separation of church and state, declaring the right to religious freedom for every human. This declaration promotes pluralism in American society and the Catholic community as it protects all individuals from coercion, from action or from association contrary to one's beliefs. Cardinal Ratzinger, one of the first supporters of Christian pluralism as commonly seen in the American Catholic Church, cited the need to accommodate divergent opinions on the human's road to salvation.[228]

American theologian, George Weigel, further supports this call for the need for support of religious freedom as fundamental to a pluralistic society. Religious freedom cannot be reduced to simply the right to participate in certain activities on Friday night and Saturday if you're Jewish, Saturday night or Sunday if you are Christian, Friday if you're Muslim. There is a public meaning to religious freedom. This is what is often contested today.[229]

In addition, other popes and American Catholic Church leaders have emphasized the need for pluralism and diversity in American society. For example, Pope Francis stated in his address to the United States Congress that:

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[226] David A. Hollinger. 2022. *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular*. (Princeton, Princeton University Press): 122.
[227] Ibidem.
[228] Devorah Schoenfeld. 2022. Chapter 7: 'Therefore do Maidens Love You': Passion and Pluralism in Jewish and Christian Song of Song Commentaries. In *A Companion to Comparative Theology*, ed. Pim Valkenberg, (Brill) pp. 150-169.
[229] Sebastian Gomes. (19 Oct 2020). "George Weigel: Religious freedom is a fundamental issue for Catholic voters." *America: The Jesuit Review.* Amerciamagazine.org. Retrieved November 11, 2022.

> In this land, the various religious denominations have greatly contributed to building and strengthening society. Therefore, it is important that today, as in the past, the voice of faith continues to be heard, for it is a voice of fraternity and love, which tries to bring out the best in each person and each society.[230]

This quote indicates Pope Francis' commitment to pluralism, recognizing the diversity and collaboration between Catholics and other denominations. Similarly, while speaking to a gathering in Philadelphia during his visit to the United States in 2015, Pope Francis stated, "Religious freedom certainly means the right to worship God, individually and in community, as our consciences dictate." Francis additionally said, "But religious liberty, by its nature, transcends places of worship and the private sphere of individuals and families,"[231] emphasizing the need for respect and collaboration between people of diverse religions. Therefore, each American citizen enjoys religious, political, and philosophical pluralism allowing them the freedom to freely associate with whatever religion they choose, participate equally in American society's political activities, and also allowing for the belief in multiple approaches to the truths about the world. Sociologist Peter L. Berger opines that it is no longer a question of whether pluralism exists in the Catholic Church in the U.S. but of how members of the Catholic Church practice pluralism.[232]

Though there are differences between Catholics and protestants, it is important to acknowledge the similarities in a spirit of Ecumenism without compromising that which is central to our beliefs as Catholics. As Bishop Joseph E. Strickland of Tyler notes when considering the Evangelical Protestants:

> So, we've got everything in the banquet of supernatural truth in the Catholic Church, but although the Evangelicals lack our provisions, many practices admirable faith and make great sacrifices to live it. Many of them have been staunch allies in defense of unborn life and in other battles between Christianity and the secular culture […]. On the life issues, on sexual morality, on the importance of traditional marriage, and on respect for this nation and its values, we are comfortable together

[230] Pope Francis. 2015. "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cuba, to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, Visit to the Joint Sessions of the United States Congress: Address of the Holy Father," United States Capitol, Washington DC, (24 Sept 2015). In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 16, 2022.
[231] Pope Francis. 2015. "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cuba, to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, Meeting for Religious Liberty with the Hispanic Community and Other Immigrants: Address of the Holy Father," Independence Mall, Philadelphia, PA (26 Sept 2015). In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 16, 2022.
[232] Jean Paul Sarrazin and Saira Pilar Redondo. 2022. "Pluralism versus Pluralization. How the Protection of Cultural Diversity Can Turn Against New Forms of Religious Diversity." *Columbia Internacional 109*: 115-137. DOI https://doi.org/10.7440/columbiant109.2022.05.

> as Catholics and Protestants. They are the salt of the earth […]. It's not Catholic truth versus Protestant truth. It's simply the truth. It is reality. Ecumenism is great and we want to be loving and friendly with everyone. But ultimately it has to be about more than a static dialogue or mutual understanding—it has to be about returning all Christians, even all people outside of Christian communities, to full communion with the Church.[233]

The Church has a right to a voice within America's secular, pluralistic society. It is not enough to relegate deeply held beliefs, issues of human rights and natural law, to merely personal beliefs. As Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York notes in reference to how Catholics and those of other professions, especially those in political leadership, should engage with a pluralistic society:

> I would say that America is at its best when religion has a place at the table. The genius of American democracy is when people of different moral tongues speak up, and that's what we're doing. On these cases, too, I think we need to be much more credible and try to get our act together in stating: Is it true that the Catholic Church is against same-sex marriage? Yes. Is it true that the Catholic Church is against abortion? Yes. But that's not the reason that we're trying to be so forceful here. We're also saying that these are issues of human rights, these are issues of natural law. In other words, this isn't about trying to impose specifically religious convictions on the entire country […]. We're speaking about issues here that are at the core of what we are as a republic. One does not have to be a person of faith, whether that faith be Catholic, Jewish, or Baptist, to hold these views. We're more speaking as Americans, as people of faith certainly, but we're making the argument on the basis of fundamental American values.[234]

Bishop Robert Barron of the Diocese of Winona-Rochester notes "in our increasingly secularized culture, we [Catholics]need a smart presentation on faith."[235] In 2017, Bishop Barron gave lectures to both Google and Facebook, noting that the intended audience was "not so much the convinced religious believer, but rather the outsider, the seeker, the skeptic."[236] He further noted that the "tone that I adopted for both lectures is rather elevated intellectually. This is because I am convinced that a dumbed-down religion, practiced across denominational divides for about the past fifty years, has been a disaster. When the 'new atheist' critiques arose fifteen years ago [early 2000s], most believers in God didn't have a clue how to respond to what were, basically,

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[233]Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the laity in the Twenty-first Century*, 38-39.
[234] Timothy Dolan, John L. Allen Jr. 2012. *A People of Hope.* (New York, Image Books), 91-92.
[235] Robert Barron. 2018. *Arguing Religion: A Bishop Speaks at Facebook and Google*. (Park Ridge IL: Word on Fire): 2.
[236] Ibidem.

tired arguments and crude caricatures. Especially in our increasingly secularized culture, we need a smart presentation of faith."[237] Bishop Barron further noted that "the more we cultivate rational speech around matters religious, the more peaceful our increasingly roiled culture will be."[238]

The above theological assessment of the pluralism of the organization of social life illustrates the rapid transition from the traditional American understanding of the separation of Church and state, to a present state that is becoming antagonistic toward religion. The social acceptance of religious beliefs has become increasingly hostile, making it extraordinarily challenging to maintain a peaceful coexistence between the Church and secular society—and yet, the Church still belongs at the table.

b. Interpretation and Evaluation of the Manifestations of Cultural Pluralism

Cultural pluralism entails the maintenance of unique cultural identities among smaller groups in society, with the acceptance and respect of these cultures by the dominant and other cultures within the same society. However, over the years, there has been a significant transformation in the manifestation of cultural pluralism in American society and among the Catholic faithful. As Pope Benedict XVI stated in "Verbum Domini":

> God does not reveal himself in the abstract, but by using languages, imagery and expressions that are bound to different cultures. This relationship has proved fruitful, as the history of the Church abundantly testifies. Today it is entering a new phase due to the spread of the Gospel and it taking root within different cultures, as well as more recent developments in the culture of the West. It calls in the first place for a recognition of the importance of culture as such for the life of every man and woman. The phenomenon of culture is, in its various aspects, an essential datum of human experience.[239]

The twenty-first century has seen a very high rise in the openness of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews to each other's religious, cultural practices, and traditions, providing a more significant opportunity for the contemporary manifestation of cultural pluralism in American society. One prominent manifestation of cultural pluralism in contemporary American society is intermarriages across religions without the need for one party to adopt the other's religion. Most ancient

[237] Ibidem, 2.
[238] Ibidem, 3.
[239] Pope Benedict XVI. 2010. "Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Verbum Domini" 109. In www.vatican.va.

religiously conservative societies were against inter religious marriages due to the need for one to convert to another religion. However, current American society allows for intermarriages between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and many other professions, with each party recognizing and respecting the other's practices and beliefs.

In addition, the integration of ethnic, cultural practices and religion also indicates the evolution and manifestation of cultural pluralism in the United States. The cultural and religious integration rate across the United States is almost at a similar level to that of colonization. This "ethnoreligious diversification had made the country more responsive to inclusive notions of community and more welcoming of the critical approaches to the world being advanced elsewhere." [240] Despite the small but significant Catholic population in the United States during its founding, statistics indicate that the Catholic religion currently enjoys the highest single largest affiliation among the United States population, with more than 23 percent of the population subscribing to Catholic belief.[241] This number majorly increased due to immigrants from Catholic cultures and the conversion of the dominant religions at the time. This statistic indicates how religious pluralism in the United States has grown over the years allowing the American Catholic community to grow from among the minor religions to the largest.

Given that the history and the present of the Catholic Church in America is that of an immigrant church, it is essential that Catholics respect their collective ethnic heritages, but also recognize that within this cultural pluralism, what has the power to unite is this same Catholicity. As Cardinal Timothy Dolan reflects on how pluralistic the Church is and "how united we are in the face of pluralism" he further notes, "In the Church, we are all at home, we're all in the home of Our Mother. And so, you're right, there's an overwhelming diversity in pluralism in the Catholic Church in the United States, but, essentially, we're united."[242]

Despite this Catholicity as a unifying factor, uniquely in America, an individual's perception of their relationship to the Church may impact their Catholic identity. As secularized American culture drifts further from having their core value based on natural law, faith, and Judeo-

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[240] David A. Hollinger. 2022. *Christianity's American Fate: How Religion Became More Conservative and Society More Secular*, 22.

[241] Central Intelligence Agency. 2022. *Field Listings – Religion*. *The World Factbook*. In https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/ Retrieved October 15, 2022.

[242] Timothy Dolan. 2009. "Unity in faith, pluralism of cultures: Interview with Archbishop Timothy Michael Dolan, new Metropolitan Archbishop of New York, interview by Giovanni Cubeddu" *30 Days in the Church and in the World*. In www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_21357_l3.htm. Retrieved Feb 13, 2023.

Christian morality, prioritizing this Catholicity as the central tenet to the Catholic American, identity becomes an increasing priority. As Cardinal Dolan further noted:

> The topic of the identity of the Catholic Church in the United States is a very crucial question…the major question we face is, do we call ourselves "American Catholics" or "Catholic Americans" […] we should call ourselves "Catholic Americans." We are not Americans who happen to be Catholic. We are Catholics who live in the U.S. The normative value in our life should be our Catholic faith: the decisions we make, the values we hold dear, the priorities that we have in our life, the way we think and dream and act and plan would be most formed by our Catholic faith. Now that's the ideal, of course, because we also know that perhaps the major challenge to us is that the culture around us has more normative value than our faith […]. The major challenge in the history of the Catholic Church in the U.S. is how to be both a good Catholic and a patriotic American. Catholic leaders are always saying it is not only possible that one can be a good Catholic and a good American, it is natural, because American values at their core are based on natural law, faith, and Judeo-Christian morality […] we also know that we have to decide what is of the essence of our faith, which we can never compromise, and what is not essential that we can assimilate or change to adapt to the culture. We had to adapt, we had to assimilate, we had to change some things, but that didn't affect the essence of the faith.[243]

If the Church disregards this upwelling of secularized culture, believing that its authority alone is enough to attract new faithful, it sins because it is blinded by pride. There are many passages in the Holy Scripture that describe the importance of the mission. Believers should popularize the words of God and attract newcomers to the Church. As it is written in Matthew 28:19-20, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age." These lines illustrate that the Church is compelled to spread Christian knowledge, which makes the opposition to secularism popularization obligatory in contemporary American society.

It is vital for Christians to talk about their faith and to promote a religious worldview. It is written in Romans 10:13-14: for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?"

[243] Ibidem.

Catholicism in modern America is not often associated with a fiery brand of evangelizing and ordinary Catholics are often not known to be outwardly evangelical. As Cardinal Dolan notes, there is a reasonable explanation for this:

> One, I think, is a theological reason. I don't think Catholics are comfortable talking about their Faith. They were raised theologically in a way that meekness, humility, is considered a virtue, and we're not in-your-face- bible thumpers. Second, there is a cultural thing. I don't think we can exaggerate the fact that part of the Catholic ethos, the Catholic upbringing in America, is that we should avoid talking about religion in public. That's just how you're raised […]. There's a cultural element there, meaning we don't really want to talk about religion because it's not polite. Third, our people aren't equipped with a vocabulary to talk about this stuff [evangelizing].[244]

The secular culture promotes its values actively through mass media and popular culture, and traditionalist Christian ideology cannot compete with this mass marketing. Furthermore, the journey of faith is difficult for most, especially the young, requiring discipline and self-sacrifice. Moreover, the secular path is perceived as easier with little resistance or effort required; this path is contrary to that of religion and may even obscure the knowledge that the path of faith even exists as an option. Even if a youth may consider this path, peer pressure may deter adequate consideration. It is challenging for young people to oppose their peers who prefer secular entertainment instead of religious services. Despite this promotion of self-serving secular ideals, the disciplines necessary for religious values seem off putting and difficult, yet this path to truth is the path to freedom. As the International Theological Commission (ITC)Sub-commission for religious freedom notes:

> Human persons have a right to religious freedom because we have a duty to seek the truth, to which we must respond in freedom (no. 19). "If freedom grows with the truth, it is equally evident that truth must exist in a climate of freedom in which it can flourish" (no. 41). The "horizon of conviviality" enables us to engage in a "dialogue of truth that all seek" (no. 30). It is because religious freedom is ordered to truth that religion must be willing to engage with all who seek the truth. Religion cannot forsake truth merely to achieve a false peace in a pluralistic society. "In the name of the pluralism of society, Christians cannot favor solutions that compromise the protection of fundamental ethical needs for the common good" (no. 65). Religious traditions should facilitate and engage in dialogue, which includes speaking the truth clearly as well as listening to the other.[245]

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[244] Timothy Dolan, John L. Allen Jr. 2012. *A People of Hope.* (New York, Image Books): 205-206.
[245] International Theological Commission. Sub-Commission for Religious Freedom. 21 Mar 2019. "Religious

Cardinal Dolan, Committee Chairman for the USCCB Committee for Religious liberty further noted on reflection of this document, "while the ITC sees as a positive development the clearer distinction between Church and state, along with the widespread embrace of the free exercise of religion in pluralistic societies, it criticizes certain conceptions that shape modern liberal states."[246]

Beyond the right to free exercise of religion, Bishop Robert Barron asserts that it is dangerous to the very survival of democracy to eradicate religion from the public space. He notes, "the invocations of God or the presence of religious symbols in the public space have nothing to do with what the Founders meant by the establishment of an official religion—a practice whose dangerous consequences they knew only too well […] the aggressive eradication of religion from the public forum does serious damage to our democracy […]. Take out of consideration the creator, who made every person in love and destined each for eternal life, and properly inalienable rights promptly disappear. And individuals become, in very short order, the objects of political manipulation and domination. To see the truth of this, all we have to do is look at the totalitarianisms of the last century, governments that were grounded in an explicit denial of God […]. Democracies appropriately involve the debating of public policy, the election of officials, the existence of a free press, and the rule of law, but those practices and customs are rooted in certain conditions that are not themselves the object of deliberation. They are founded in moral absolutes—among which are liberty, equality, the inviolability of life, and the right to pursue happiness, these non-negotiable truths are in turn logically correlative to belief in a Creator God. This is why I would hold, precisely as an American, that it is supremely dangerous to our democracy to eradicate references to God from public spaces."[247]

Free will is a central tenet in Christianity. The love of God and of others is a choice made of this free will. Religious views and the absence of faith in God are free choices that every individual makes independently. Central to the tenet is that freedom of choice is a primary characteristic of humans whom God created in His image. It is said in Joshua 24:15: "But if serving

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Freedom for the Good of All: Theological Approaches and Contemporary Challenges." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

[246] Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York and Chairman of the Committee for Religious Liberty. 2019. "First Freedom Blog: For the Good of All." In https://www.usccb.org/committees/religious-liberty/first-freedom-blog/Cardinal-Dolan-for-the-good-of-all. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

[247] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries): 149-151.

the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living." Hence, from the Christian point of view, secularism is a free and acceptable choice, and Christians should be tolerant of opposing faiths and the worldview of others. The Church, for its part, remains open and accessible to those people who choose Christianity for spiritual support.

In the same way that we, as Catholics, must advocate for religious freedoms, we must also advocate for those same freedoms for other denominations and other professions. As Pope Benedict noted in his visit to the United States:

> The task of upholding religious freedom is never completed. New situations and challenges invite citizens and leaders to reflect on how their decisions respect this basic human right. Protecting religious freedom within the rule of law does not guarantee that peoples — particularly minorities — will be spared from unjust forms of discrimination and prejudice. This requires constant effort on the part of all members of society to ensure that citizens are afforded the opportunity to worship peaceably and to pass on their religious heritage to their children.[248]

When contemplating the prejudices and bigotries that exist in any society, but often become pronounced in a pluralistic society that regularly experiences waves of immigration, Catholics are called to be on the forefront of this dialogue for justice. As noted by Cardinal Wilton Daniel Gregory, Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Washington regarding race relations and bigotries:

> […] There's an awful lot on our plate in terms of the world in which we live. What I would like to make sure that our people, our Catholic people, realize is that it's not a matter of choosing one and ignoring the other. It's a matter of seeing them as interrelated hatred. Whether it be directed towards people of color, immigrants, Jews, Muslims, hatred is never acceptable. When we as Catholics look at the plate that is before us, in terms of, how do we respond to these societal challenges, we have to begin by saying, you cannot be, as Pope Francis said, a true Christian and an anti-Semite. Pope Francis has written extensively, and often, and certainly his encyclical, "Fratelli Tutti," is a prime example of calling us together as brothers and sisters and acknowledging that the problems and the challenges that we face, we do so under the light of the Gospel, but also with a great desire to draw

[248] Pope Benedict XVI. (17 Apr 2008). "Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters, Meeting with Representatives of Other Religions, Address of His Holiness, Benedict XVI." Washington DC. In www.vatican.va. Retrieved Feb 12, 2023.

this human family together more effectively. So, we Catholics have to balance all of those things.[249]

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego further expressed our call as Christians to recognize the danger of rhetoric and mischaracterization of religious minorities, especially in the United States. These comments were rendered in response to the limitations made on travel from Muslim majority countries with histories of government sponsored terrorism. McElroy decried the "intolerable exclusion and marginalization, which both the followers of Islam and Christians are facing in our tormented world…It is unconscionable that in the United States, in the 21st century, one of the great world religions is caricatured, misrepresented and despised so widely in our culture," he said about followers of Islam. "It is even more appalling that Muslims have now become the object of government actions, carefully and deliberately designed in laws to target a specific religious community." McElroy said, "By linking the Muslim community to that threat in a discriminatory manner, we undermine our national security and dishonor our national heritage." McElroy praised the sharing of theological reflections: "It is not enough to clarify our commonalities and differences on a deep theological level, or even to publish these findings, if we do not take steps to broadly convey this deepened level of friendship and truth to Catholics and Muslims more broadly." It is not merely or even primarily theological ignorance, but rather "ignorance of not knowing one another as brother and sister precisely in our religious identities."[250]

The USCCB Cultural Diversity Committee Mandate is to "bring Catholics from various culturally diverse communities into a fuller participation in the faith, life, and evangelizing mission of the Church. The committee especially works to promote an awareness of cultural diversity within all the committees in the USCCB." The USCCB further expresses, "we live at a time when the encounter of languages, races, and cultures is more intense than ever. Mass media, especially the Internet, travel, immigration, and an increasingly globalized economy are bringing people together more and more. The experience of diversity is therefore more characteristic of our times and brings with its serious challenges and great opportunities."[251] To capitalize on these opportunities, the USCCB published the statement *Go and Make Disciples*. They express that with

[249] M. J. O'Loughlin. (2022). *Interview of Cardinal Wilton Daniel Gregory:* "Why Cardinal Gregory became an advocate for Catholic-Jewish dialogue—and wants young Catholics to get involved." *America: The Jesuit Review*. In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved Feb 12, 2023.

[250] H. Schlumpf. 2017. *Bishop McElroy: Discrimination against Muslims 'unconscionable'*. National Catholic Reporter. In https://www.ncronline.org/bishop-mcelroy-discrimination-against-muslims-unconscionable. Retrieved March 10, 2023.

[251] USCCB (n.d.) "USCCB Cultural Diversity Committee Mandate." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 10, 2023.

outreach and intentional dialogue based on a clear sense of Catholic identity, the Church will be able to (1) to deepen the faith of Catholics so that they might share their faith with others, (2) to invite all in the United States to hear the message of salvation, and (3) to foster gospel values in society.[252]

The universality of Catholic Tradition provides constancy in a diverse, pluralistic culture. This universality is an attractive attribute for the generations of immigrants that form the body of the faithful in the Catholic Church in America. For generations, these different ethnic groups have left their impact upon the Church. So too have different professions and denominations. As Cardinal Dolan notes, reflecting upon the melting pot of the metropolis of New York:

> I just happened to live in Rome for many years. I find New York to be very much like Rome in its catholicity, in its universality, in its all-embracing character. This is the first feature. The Archdiocese of New York, which I'm now honored to serve as shepherd, is a wonderful mosaic of the universality of the Church. Every day, when I go into St Patrick's Cathedral, I see Filipinos, Chinese, Africans, Latinos, people from Haiti, people of German background, Irish background, Italian background […]. Every Sunday, somewhere in the Archdiocese, we have Mass in thirty-three languages – thirty-three languages! Is that not tremendous, the universality of the Church?[253]

The above theological interpretation and evaluation of the manifestation of cultural pluralism demonstrates the challenges facing the Church in America. We know that there has been a significant transformation in the manifestations of cultural pluralism in American Society and among the Catholic faithful. Colloquially, America is the Melting Pot of the world. This vast and increasing mass of cultural and religious ideologies risks dilution of beliefs and increasing secularization. Therefore, it is critical for Catholics in America to embrace the truth that we are not Americans who happen to be Catholic, but Catholics who live in the United States.

c. Assessment of the Dangers of Religious Indifferentism

Religious indifferentism has falsely been touted since the age of Enlightenment as a sign of intellectual maturity. Freedom, as it pertains to humanity, suggests that we are our own masters. Morally and theologically human freedom is not absolute. Democracy, in its turn, gives the illusion

[252] USCCB. 2002. "Go and Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 10, 2023.
[253] Timothy Dolan. 2009. "Unity in faith, pluralism of cultures: Interview with Archbishop Timothy Michael Dolan, new Metropolitan Archbishop of New York, interview by Giovanni Cubedu" *30 Days in the Church and in the World*. In www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_21357_l3.htm, Retrieved Feb 13, 2023.

of freedom based on the notion that the members of a democratic society have absolute freedom. Religion is perceived as placing limitations on humanity's freedoms. In secular society, there is a false assumption that the acceptance of others in a pluralistic, democratic society means diminishing the importance of one's own beliefs. In a statement by the USCCB regarding the need for Catholic Americans to properly balance their faith in a pluralistic society, they encouraged Catholics to be cautious about assimilating so deeply in society that they become indifferent to the necessity of the teachings of the Church in our social life. The risk of this indifference to faith as our guiding principle, believing democracy alone is sufficient, is illustrated below:

> Since the entry of Catholics into the U.S. political mainstream, believers have struggled to balance their faith with the perceived demands of democratic pluralism […]. Real pluralism depends on people of conviction struggling vigorously to advance their beliefs by every ethical and legal means at their disposal. Today, Catholics risk cooperating in a false pluralism. Secular society will allow believers to have whatever moral convictions they please — as long as they keep them in the private preserves of their consciences, in their homes and churches, and out of the public arena. Democracy is not a substitute for morality, nor a panacea for immorality. Its value stands — or falls — with the values which it embodies and promotes. Only tireless promotion of the truth about the human person can infuse democracy with the right values. This is what Jesus meant when He asked us to be leaven in society. American Catholics have long sought to assimilate into U.S. cultural life. But in assimilating, we have too often been digested. We have been changed by our culture too much, and we have changed it not enough. If we are leaven, we must bring to our culture the whole Gospel, which is a Gospel of life and joy.[254]

Moreover, reliance on traditional 'inherited' religions, such as Catholicism, as a birth right and as a reliable means to propagate the faith in a pluralistic secular society is insufficient. In the same token, just because a person states they are Catholic, does not mean that they are practicing, rather their affiliation may be akin to a cultural affiliation and not a religious affiliation. As Cardinal Dolan noted:

> In traditional Catholic countries, sometimes faith is taken for granted, but in the U.S., you can't take your faith for granted. You must choose it, because every day you are in an environment where your faith will be challenged and questioned, so you have to choose it, and you embrace it, and you love it and you learn it. I'm not saying you always do that, because part of our problem too is that, even in traditional Catholic families, sometimes people take the faith for granted and drift away

[254] USCCB. (n.d.). "Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics, A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of the United States." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved Feb 13, 2023.

> from it [...]. It used to be that if you were born a Catholic, you never left the Church. You might stop practicing, but you would always identify yourself as a Catholic […]. That's not true anymore. So now you hear some of our people claiming, "I may have been raised a Catholic, but now I have left the Church, I am no longer a Catholic, and I've joined another religion". That's a tremendous pastoral challenge for us because the Church is a loving Mother who breaks into tears when her children leave home. She wants them to come back.[255]

A very real and tangible risk to human life can be seen when religious indifferentism relegates issues of human rights and the law to purely mercurial secular ideologies. When human existence is valued purely in a utilitarian dimension, and the sacredness of life is disregarded, then humanity is devalued. The purpose of the law is to benefit humanity—life is inviolable and should be paramount if law is just. All beings have intrinsic value. As Cardinal Dolan notes:

> The pragmatic, utilitarian worldview depends upon sand to construct a system of laws protecting human rights, particularly that of life itself, since everything is constantly being re-negotiated, based on the drifting dunes of utility, convenience, privacy, and self-interest. It is a bedrock feature of modern political and legal theory that only neutral, utilitarian principles can provide a basis for public policy discussions and law, and that appeals to transcendent values—such as religion—cannot legitimately be present. Participants in public discourse are expected to set aside their religious convictions and other 'non-public reasons', and instead seek only to persuade their fellow citizens by secular arguments. […]. The fundamental premise is that the human person must be at the center of all legal systems and culture, and that human life is inviolable, and end in itself, not a means to an end. There is an old Latin saying, 'Law is established for the benefit of mankind.'[256]

Cardinal Dolan further notes that often-used ideologies that erode the basis of natural law are pragmatism, utilitarianism and consumerism which are little more than "fancy vocabulary words for the passionate drive for having and doing." He further noted, "life is basically about being, and the law's most noble purpose is to safeguard the 'being' of life from the rawest preferences for having and doing."[257]

Unquestionably, the greatest risk of religious indifferentism to the Catholic Church comes

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[255] Timothy Dolan. 2009. "Unity in faith, pluralism of cultures: Interview with Archbishop Timothy Michael Dolan, new Metropolitan Archbishop of New York, interview by Giovanni Cubeddu" *30 Days in the Church and in the World*. In www.30giorni.it/articoli_id_21357_l3.htm. Retrieved Feb 13, 2023.
[256] Cardinal Timothy Dolan. 24 Jan 2012. "Law & the Gospel of Life: Inaugural Address in the Law and Gospel of Life Series." Fordham University School of Law. Retrieved from catholicculture.org February 10, 2023.
[257] Ibidem.

from Catholics themselves – those who have distanced themselves from the Church.

> "Many Catholics seem 'lukewarm' in faith (cf. Rev 3:14ff.) or have a limited understanding of what the Church believes, teaches, and lives. Others may know about the gospel message but have not personally experienced the risen Christ. Still others are indifferent to the Church's guidance or see the Church's teaching in a negative light. For a variety of reasons, people leave the Church. They may seek out or be recruited into non-denominational, evangelical, or fundamentalist churches, or into New Age or other religious movements. Far too often they simply abandon the Christian faith altogether."[258]

Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, Archbishop of Newark, described this trend toward society's relegating religion to merely time spent at worship and the perils that result from this trend as a significant risk. He noted that it was imperative to head off this "growing trend that seems to isolate us, convincing us to neatly compartmentalize our lives" resulting in people attending Sunday Mass and then doing "whatever we think we need to do to get by" for the remainder of the week. He further noted, "If we permit the chasm between faith and life to continue to expand, we risk losing Christ, reducing him simply to an interesting idea of a comforting, nostalgic memory. And if we lose Christ, the world has lost the salt, light and leaven that could have transformed it." He further reminded the faithful that the church is "the place where believers speak and listen to each other, and it is the community of faith that speaks with and listens to the world. The church feels a responsibility for the world, not simply as yet another institutional presence or a benevolent NGO [Non-governmental organization], but as a movement of salt, light and leaven for the world's transformation. For this reason, our kindness will be known to all."[259] Ultimately, it is the role of the Church and the role of the faithful to make Christ known and loved, to spread the knowledge of salvation everywhere, and to pray and suffer for the salvation of souls. Christ gave his Church the commission to spread the message of Salvation to the ends of the earth. Relegating religion to purely something done in one's private life ultimately results in failure of this mission.

Bishop Robert Barron notes that all people of faith have a responsibility in a growing ideologically secularistic society to be, "first, clear and public witnesses to the existence of God […]. Christians should live their lives in such a way that they would make no sense unless God

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[258] USCCB. (n.d.). *Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us*. In https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/adult-faith-formation/our-hearts. Retrieved Feb 12, 2023.
[259] Joseph W. Tobin. (6 Jan 2017). "Text of Homily During Mass of installation of His Eminence, Joseph William Cardinal Tobin, C.S.s.R." Archdiocese of Newark. In www.rcan.org. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

exists. People should be able to see by the way we behave and think that God is real. The Catholic theological tradition—informed in no small way by the work of Islamic philosophers and commentators—holds that God can be known through an appeal to the contingency, or non-self-sufficiency, of the world […]. Healthy religion ought to point stubbornly to the fleeting, evanescent quality of the universe, and hence raise the minds and hearts of people to the transcendent God […]. All the followers of the Abrahamic religions ought to affirm the unity of God […]. To say that there is only one God is to say that no culture, no individual, no political party, no ideology is absolute. And this declaration must be made publicly […]. The greatest common enemy that all religious people have is ideological secularism. We have to oppose it by speaking publicly of the one creator God and by acting, consciously and intentionally, as the children of that God."[260] Bishop Barron's reflection illustrates that religion provides the structure to an ethical framework, and functions as a regulator of values in daily life. In other words, religion acts as an agency of socialization. Thus, religion helps in building values such as love, empathy, respect, and harmony.

The above theological assessment of the dangers of religious indifferentism presents the need for Catholic Americans to properly balance their faith in a pluralistic society, encouraging Catholics to be cautious about assimilating so deeply in society that they become indifferent to the necessity of the teaching of the Church in our social life. Inculturation into society does not mean the loss of one's intrinsic characteristics, rather inculturation means sharing what is best with society. Devaluing religion through indifferentism for fear of offending society, devalues society.

d. The Positive and the Negative Manifestations of Doctrinal Discourse in the Community of the Catholic Church

Much of the doctrinal discourse in the United States in the modern era revolves around faith and morals. The USCCB Committee on Doctrine has as its mandate to "assist the bishops, both collectively and individually, in areas of faith and morals." This committee's role is to collaborate with the other USCCB committees "through consultation and evaluation, providing expertise and guidance concerning the theological and moral issues that confront the Church in the United States."[261] Much of the work provided by the committee can be seen in the documents produced by other committees, especially in the fields of health care, relationship between faith

[260] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries): 208-209.
[261] USCCB (n.d.) "Doctrine." USCCB Committee on Doctrine. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 10, 2023.

and science, and the scriptural translations. Much of their attention is directed toward the Synod on Synodality.

The Synod on Synodality has heightened the focus on the present state doctrinal discourse in the Church today, including the United States. Though this dialogue appears to be largely welcomed, several of the bishops have, in interviews with American Catholic media, encouraged the faithful to view this process as a means to evaluate how we, as the universal Catholic Church, journey together. Cardinal Joseph Tobin noted:

> There are certainly voices that would suggest the need to change Catholic doctrine, but I don't think that's what the Holy Father has in mind in this whole process. It's much more about how we walk together […]. What I hope for the synod across the world, is that we interpret whatever political stances we want to take in the light of our faith, rather than our faith in the light of our political stances and perhaps a greater acceptance and attention to voices that don't immediately articulate my own position […]. The synod is going to be meeting. Synodality is a way of being church, and my hope is that it will never be done. It's going to teach us how we work together going forward […]. It's really a call to look at how we're being church together. It's not a spectator sport, and it's not a fast food restaurant.[262]

Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego similarly cautions that the focus and starting point of the Synod on Synodality should not be on the Church hierarchy, rather the faithful in the following statement:

> I have to say the notion of beginning with the hierarchical nature of the church, rather than with a synodal concept or something close to synodality, to me risks a retreat to the vision of the church that sees it first of all as a perfect society rather than the pilgrim people of God. I think that's the problem with the critique of synodality as it's been presented.[263]

In the midst of the "continental" phase of the Synod on Synodality, the stance of the USCCB is largely positive. The USCCB committee on Justice, Peace and Human Development notes that over 700,000 persons participated in the diocesan phase of the synodal process, with over 30,000 opportunities for the faithful to participate, generating 22,000 reports from individual parishes utilized to generate the *National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod.* The document noted:

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[262] J. Lavenburg. 2023. "Tobin says 'doctrinal change' is not the point of Synod on Synodality." *Crux.* In https://www.cruxnow.com. Retrieved February 1, 2023.
[263] Gerard O'Connell. 2022. "Exclusive: Cardinal Robert McElroy's first interview since receiving the red hat." *America: the Jesuit Review.* In https://www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved February 1, 2023.

> The most common desire named in the Synodal consultation was to be a more welcoming Church where all members of the People of God can find accompaniment on the Journey. The synodal consultations mentioned several areas where there existed a tension between how to walk with people while remaining faithful to the teachings of the Church. "*For many, the perception is that the blanket application of rules and policies is used as a means of wielding power or acting as a gatekeeper."* As one synodal consultation described, "*People noted that the Church seems to prioritize doctrine over people, rules, and regulations over lived reality. People want the Church to be a home for the wounded and broken, not an institution for the perfect. They want the Church to meet people where they are, wherever they are, and walk with them rather than judging them; to build real relationships through care and authenticity, not superiority.*"[264]

The groups who most commonly mentioned by the participants in the diocesan phase of the synodal process as "integral to the Church being a more welcoming Church" included members of the LGBTQ community, divorced persons, whether remarried or not, those with special needs, diverse cultures and ethnic backgrounds, the youth, and women, noting:

> Nearly all synodal consultations shared a deep appreciation for the powerful impact of women religious who have consistently led the way in carrying out the mission of the Church. Likewise, there was recognition for the centrality of women's unparalleled contributions to the life of the Church, particularly in local communities. There was a desire for stronger leadership, discernment, and decision-making roles for women—both lay and religious—in their parishes and communities: "*people mentioned a variety of ways in which women could exercise leadership, including preaching and ordination as deacon or priest. Ordination for women emerged not primarily as a solution to the problem of the priest shortage, but as a matter of justice.*"[265]

Unquestionably, the discourse in a pluralistic society is not always fruitful. In fact, this dialogue often mirrors the polarization of society. As Cardinal Robert McElroy notes:

> An increasingly strong contradiction to the vision of a church of inclusion and shared belonging lies in the growth of polarization within the life of the church in the United States and the structures of exclusion that it breeds […]. Our political society has been poisoned by a tribalism that is sapping our energy as a people and endangering our democracy. And that poison has entered destructively into the life of the church. This polarization is reflected in the schism so often present between the pro-life communities and justice-and-peace communities in our parishes and dioceses […]. It is found in the friction between Catholics who emphasize inclusion and others who perceive doctrinal

[264] USCCB. 2022. "National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023: 7-8.
[265] Ibidem, 8.

> infidelity in that inclusion. Even the Eucharist has been marred by this ideological polarization […]. A culture of synodality is the most promising pathway available today to lead us out of this polarization in our church. Such a culture can help to relativize these divisions and ideological prisms by emphasizing the call of God to seek first and foremost the pathway that we are being called to in unity and grace.[266]

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston notes that doctrinal discourse is not new within the Catholic Church. What is new, especially as it pertains to the public face of this discourse, is the media attention paid to these discourses and the resultant swaying of public opinion. As Cardinal DiNardo explained:

> Throughout the history of the Church, ministers, theologians and the laity all have debated and have held personal opinions on a variety of theological and pastoral issues. In more recent times, these debates have made their way into the popular press. That is to be expected and is often good. However, these reports are often expressed in terms of opposition, as political—conservative vs. liberal, left vs. right […]. Christian charity needs to be exercised by all involved. In saying this, we all must acknowledge that legitimate differences exist, and that it is the work of the Church, the entire body of Christ, to work towards an ever-growing understanding of God's truth. As Bishops, we recognize the need for honest and humble discussions around theological and pastoral issues […]. As Pastors and Teachers of the Faith, therefore, let me assert that we always stand in strong unity with and loyalty to the Holy Father.[267]

Regarding the vitriol that often surrounds doctrinal discourse, and risk that it poses to the Church, it is important to do so with sound arguments, based on reason, civility and logic, not emotion. As Bishop Robert Barron notes:

> What is particularly sad to me is that the commentariat, especially in regard to religion, has become so polarized and ideologically driven that the most elementary distinctions aren't made and the most broad-brush analyses are commonplace. What makes it sadder still is that these distortions and projections stand in the way of addressing the vitally important issue under consideration. As left and right defend their perspective ideological bailiwicks, the Church continues to hemorrhage young people. If we want to get serious about a problem that ought to concern everyone in the Church, it would be wise to attend to objectivities.[268]

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[266] Robert W. McElroy. (5 May 2021). "Bishop McElroy: The Eucharist is being weaponized for political ends. This must not happen." *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved February 14, 2023.
[267] Cardinal Daniel DiNardo. 2017. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops President on Dialogue Within the Church. USCCB. In https://www.usccb.org/news/2017/us-conference-catholic-bishops-president-dialogue-within-church. Retrieved February 14, 2023.
[268] Robert Barron. 2022. *Redeeming the Time: Gospel Perspectives on the Challenges of the Hour*. (Park Ridge, IL,

The most striking negative manifestation of doctrinal discourse in the Catholic Church in America is in the apparent willingness of Bishops to openly debate their disagreements using the media as their willing intermediary. There are three glaring examples of this open discourse in the public space among the leadership of the American Catholic Church:

1. Denial of Holy Communion to public officials who are Catholics and who openly support abortion;
2. The role of women in the Catholic Church, especially as it pertains to advocating for women's ordination;
3. Modification to sexual moral teaching especially as it pertains to the LGBTQ Community.

To illustrate each of these discourses, the following will give examples of the official published guidelines by the USCCB, the often-opposing responses of members of American Catholic Bishops, and the response of the USCCB and the Holy See to this discourse, if applicable.

The USCCB last published the *Guidelines for Reception of Communion* in November 1996, noting, "As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin […]. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without proper sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this care, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (canon 916)."[269] Furthermore, in 2006, the USCCB published an updated guideline for Reception of Holy Communion based *"Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper": on Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist,* stating:

> The judgment of one's state of grace obviously belongs only to the person involved, since it is a question of examining one's conscience. However, in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm, the Church, in her pastoral concern for the good order of the community and out of respect for the sacrament, cannot fail to feel directly involved. The *Code of Canon Law* refers to this situation of a manifest lack of proper moral disposition when it states that those who 'obstinately persist in manifest grave sin' are not to be admitted to

Word on Fire): 59.

[269] USCCB. (14 Nov 1996). "Guidelines for Reception of Communion." In USCCB.org. Retrieved February 14, 2023.

> Eucharistic communion.[270]

Though the guidelines published by the USCCB do not explicitly detail canon 915, it states "Those upon whom the penalty of excommunication or interdict has been imposed or declared, and others who obstinately persist in manifest grave sin, are not to be admitted to Holy Communion."[271]

In an official notification to The Speaker of the House of Representatives of the United States Congress, Nancy Pelosi, Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone of San Francisco stated:

> […] should you not publicly repudiate your advocacy for abortion "rights" or else refrain from referring to your Catholic faith in public and receiving Holy Communion, I would have no choice but to make a declaration, in keeping with canon 915, that you are not to be admitted to Holy Communion.[272]

In response to dialogue regarding publicly excluding Catholic public officials from the Eucharist, including President Joseph Biden and Nancy Pelosi, who support abortion, Cardinal Robert McElroy (then Bishop) acknowledged the following argument:

> Those who support this action make a concise, three-part argument: The president [and other public Catholic officials] supports positions on abortion that clearly depart from the teaching of the church on an extremely grave moral issue; the long tradition of the church requires personal worthiness to receive the Eucharist; and the persistent rejection of clear Catholic teaching extinguishes that worthiness.[273]

Cardinal McElroy refutes this argument stating, "The proposal to exclude pro-choice Catholic political leaders from the Eucharist is the wrong step. It will bring tremendously destructive consequences—not because of what it says about abortion, but because of what it says about the Eucharist […]. Because of this sacred nature and identity, the Eucharist must never be instrumentalized for a political end, no matter how important. But that is precisely what is being done in the effort to exclude Catholic political leaders who oppose the church's teaching on abortion and civil law. The Eucharist is being weaponized and deployed as a tool in political warfare. This must not happen. The substantial damage that will take place within the eucharistic community as a result of this instrumentalization will be broad and deep […]. A national policy of

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[270] USCCB. 2006. "Happy Are Those Who Are Called to His Supper"; On Preparing to Receive Christ Worthily in the Eucharist. P 11; see also Code of Canon Law (1983). In www.vatican.va. can 916.
[271] Code of Canon Law, can 915, 916.
[272] Salvatore J. Cordileone. (20 May 2022). "Archbishop Salvatore J. Cordileone's statement on the Notification sent to Speaker Nancy Pelosi." In www.sfarchdiocese.org. Retrieved February 10, 2023.
[273] Robert W McElroy. (5 May 2021). "Bishop McElroy: The Eucharist is being weaponized for political ends. This must not happen." *America: The Jesuit Review*. In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved February 14, 2023.

excluding pro-choice political leaders from the Eucharist will constitute an assault on that unity, on that charity. Fully half the Catholics in the United States will see this action as partisan in nature, and it will bring the terrible partisan divisions that have plagued our nation into the very act of worship that is intended by God to cause and signify our oneness."[274]

Bishop Robert Barron defends the Church's right to discriminate, pass judgment and define exclusions using the allusion of 'tough love'. He noted, "The Church of Jesus Christ is radically inclusive, for its ultimate purpose is to draw all people to the Lord […]. Inclusivity is without doubt one of the dimensions of the Church's love. However, the Church is also exclusive and intolerant, for it discerns that certain forms of behavior are repugnant to its own integrity. Thus, for a variety of reasons, it excludes people from receiving solemnly declares that those who are in the state of mortal sin are not worthy to approach the Eucharistic table unless they first receive sacramental absolution. And it unapologetically asserts that the Christian life has a formal structure, which by its very nature excludes certain styles of life that are incompatible with it. These discriminations, judgements, and exclusions are, if I might put it this way, modes of "tough love." Though they seem harsh, they are ways of wanting the good of the other […]. Real love both includes and excludes: real love is both tolerant and intolerant."[275]

The USCCB reaffirmed what was stated in the above *Guidelines for Reception of Communion,* published in 1996, and reiterated in 2006, the document developed by the Committee on Doctrine of the USCCB, titled *The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church,* which was approved by the full body of the USCCB at its November 2021 General meeting. This document states, "[…] the reception of Holy Communion entails one's communion with the Church in this visible dimension […]. Reception of Holy Communion in such a situation [in cases of outward conduct which is seriously, clearly and steadfastly contrary to the moral norm] is also likely to cause scandal for others, weakening their resolve to be faithful to the demands of the Gospel […]. It is the Special responsibility of the diocesan bishop to work to remedy situations that involve public actions at variance with the visible communion of the Church and the moral law. Indeed, he must guard the integrity of the sacrament, the visible communion of the Church,

[274] Robert W McElroy. (5 May 2021) "Bishop McElroy: The Eucharist is being weaponized for political ends. This must not happen." *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved February 14, 2023.
[275] Robert Barron. 2022. *Redeeming the Time: Gospel Perspectives on the Challenges of the Hour.* (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire): 139-140.

and the salvation of souls."[276] Prior to the formal approval of this document, in June 2021, the USCCB noted that at the Spring 2021 USCCB Plenary Assembly, there had been "much attention on the vote taken to draft a document on the Eucharist. The question of whether or not to deny any individual or group Holy Communion was not on the ballot." The USCCB further stated in response to questions related to the development of this document, "the bishops made no decision about barring anyone from receiving Holy Communion. Each Catholic—regardless of whether they hold public office or not—is called to continual conversion, and the US bishops have repeatedly emphasized the obligation of all Catholics to support human life and dignity and other fundamental principles of Catholic moral and social teaching. There will be no national policy on withholding Communion from politicians."[277]

Regarding the question if the Holy See told the bishops not to move forward on drafting the document, the USCCB emphatically stated, "No." They noted instead, "The Holy See did encourage the bishops to engage in dialogue and broad consultation."[278]

Pope Francis stated in response to questions from reporters regarding this ongoing discourse, "abortion is murder: The Church cannot change its position, but every time the bishops have as pastors, they have taken sides on the political front."[279] He further stated:

> Communion is not a prize for the perfect—think of Jansenism—Communion is a gift, a present, it is the presence of Jesus in the Church and in the community. Then, those who are not in the community cannot take Communion […]. Out of the community—excommunicated—because they are not baptized or have drifted away […]. Now we go to that person who is not in the community, who cannot receive Communion. And this is not a punishment, he is outside. But the problem is not theological, it is pastoral, how we bishops manage this principle pastorally. And if we look at the history of the Church, we will see that every time the bishops have not dealt with a problem as pastors, they have taken sides on a political front […]. When the Church defends a principle, when it does so in a non-pastoral manner, it takes sides on a political level, and this has always been the case, just look at history. What must the pastor do? Be a pastor, don't go

[276] USCCB. (digital ed. Jan 2022). "The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington DC, 28-29.
[277] USCCB. (21 June 2021). "Questions and Answers on the US Bishops' Vote to Draft a Document on the Meaning of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church. In USCCB.org.
[278] Ibidem.
[279] Pope Francis. (15 September 2021). "Pope: Abortion is murder, the Church must be close and compassionate, not political." Speaking to journalist on the return flight from Slovakia, Pope Francis talks about his dialogue with Hungarian authorities, anti-Semitism, and vaccines, as well as Holy Communion for politicians who approve abortion laws. In Vaticannews.va. Retrieved February 16, 2023.

> condemning. Be a pastor because he is a pastor also for the excommunicated. Pastors with God's style, which is closeness, compassion, and tenderness. The whole Bible says so. A pastor who does not know how to act as a pastor […]. I am not very familiar with the details of the United States […]. But if you're close, tender, and given communion? It's a hypothesis. The pastor knows what to do at all times. But if you go beyond the pastoral dimension of the Church, you become a politician, and you can see this in all the non-pastoral condemnations of the Church.[280]

The USCCB's statement on the Ordination of Women was published in 1975. An updated statement has not been provided by the USCCB. This document states, "Recently the question of ordination of women to the priesthood and episcopate has become an increasingly pressing issue in our churches, but the state of the question is not the same for both, The General Convention of the Episcopal Church I expected to consider the question at its meeting in September 1976; meanwhile the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church has recently reaffirmed its position that only men are to be ordained to the priesthood."[281]

On the topic of women's ordination, Cardinal Robert W. McElroy does not directly suggest that women should be ordained in the priesthood, rather he states:

> The proposal to ordain women to the permanent diaconate had widespread support in the global dialogues. While there is historical debate about precisely how women carried out a quasi-diaconal ministry in the life of the early church, the theological examination of this issue tends to support the conclusion that the ordination of women to the diaconate is not doctrinally precluded. Thus, the church should move toward admitting women to the diaconate, not only for reasons of inclusion but because women permanent deacons could provide critically important ministries, talents and perspectives […]. The question of the ordination of women to the priesthood will be one of the most difficult questions confronting the international synods in 2023 and 2024. The call for the admission of women to priestly orders as an act of justice and a service to the church was voiced in virtually every region of our world church. At the same time, many women and men who participated in the synod favored reserving the priesthood for men in keeping with the action of Christ and the history of the Church.[282]

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[280] Pope Francis. (15 September 2021). "Pope: Abortion is murder, the Church must be close and compassionate, not political.": Speaking to journalist on the return flight from Slovakia, Pope Francis talks about his dialogue with Hungarian authorities, anti-Semitism, and vaccines, as well as Holy Communion for politicians who approve abortion laws. In Vaticannews.va. Retrieved February 16, 2023.

[281] USCCB. 1975. "Statement on the Ordination of Women." *USCCB Committee on Ecumenical & interreligious Affairs*. In USCCB.org.

[282] Robert W. McElroy. (24 Jan 2023). "Cardinal McElroy on 'radical inclusion' for L.G.B.T people, women and others in the Catholic Church." *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved Feb 14, 2023.

Cardinal John Tobin of Newark, who sits on the Vatican Synod Committee, has made several statements interpreted by the American media to have been in support of women's ordination. The statement he made to the New York Times most often interpreted to indicate his support for women's ordination was, "Maybe my theology isn't sophisticated enough, but I don't believe that there's a compelling theological reason why the pope couldn't name a woman cardinal."[283] Interestingly, this often-quoted statement was, in some respect, taken out of context. What he explained prior to this statement was: "Regarding priests, it really is a stumbling block for people, and especially in the country and in this culture, as all areas of life are opening up to women that this particular ministry in the Catholic Church is not. So, I understand the consternation. I have eight sisters. I know for some women this sort of stumbling block takes them away from the church. As for cardinals, most are bishops, but not all of them. As recently as the 19th century there were lay people who were cardinals." He was then asked, "So will we see women cardinals soon?" To which he responded to the above statement, "Maybe my theology isn't sophisticated enough, but I don't believe that there's a compelling theological reason why the pope couldn't name a woman cardinal." He then noted, "Pope Francis has promised to find a more incisive role for women in the church. There are isolated incidents of women being appointed to fairly influential posts in the Roman Curia. I think it's got to be more than that.[284]

This dialogue with American Media potentially exacerbates confusion. In a society of tweets and social media, the Cardinal's statement, taken out of the context of the conversation, implies he supports women's ordination. In fact, he points to the fact that laity, historically, have been named cardinals without having been ordained priests first. It wasn't until 1917, when Pope Benedict XV decreed via the Code of Canon law that only priests or bishops could be elevated to the college of cardinals[285] and ultimately this change is reflected in the current Code of Canon Law 351 specifically mandating that all cardinals, even cardinal deacons, must be priests first.[286] What this statement does not note is that even in the situation where laymen were appointed to the College of Cardinals, they were obliged to be ordained to a clerical order within 12 months, "being bound within that period to take Deacon's orders; but then the same plenary power which elevated

[283] Kristof, N. 2017. Cardinal Tobin, Am I a Christian? *The New York Times*. In https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/22/ opinion/sunday/cardinal-tobin-christian.html. Retrieved Feb 14, 2023.
[284] Kristof, Nicholas. (22 Dec 2017) "Cardinal Tobin, Am I a Christian?" *The New York Times.* In www.nytimes.com. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.
[285] Codex Iuris Canonici. (27 May 1917). Promulgated by Benedict XV, can. 351. In www.vatican.va.
[286] Code of Canon Law (1983), can. 351.

them could extend its favors to an indefinite renewal of the expired dispensation at the end of each year."[287]

Pope Francis reiterated that the teaching of the Church regarding ordination of women remains consistent with that historically held in the following statement, "on women priests, that cannot be done. Pope St. John Paul II after long, long intense discussions, long reflection said so clearly. Not because women don't have the capacity. Look, in the Church women are more important than men, because the Church is a woman. (Using masculine and feminine articles in Italian) It is 'la' Church, not 'il' Church. The Church is the bride of Jesus Christ. And the Madonna is more important than popes and bishops and priests. I must admit we are a bit late in an elaboration of the theology of women. We have to move ahead with that theology. Yes, that's true."[288]

Three recent open publications, initially by Cardinal McElroy, followed by a scathing response authored by Archbishop Naumann, and followed Cardinal McElroy's retort, demonstrate the willingness of American bishops to engage in doctrinal discourse in the public forum. This discourse was born out of the ongoing Synod on Synodality and it diverges with the officially expressed teaching as presented by the USCCB.

As noted above in the Assessment of the Pluralism of the Organization of Social Life, the USCCB's *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines of Pastoral Care* states, "the Church teaches that persons with a homosexual inclination 'must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity." It also notes, "Any sexual act that takes place outside of the bond of marriage does not fulfill the proper ends of human sexuality. Such an act is not directed toward the expression of marital love with an openness to new life. It is disordered in that it is not in accord with this twofold end and is thus morally wrong."[289]

Cardinal McElroy argues that the Church, in its dealings with marginalized, downtrodden and outcast members of the Church, must "systematically bring the peripheries into the center of life in the church." When considering the LGBT community and those excluded for reasons related

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[287] William Cornwallis Cartwright. 1868. "On the Constitution of Papal Conclaves" (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas): 123-124.

[288] Full transcript of Pope Francis' inflight interview from Philadelphia to Rome. Catholic News Agency. 2015. In https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/32728/full-transcript-of-pope-francis-inflight-interview-from-philadelphia-to-rome. Retrieved Feb 12, 2023.

[289] USCCB. (14 Nov 2006). "Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care." United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In www.usccbpublishing.org, p. 1-2.

to marriage, he was direct in calling for their inclusion:

> These include those who are divorced and remarried without a declaration of nullity from the church, members of the LGBT community and those who are civilly married but have not been married in the church […] pastoral practices that have the effect of excluding certain categories of people from full participation in the life of the church are at odds with this pivotal notion that we are all wounded and all equally in need of healing […]. While Catholic teaching must play a critical role in the decision making of believers, it is conscience that has the privileged place. Categorical exclusions undermine that privilege precisely because they cannot encompass the inner conversation between women and men and their God […]. The Eucharist is a central element of God's grace-filled transformation of all the baptized. For this reason, the church must embrace a eucharistic theology that effectively invites all of the baptized to the table of the Lord rather than a theology of eucharistic coherence that multiplies barriers to the grace and gift of the eucharist […]. The effect of the tradition that all sexual acts outside of marriage constitute objectively grave sin has been to focus the Christian moral life disproportionately upon sexual activity. The heart of Christian discipleship is a relationship with God the Father, Son and Spirit rooted in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The church has a hierarchy of truths that flow from this fundamental kerygma. Sexual activity, while profound, does not lie at the heart of this hierarchy. Yet in pastoral practice we have placed it at the very center of our structures of exclusion from the Eucharist. This should change.[290]

Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City, in direct response to Bishop McElroy's discourse on eucharistic inclusion of the LGBT community stated:

> I have been saddened that in the preparation for the Synod on Synodality, there has been a renewed effort by some in Church leadership to resuscitate moral confusion on human sexuality […]. Cardinal Robert McElroy's article in the Jesuit Journal America Magazine has charged that the Catholic Church 'contains structures and cultures of exclusion that alienate all too many from the Church or make their journey in the Catholic faith tremendously burdensome. Cardinal McElroy champions what he terms radical inclusion that embraces everyone into full communion with the Church on their terms. The Mandate of Jesus given to the apostles to make disciples of all nations is construed to mean to enlarge the tent of the Church by accommodating behaviors contrary to our Lord's own teaching. Cardinal McElroy appears to believe that the Church, for 2000 years, has exaggerated the importance of her sexual moral teaching and that radical inclusion supersedes

[290] Robert W. McElroy. (24 Jan 2023). "Cardinal McElroy on 'radical inclusion' for L.G.B.T people, women and others in the Catholic Church." *America: The Jesuit Review*. In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved Feb 14, 2023.

> doctrinal fidelity, especially in the area of the Church's moral teaching regarding human sexuality […] this is a most serious and dangerous error.[291]

Demonstrating that this open doctrinal discourse, using the media at forum, is far from over, Cardinal Robert McElroy addressed the criticisms levied by his fellow bishops noting that the position he presented had "received both substantial support and significant opposition." He stated, "Criticisms included the assertion that my article challenged an ancient teaching of the church, failed to give due attention to the call to holiness, abandoned any sense of sin in the sexual realm and failed to highlight the essential nature of the conversation. Perhaps most consistently, the criticism stated that exclusion from the Eucharist is essentially a doctrinal rather than a pastoral question." In this response Cardinal McElroy stated, "I seek here to develop more fully [...] some important related questions, namely on the nature of conversion in the moral life of the disciple, the call to holiness, the role of sin, the sacrament of penance, the history of the categorical doctrine of exclusion for sexual sins and the relationship between moral doctrine and pastoral theology." He further proposed that three foundational principles of Catholic teaching invited a re-examination of the church's practice in this area: 1. "Pope Francis' image of the church as a field hospital, which points to the reality that we are all wounded by sin and all equally in need of God's grace and healing." 2. The role of the conscience in Catholic thought. For every member of the church, it is conscience to which we have the ultimate responsibility and by which we will be judged." 3. "The Eucharist is given to us as a profound grace in our conversion to discipleship." He further stated, "For all of these reasons, I proposed that divorced and remarried or L.G.B.T. Catholics who are ardently seeking the grace of God in their lives should not be categorically barred from the Eucharist" He additionally states that "the moral tradition that all sexual sins are grave matter springs from an abstract, deductivist and truncated notion of the Christian moral life that yields a definition of sin jarringly inconsistent with the larger universe of Catholic moral teaching […]. It is important to note that the criticisms of my article did not seek to demonstrate that the tradition classifying all sexual sins as objective mortal sins is in fact correct, or that it yields a moral teaching that is consonant with the wider universe of Catholic moral teaching. Instead, critics focused upon the repeated assertion that the exclusion of divorced/remarried and L.G.B.T. Catholics from the Eucharist is a doctrinal, not a pastoral question. I would answer that

[291] Joseph F. Nauman. (14 Feb 2023). "Archbishop Naumann responds to Bishop McElroy: "Radical Inclusion can't supersede Catholic doctrine." *Catholic News Agency.* In www.catholicnewsagency.com. Retrieved Feb 14, 2023.

Pope Francis is precisely calling us to appreciate the vital interplay between the pastoral and doctrinal aspects of church teaching on questions just such as these."[292]

Perhaps the most poignant commentary on doctrinal discourse was offered by Cardinal Timothy Dolan regarding the divine nature of the Church itself:

> Who was it who said that after years of study I've come to reluctantly accept that the Roman Catholic Church must be divine, because no merely human institution governed by such imbecility could have survived a fortnight! I use that a lot. People are shocked because they think we're supposed to defend the pristine beauty of the Church […], you love the mystical body, warts and all. I Tell priests when I'm preaching retreats, "We're married to her, you know. She's supposed to be our wife, and sometimes we see her with curlers and Noxzema. Sometimes she is a dazzlingly beautiful woman, who we picture walking up the aisle on her wedding day, and sometimes she's a nag. Sometimes she lets us down, and sometimes we think, 'How the hell did I ever hitch up with this one?' But in the long run, she's the love of our life, and we're head over heels hopelessly in love with her.[293]

The above theological reflection on the positive and negative manifestation of doctrinal discourse in the Catholic Church community illustrates that this discourse in a pluralistic society is not always fruitful. In fact, it often mirrors the polarization of society. The doctrinal discourse is not new within the Catholic Church but what is new, especially as it pertains to the public face of this discourse, is the media attention paid to these discourses and the resultant swaying of public opinion. Therefore, to prevent a great harm that this discourse may pose to the Church, it is paramount to approach such doctrinal discourse with sound arguments, based on reason, civility, and logic–not emotion.

2. The Church's Teaching on Globalization and Theological Evaluation of this Phenomenon

The Catholic Church does not oppose globalization. It regards globalization as a natural stage in the development of society. It is impossible to avoid globalization currently due to international contacts between countries, mass migration, and the cultural connection of different nations. Moreover, Biblical teaching features the idea of globalization, which is evident in the passages about prophecies. Luke 13:29 says: "And people will come from east and west, and from north

[292] Robert W. McElroy. 2023. "Cardinal McElroy responds to his critics on sexual sin, the Eucharist, and LGBT and divorced/remarried Catholics" *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved March 2, 2023.
[293] Timothy Dolan, John L. Allen Jr. 2012. *A People of Hope.* (New York, Image Books): 187.

and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God." This shows that there are no boundaries for God and for faith, and the Lord welcomes everyone, regardless of their country of origin or where they reside. This perspective also reflects the modern global perspective that most people share. It is possible to find the similar idea in Isaiah 43:9: "Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled: who among them can declare this, and shew us former things? Let them bring forth their witnesses, that they may be justified: or let them hear, and say, it is truth." In other words, the Holy Scripture supports the worldwide spread of God's revelation and teaching. As Cardinal Francis George (1937-2015) noted, "In our progressively more globalized society, capital, persons, ideas move around the world with greater and greater ease. Contacts, of course, are not relationships, but if we allow contacts to develop into ever more universal relationships, then the relationships generated by shared faith are going to become more important than the relationships that are now based upon citizenship. What will be the carrier of culture in the millennium ahead? Not nation-states, as we have known them for the past five hundred years. The conversation creating culture will be one that is carried on by the great faiths."[294]

Not all interpretations of globalization are positive, however. Many Christians are afraid of it, considering globalization to be a step towards the end of the times and the attempt of humanity to build a new Babylon. Those who harbor these concerns reference the book of Daniel. In Daniel 2:36-43 King Nebuchadnezzar, the ruler of Babylon, had a dream where he saw the statue that personified four kingdoms that rule the world, which is the metaphor for globalization and evolution of states into empires. Daniel also had the vision of the strange beast that united the characteristics of different animals that some scholars interpret as the allusion to the global government that unites nations. A similar vision is described in Revelation 13:1-2: "And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority".

Some scholars interpret it as the representation of the world government that consists of huge empires, but others regard it as the image of the Antichrist. The description of the beast is

[294] Francis Cardinal George. 2015. *A Godly Humanism: Clarifying the Hope that lies Within.* (Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America Press): 142.

written in a negative tone, which means that the last global government is not something that will be auspicious for humanity. Jeremiah 51:1-2 describes the warning of the Lord against building the new Babylon: "Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Leb-Kamai, and I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble." It is evident that Biblical teachings feature both negative and positive connotations toward globalization, which makes interpretations and the choice of excerpts for discussion crucial.

a. The Church's Position on the Phenomenon of Globalization

The Catholic Church largely supports globalization because it allows people to unite their efforts in fighting inequality, injustice, poverty, and promoting peace throughout the globe. Less developed countries can improve their quality of life through this global interaction, and the Catholic Church welcomes these changes. Dramatic changes in society, and even milestones related to the passage of time often stir angst in society, with a propensity to focus on darker connotations and prophetic language of scripture. The bias connected with the attitudes toward globalization is reflected in the behavior of different religious congregations in the United States. As such, many prophecies regarding the end times swirled around the new millennium. Catholics did not promote these ideas about the end of times at the beginning of the new century, but it was strikingly commonplace among believers from other confessions. This divergence of interpretation shows that the Holy Scripture gives space for differing perceptions. It is vital, therefore, for believers to adhere to rational guidance, rather than emotional responses based on arbitrary events such as the passage of time based on a calendar devised by man, to the teaching of the Catholic Church concerning such serious topics. In an interview with Rev. Alexander Santora, Cardinal Tobin of Newark noted when considering the current political atmosphere in the United States especially as it pertains to those with 'America First' ideologies, "We have avatars of anti-globalism," he warned. We have to question "fear as a predominant motivator," he said, adding: "This is not the way the Gospel calls us to live."[295]

The social teaching of the Catholic Church evaluates the impact of globalization on society

[295] Alexander Santora. 2019. *N.J. cardinal talks about what Pope Francis walks*. NJ.com. In https://www.nj.com/opinion/2019/10/nj-cardinal-talks-about-what-pope-francis-walks-faith-matters.html. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

and describes the strategies that the Church uses to deal with the concerns caused by this process. The Catechism emphasizes the importance of the Church's social doctrine, defining it as an indispensable part of ministry. It supposes that evangelization is impossible if the Church ignores the personal and social needs of believers, disregarding their daily circumstances. The Catechism acknowledges that the human is not the abstract being, instead, the person lives in the particular society and faces particular economic and moral concerns. The Catechism claims that the redemption plan cannot be divided from the creation plan, and the plan of redemption usually features definite situations connected with injustice in the real world that should be opposed. The point that the Catechism makes relates to promoting the truth, peace, and justice in the world that is the mission of the Catholic Church. Globalization, in its turn, is an instrument for evangelization and popularizing the message of the Gospel in society.[296]

The first Church documents concerning globalization appeared at the end of the 19th century and increased in frequency and content into the present day. For example, both of the encyclicals "Rerum Novarum" and "Quadragesimo Anno" concentrated on the social problems facing people in industrialized and developed countries. Additionally, the encyclical "Mater et Magistra," expressed increasing concerns about the destiny of developing countries in the global economy because these countries had become especially vulnerable in the new world without boundaries.

The Catholic tradition promotes the idea that globalization is an indispensable part of civilization's development that is not wise to oppose. The Church is convinced that economic, cultural, and political changes should use ethical principles as the guide for development. With failure to adhere to ethical principles as its guide, the global community risks becoming deeply unjust because rich people and corporations will become more affluent, while the population of the developing country may be relegated to cheap labor. Ethical motivation and applying the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching in practice are effective ways to ensure that human dignity and human rights are not violated in the global society.

John Paul II wrote in his encyclical letter "Centesimus Annus" that the mission of the Catholic Church should not change in the global society. The Christian teaching can easily relate to contemporary reality because the essence of human relations does not change in the new

[296] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 355-361.

economic and political context. John Paul II writes about the spread of the Catholic teaching in the global society in the following words:

> In effect, to teach and to spread her social doctrine pertains to the Church's evangelizing mission and is an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Savior.[297]

Therefore, John Paul II emphasized the importance of the active participation of the Church in social life. Globalization does not improve the lives of all people automatically, and the struggle for equality and social justice continues. The Catholic Church has a prophetic role in the improvement of the global world.[298] It is possible to make parallels between the position of Pope John Paul II and the lines from the Pastoral Constitution "Gaudium et Spes" published by the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council:

> Christ did not bequeath to the Church a mission in the political, economic or social order; the purpose he assigned to her was a religious one. But this religious mission can be the source of commitment, direction, and vigor to establish and consolidate the community of men according to the law of God.[299]

This assertion emphasizes the conviction that the Church is responsible for the spiritual well-being of people. The Church is not responsible for the political or economic development of society in the modern world, which allows it to concentrate on the questions of morality and social justice. This perspective is supported by all popes after the Second Vatican Council, including John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis, which is evident in their letters and books.

The views of Pope Benedict XVI on globalization are reflected in his encyclical "Caritas in Veritate." He criticizes the contemporary global economy, stating that the existing system leads to the oppression of vulnerable populations in all countries, to their exclusion from economic life, and their ubiquitous exploitation. The increased flow of culture, people, services, products, and money leads to the development of a completely new global context that will dominate in the 21st century.

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[297] Pope John Paul II. 1991. "Encyclical Letter: Centesimus Annus," 5.
[298] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2005. "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church", 75.
[299] Second Vatican Council. (7 Dec 1965). "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes," 42.

Although diversity and easy access to communication and transportation are positive consequences of globalization, exploitation of poor and working-class people is one of the negative consequences. International organizations, national governments, and the Church should examine these problems thoroughly, and elaborate on the common framework that allows changing this social and economic injustice in the contemporary global community. Pope Benedict XVI mentions Catholic social thought as an effective strategy to cope with the arising concerns in globalization. Although the amount of wealth increases globally, the number of inequalities becomes dramatic.[300]

Pope Benedict XVI considers charity as the main characteristic of the Christian in the global world because it is connected with responsibility and love to others. These qualities can help the Catholic Church and faithful Christians overcome the challenges posed by the global society. He supports this idea by arguing:

> Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelled out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36-40). It gives real substance to the personal relationship with God and with the neighbor; it is the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members, or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones).[301]

It is possible to find similar claims in the text written by Pope Francis. He also regarded the global interconnection of governments and social organizations as the critical factor in contemporary life. Pope Francis wrote about the negative consequences of unregulated capitalism and the spread of indifference in the global society that leads to the aggravation of injustice. In the "Message for the Celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace," he addresses the topic of migration in global society as the phenomenon that illustrates the crisis of modernity. Pope Francis highlights the biases in the global economy that lead to the impoverishment of developing countries, which is the catalyst for the migration of people in search of decent work and a chance to provide for their families. He writes that "most people migrate through regular channels. Some, however, take different routes, mainly out of desperation, when their own countries offer neither safety nor

[300] Pope Benedict XVI. (29 Jun 2009). "Encyclical Letter: Caritas in Veritate", 2.
[301] Ibidem.

opportunity, and every legal pathway appears impractical, blocked or too slow."[302] Pope Francis states that compassion is the crucial quality of Christians that allows them to react to the problems that originated from globalization.

The attitude toward globalization articulated by the USCCB is similar to the positions expressed by the Popes and Holy See, as delineated above, because the USCCB yields to the Vatican as it constitutes the official position of the Catholic Church on globalization. The USCCB in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* reaffirms the Holy See's position on globalization stating, "important issues such as migration, xenophobia, racism, abortion, global conflict, and care for creation […] in the United States and around the world […] demand our attention."[303] The primary concerns of the US Conference of Bishops are the issues related with economic inequality, poverty, and migration that are resulting from globalization because the people who experience the negative consequences of the global economic order are the most vulnerable members of society.

Finding the balance between globalization and religious norms remains a challenge for the contemporary Catholic Church in the United States. The USCCB recognizes the impact of the United States and its role in the Global economy as a world leader, and how this imbalanced power is at times in conflict with the social justice teachings of the Catholic Church. As such, the bishops acknowledge injustices perpetrated by the United States as a global power and the driving factors in these injustices in the following:

> U.S. economic and military power has sometimes led to grave injustices abroad. At home, it has fueled self-absorption, indifference and consumerist excess. Overconfidence in our power, made even more pronounced by advances in science and technology, has created the illusion of a life without natural boundaries and actions without consequences. The standards of the marketplace, instead of being guided by sound morality, threaten to displace it. We are now witnessing the gradual restructuring of American culture according to ideals of utility, productivity and cost-effectiveness. It is a culture where moral questions are submerged by a river of goods and services and where the misuse of marketing and public relations subverts public life.[304]

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[302] Pope Francis. 2018. "Message of His Holiness Pope for the Celebration of the 51st World Day of Peace." In https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.html. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

[303] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 6.

[304] USCCB. (n.d.). *Living the Gospel of Life: A Challenge to American Catholics*. In https://www.usccb.org/issues-

To deal with the challenges of the technological revolution and in the face of an ever increasingly global society, the USCCB published the Catholic Framework for economic Life offering the "key principles to help Catholics reflect on the values that should shape our participation in economic life." This statement was initially developed in 1996, by the Committee on Justice, Peace and Human Development. It was both updated and published in 2015 and reflects ten guiding principles for American Catholics within a global economy. The statement acknowledges, "As followers of Jesus Christ and participants in a powerful economy, Catholics in the United States are called to work for greater economic justice in the face of persistent poverty, growing income-gaps, and increasing discussion of economic issues in the United States and around the world."[305] The framework for this is based on the following ten points:

1. The economy exists for the person, not the person for the economy.
2. All economic life should be shaped by moral principles. Economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person, support the family and serve the common good.
3. A fundamental moral measure of any economy is how the poor and vulnerable are faring.
4. All people have a right to life and to secure the basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, shelter, education, health care, safe environment, and economic security.
5. All people have the right to economic initiative, to productive work, to just wages and benefits, to decent working conditions as well as to organize and join unions or other associations.
6. All people, to the extent they are able, have a corresponding duty to work, a responsibility to provide for the needs of their families and an obligation to contribute to the broader society.
7. In economic life, free markets have both clear advantages and limits; government has essential responsibilities and limitations; voluntary groups have irreplaceable roles but cannot substitute for the proper working of the market and the just policies of the state.
8. Society has a moral obligation, including governmental action where necessary, to assure opportunity, meet basic human needs, and pursue justice in economic life.
9. Workers, owners, managers, stockholders and consumers are moral agents in economic life. By our choices, initiative, creativity and investment, we enhance or diminish economic opportunity, community life and social justice.

and-action/human-life-and-dignity/abortion/living-the-gospel-of-life. Retrieved Feb 10, 2023.

[305] USCCB Committee on Justice, Peace & Human Development (2015) Statement: "A Catholic Framework for Economic Life." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved February 18, 2023.

10. The global economy has moral dimensions and human consequences. Decisions on investment, trade, aid and development should protect human life and promote human rights, especially for those most in need wherever they might live on the globe.[306]

Especially as it pertains to the last two obligations, the USCCB calls the faithful to question "What are the moral responsibilities of workers, owners, managers, stockholders and consumers in ensuring the health and well-being of our economy? How can we help each other recognize the moral responsibilities they have? How does what happen in the US affect others around the world? How can we make sure that our country's response to the economic crisis benefits those most in need both in the US and abroad?"[307]

It is the Church's role to call for justice and respect of human dignity in a globalized society. As Cardinal Joseph Tobin notes, "In Jesus, God identifies himself with those to whom service is given or refused […] our behavior toward others is, finally, our behavior toward God." Globalization shows the "increasing interdependence of the human family" around the world. "We're linked whether we want to recognize it or not. We're linked in ways that predicate the wealth of one country frequently on the impoverishment of another". Catholic social teaching calls for globalization to be marked by "respect for the equal dignity of persons and [the generation of] reciprocal connections that enable persons to share in the common good."[308]

In a pastoral letter to the Archdiocese of Newark, Cardinal Joseph Tobin suggests a pastoral approach toward outreach to the marginalized. He notes, "On the day the risen Lord returned to the Father, he commanded his disciples to "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature" (Mk 16:15). These last words of Jesus to his disciples urge them (and us) to get out of themselves (ourselves) and go to the periphery. Where do we find the periphery? [...] The periphery is not confined to geography or social, economic or legal status or to our religious or political points of view. Anyone who is different from us stands outside our comfort zone. This can include people who disagree with us on issues of politics, economics or social policy. It can also mean friends, family members or fellow parishioners who see the world differently than us. Getting outside ourselves and going to the periphery can mean any effort to reach out to others with compassion and understanding. It does not mean necessarily that we abandon our beliefs,

[306] USCCB. Committee on Justice, Peace & Human Development. 2015. Statement: "A Catholic Framework for Economic Life." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved February 18, 2023.
[307] Ibidem.
[308] S. Gallagher. 2014. *Archbishop Tobin reflects on Church's view of globalization*. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis Online. In https://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2014/05-09/marian.html. Retrieved Feb 18, 2023.

principles or way of life. But it does mean that we open ourselves to those who are different from us and, in doing so, share with them the good news that all are loved and redeemed in Christ. We may find that those on the periphery help us to understand better the Gospel. They may even soften the hardness of our hearts."[309]

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, KY, reiterated the responsibility of Catholics in America to be proponents for the marginalized. In a press conference following his election in 2013 as president of the USCCB he stated, "I believe we are very much in solidarity with Pope Francis, and that is, his way of articulating clearly that we need not only to serve the voiceless and the vulnerable, but to be an advocate." Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, who was elected vice-president to the USCCB in 2013, additionally noted the ongoing responsibility of the US Bishops to advocate for those who are marginalized, especially immigrants. He acknowledged that this work has been ongoing for decades and stated, "I think we're at a good time now where this can be handled," DiNardo said. "I believe there are those on both sides of the aisle, notwithstanding there's still some bitterness, who can work together. We hope to be able to be catalysts."[310]

Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark further acknowledges that the solutions for economic inequality are not easy and that they will only be possible with cooperation. He uses the following illustration to describe the work necessary to overcome economic inequality through the principles of social justice, "[…] social justice isn't instant tapioca—just add water and you have it. Rather, it's a struggle across time. But it's a struggle that is not without hope because we are struggling to make God's dream come true for human beings […]. We need to pay attention to the global so as to avoid narrowness and banality […] I think what can help us and will help us Catholics and non-Catholics build a better world together is what Francis calls the 'culture of encounter,' that we meet each other doing good […]. We decide to act, not first on the basis of what divides us, but to find common ground, common agreement in creating a better world."[311]

Economic responsibility supposes that Christians help the poor, participate in charity, and

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[309] Joseph W. Tobin. 2022. "Cardinal Tobin: Go into the whole world, especially the periphery." Archdiocese of Newark. Jul 22, 2022, Vol 3: No 22. In rcan.org. Retrieved Feb 18, 2023.

[310] M. Wisniewski. 2013. *U.S. Catholic bishops' new leaders concerned with poor*. Reuters. In https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-religion-bishopsconference/u-s-catholic-bishops-new-leaders-concerned-with-poor-idUKBRE9AB03W20131112. Retrieved Feb 18, 2023.

[311] S. Gallagher. 2014. *Archbishop Tobin reflects on Church's view of globalization*. The Archdiocese of Indianapolis Online. In https://www.archindy.org/criterion/local/2014/05-09/marian.html. Retrieved Feb 18, 2023.

try to improve the situation with the rights of workers and immigrants who came to the United States in search of employment. These attempts to improve the quality of life of the vulnerable populations are connected with close contacts of the Catholic Church and state organizations.

The USCCB statement *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* specifically addresses the moral responsibility to address poverty and the needs of the underdeveloped societies globally. Noting "the increasing interconnectedness of our world calls for a moral response, the virtue of solidarity." The document further describes, "a more just world will likely be a more peaceful world, a world less vulnerable to terrorism and other violence. The United States has the responsibility to take the lead in addressing the scandal of poverty and underdevelopment. Our nation should help to humanize globalization, addressing its negative consequences and spreading its benefits, especially among the world's poor. The United States also has a unique opportunity to use its power in partnership with others to build a more just and peaceful world."[312] The document further addresses six specific moral responsibilities within the global community to which the United States is specifically obliged:

- The United States should take a leading role in helping to alleviate global poverty through substantially increased development aid for the poorest countries, more equitable trade policies, and continuing efforts to relieve the crushing burdens of debt and disease.
- US policy should promote religious liberty and other basic human rights. In particular, US policy should promote and defend the rights of religious minorities throughout the world, especially in regions where people of faith are threatened by violence simply because of their faith.
- The United States should provide political and financial support for beneficial United Nations programs and reforms, for other international bodies, and for international law, so that together these institutions may become more responsible and responsive agents for addressing global problems.
- Asylum should be afforded to refugees who hold a well-founded fear of persecution in their homelands. Our country should support protections for persons fleeing persecution through safe haven in other countries, including the United States, especially for unaccompanied children, women, victims of human trafficking, and religious minorities.
- Our country should be a leader—in collaboration with the international community—in addressing regional conflicts.

[312] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 42 (#90).

- Leadership on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an especially urgent priority. The United States should actively pursue comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and peaceful resolution that respects the legitimate claims and aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians, ensuring security for Israel, a viable state for Palestinians, respect for Lebanon's sovereignty, and peace in the region. Defending human life, building peace, combating poverty and despair, and protecting freedom and human rights are not only moral imperatives—they are wise national priorities that will make our nation and world safer.[313]

The USCCB additionally emphasizes critical concerns that are urgent in American society--ecological concerns of climate change and sustainability. Sustainability and concerns regarding the climate are a global trend, and the United States is among the leaders in promoting this ecological agenda. Curiously, the Catholic Church also supports this secular topic because it corresponds to its social doctrine. The USCCB states, "care for Creation is a moral issue. Protecting the land, water and air is a religious duty of stewardship and reflects our responsibility to born and unborn children, who are most vulnerable to environmental assault."[314]

The globalization of the world has led to profound ecological consequences. Industrialization has been shown to cause environmental concerns that have led to global warming, rising sea levels, contaminated land and water, among others. This is a shared concern of secular ecological activists and religious people who regard Earth as a gift from God its creator. The Catholic Church expresses similar worries about ecology in the United States and has discussed this problem on the official level with the government and the international community. This topic about ecology is described in the "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church" in the following excerpt:

> Responsibility for the environment should also find adequate expression on a juridical level. It is important that the international community draw up uniform rules that will allow States to exercise more effective control over the various activities that have negative effects on the environment and to protect ecosystems by preventing the risk of accidents.[315]

In his reflection on Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship, Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski, of Miami, the Chairman of the Committee on Domestic Justice and Human

[313] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 42-43 (#90).
[314] Ibidem, p. 40 (#86).
[315] Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. 2005. "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church", 468.

Development noted, "In our care of creation, the church is, not surprisingly, consistent. The Catholic conception of stewardship of the environment is also rooted in the dignity of the human person and his relationship with God. This relationship finds its origin for us, 'in the beginning'." Archbishop Wenski reminds that the "book of Genesis is meant to draw us into God's creative activity," noting that as Adam was formed "out of the dust of the ground," he was "intimately connected with the Earth. Though God was capable of making him from nothing, he chose to use the materials that he had already created as part of her earlier work to make the first human being. What should strike us about God's choice here is that he intended a clear intertwining and interconnectedness of our physical well-being and the condition of the environment from which we were formed. This foundational concept ties our care for the world to our first moments in history, and we ought not neglect that our responsibilities originate here at the dawn of time."[316]

In these matters, the secular government, the international community, and the Catholic Church pursue similar ideals. All of these groups share the common goal of preserving a normal environment, improving the well-being of people, reconciliation of industrialization, and the preservation of human health and the development of nations. sharing these common ideals illustrates that the USCCB uses papal doctrine and writings, as a guide for achieving the common good for all humans in the global society. Poverty and immigration are negative consequences of globalization in the economic sphere. At the same time, problems with sustainability and ecology show that industrialization has a destructive impact on the well-being of people in all spheres, including the quality of air and water.

Archbishop Thomas G. Wenski, reminds Catholics that our worldview must be centered by the prosperity of the human person, not economic prosperity, illustrating divergence from the secular rational on these matters:

> The Catholic should care deeply about an effective and efficient economic system that meets the needs of people as much as possible. Even so, the Church's teaching in this area is concerned primarily with the degree to which that economic system is truly at the service of the human person, and the extent to which the economy creates conditions for us to thrive precisely as created daughters and sons, made in the image and likeness of a loving and merciful God. This is why a purely economic analysis of the worth of individuals cannot fit in a Catholic worldview.[317]

[316] Thomas G. Wenski. (2014 Nov 6). "Climate Change and Environmental Stewardship," *Origins* 44 (23): 385-389.
[317] Ibidem.

Globalism refers to nations developing policies and relations for the better interests of the entire world rather than for their individual nation's interests. The Catholic Church is one of the most extensive critiques of globalism due to the many side effects it may cause on the American Catholic church community to ensure the achievement of global interests. According to the USCCB, globalism is one of the significant drivers of inequality and socioeconomic exclusion across the United States, as it leads to unequal economic growth. In addition, globalism may result in disregarding the nation's poverty and other social problems while focusing on issues outside the United States boundaries, which may further deteriorate the current spread of socioeconomic exclusion and social disintegration across the United States.[318] Even though the American Catholic church is the most prominent critic of globalism, Cardinal Timothy Dolan asserts the Church's commitment to helping America tackle the dehumanizing consequences of globalization.[319] The predominant driver of the American economy is capitalism. Unfettered capitalism, without compassion for the other, contributes to social disintegration. Bishop Robert Barron notes the intent of the Church's teaching on capitalism is not one of condemnation but one of moral obligation explaining this obligation with the following illustration:

> Private property is a right, but not an "inviolable" right"—if by that we mean without qualification or conditions—and saying so is not tantamount to advocating socialism […]. A nation state indeed has a right to its own wealth, garnered through the energy and creativity of its people, and it may legitimately maintain and defend its borders; however, these prerogatives are not morally absolute. This is not "globalism" or denial of national integrity; it is simply Thomas Aquinas' distinction between ownership and use, extrapolated to the international level.[320]

The USCCB further explains the uncertainty and anxiety globalism has caused the citizens of the United States. The Church urges the government to ensure economic justice, advocating that the government protects the life and dignity of the United States population when making economic choices and decisions. The USCCB warns that globalism results in the insecurity of fundamental human rights, including food, shelter, education, job security, medical care, and

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[318] USCCB. Office of International Justice and Peace. (3-5 Oct 1996). "The Globalized Economy: Challenges to the Church in the U.S." In usccb.org. Retrieved October 15, 2022.
[319] John Sniegocki. (2022 Jan 20). "The US Catholic Church, Elections, and a Holistic Ethic of Life." *Praxis: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Faith and Justice.* In https://doi.org/10.5840/praxis202211914. Retrieved October 16, 2022.
[320] Robert Barron. (19 Nov 2020). "BISHOP BARRON: Pope Francis, "Fratelli Tutti" and the universal destination of goods." *The Catholic Voice.* In www.catholicvoiceomaha.com. Retrieved February 18, 2023.

productive work.[321] As a result, globalism contributes to socioeconomic exclusion in the American community, dividing the population into various segments depending on their wealth, race, or other social norms. However, the Church acknowledges that there are some advantages of globalization and globalism, such as foreign aid and international finance, that supports societies worldwide. The USCCB promotes using foreign aid to provide humanitarian assistance rather than military and commercial assistance as instruments of peace.[322] Humanitarian assistance helps provide necessary aid to the unfortunate and poverty-stricken individuals in the American community as well. Globally, the use of humanitarian and just, supportive financial endeavors rather than military campaigns or commercial exploitation, provides the opportunity for advancement and socio-economic inclusion of disadvantaged populations.

As presented above, the Church's position on the phenomenon of globalism illustrates that the Church promotes the idea that globalization is an indispensable aspect of civilization's development that is not wise to oppose. At the same time, the Church acknowledges that economic, cultural, and political changes should be based on ethical principles as their guide for development. With failure to adhere to ethical principles as its guide, the global community risks becoming deeply unjust. Ethical motivation and the application of Catholic Social Teaching in practice are effective ways to ensure that human dignity and human rights are not violated in the global society. Furthermore, finding the balance between globalization and religious norms remains a challenge for the contemporary Catholic Church in the United States. Therefore, the Church has a unique role and responsibility to use her power, thereby helping to humanize globalization to build a more just and peaceful world.

b. Assessment of the Different Manifestations of Social Disintegration

Social disintegration refers to the decline of society over time resulting from the breakdown or lapse of traditional social support systems. Social disintegration manifests itself in society in different forms, mainly depending on the society's social norms and culture. Divergence of society from the guiding principles of social justice is at the *root* of this disintegration, because respect of human life is the *root*. There are seven main principles of social justice that Catholic social

[321] USCCB, Office of International Justice and Peace (3-5 Oct 1996). "The Globalized Economy: Challenges to the Church in the U.S." In usccb.org. Retrieved October 15, 2022.
[322] Ibidem.

teaching promotes. Among them are: Life and dignity of the human person, call to family, community and participation or subsidiarity, rights and responsibilities or the common good, preferential option of the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers or solidarity, and care for God's creation or stewardship. These characteristics allow Catholics to create a supportive community that functions according to the rules described in the Holy Scripture.

Disintegration of society's respect of human life and the cornerstones of social life—marriage, family and community—will ultimately lead to the disintegration of the very fabric of a society. Reflecting on the etiology of the different manifestations of social disintegration and our responsibility as a county in response to such unrest and injustice, the USCCB in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* states:

> The political realities of our nation present us with opportunities and challenges. We are a nation founded on "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," but the right to life itself is not fully protected, especially for unborn children, the terminally ill, and the elderly, the most vulnerable members of the American family. We are called to be peacemakers in a nation at war. We are a country pledged to pursue "liberty and justice for all," but we are too often divided across lines of race, ethnicity, and economic inequality. We are a nation of immigrants, struggling to address the challenges of many new immigrants in our midst. We are a society built on the strength of our families, called to defend marriage and offer moral and economic support for family life. We are a powerful nation in a violent world, confronting terror and trying to build a safer, more just, more peaceful world. We are an affluent society where too many live-in poverty and lack health care and other necessities of life. We are part of a global community charged with being good stewards of the earth's environment.[323]

Loss of respect for life is not limited to the pre-born, but manifests at all stages of life. The Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred, and that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Without this foundation, social disintegration accelerates. As Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York notes at the very heart of this social disintegration, is a loss of respect for life. Only a concerted and intentional change in how we value life can change this divisiveness which crosscuts society. As Cardinal Dolan describes:

> Everyone seems to lament the divisiveness in our society today—in politics, culture, schools, even

[323] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 11 (#2).

> within our beloved Church. One thing that seems to unite all sides is the worry that our world has lost a basic respect for life. Left and right, Democrat and Republican, East and West, across the globe, all seem to agree. For instance: We grieve at the plight of refugees and immigrants at the border, scared, worried, desperate, caught between two worlds, treated at times like chattel instead of human beings made in God's image and likeness […]. Human life is now treated as useless, worthless, disposable. Pope Francis, as usual, has tagged it: we live in a "throwaway-culture." Society tells us that life is OK, the Holy Father observes, as long as it's useful, productive, not a challenge or an inconvenience. As he vigorously states, no, all life matters, every life is sacred, no matter what conditions might threaten it.[324]

The conviction that human dignity cannot be compromised is based on the claim that God created all people in his image, which makes every person of divine creation. We are 'spiritual beings' in the flesh. God gives life, and therefore He alone has the right to initiate and terminate it, demonstrating, that which makes life sacred. Human dignity and the value of life is a central tenet in Christian social teaching. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states:

> Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are before society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its moral legitimacy.[325]

The secular culture in the modern globalized society emphasizes the importance of human rights that are regulated by international laws. It means that the principles of Catholic teaching and the international secular agenda are interconnected. At the same time, Catholic doctrine has several differences on morally biased questions connected with human dignity and life. Among the examples that feature these distinctions is the attitude toward assisted suicide, the death penalty, and abortion, all of which directly violate the Catholic moral teaching on human life and dignity. "Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected, and the responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities—to one another, to our families, and

[324] Cardinal Dolan. 2021. *Human Rights Begin in the Womb*. Catholic New York. In https://www.cny.org/stories/human-rights-begin-in-the-womb,22937. March 11, 2023.
[325] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1930.

to the larger society."[326]

If human dignity and the right to life are purely attributed to society and are not inviolable rights endowed by God, as taught in Catholic social teaching, then it is intrinsically devalued. As Bishop Robert Barron notes, "the forgetfulness of the dignity of human beings […] is on every clearer display in our Western culture. One has only to consider the over 58 million abortions that have taken place, under full protection of the law […] or the ever more insistent push toward permitting euthanasia, even on children […] or the wanton killings going on nightly in the streets of our major cities." He further notes, "What makes this sort of startling violence against human beings possible, I would submit, is the attenuation of our sense of God's existence. In the classical western perspective, the dignity of the human person is a consequence and function of his or her status as a creature of God. Precisely because the human being is made in the image and likeness of the Creator and destined, finally for eternal life on high with God, as he is a subject of inalienable rights […]. For the past two hundred years, atheists have been loudly asserting that the dismissal of God will lead to the human liberation […] once the human being is untethered from God, he becomes, in very short order, an object among objects, and hence susceptible to the grossest manipulation by the powerful and the self-interested. In the measure that people still speak of the irreducible dignity of the individual, they are, whether they know it or not, standing upon Biblical foundations."[327]

The passage from Luke 10:25-37 says: "The good Samaritan recognized the dignity in the other and cared for his life." It shows that respect for human dignity is the Christian ethical norm. At the same time, it is also the secular norm that many Americans use to defend their position on euthanasia or abortion. The Catholic Church states that the life of the unborn child is valuable, and it is critical to respect the human dignity of the terminally ill person, which makes abortion and euthanasia homicides. From the secular perspective, the right to abortion and assisted suicide are the ways to protect the human dignity of the person who does not want to die while suffering and the woman whose rights, in secular society, supersede that of her unborn child. This opposition of moral beliefs on human life and dignity that exists in contemporary American society illustrates that it is difficult to find the common solution to biased questions despite similar values of

[326] USCCB. (n.d.). "Rights and Responsibilities". In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 11, 2023.
[327] Robert Barron. 2016. *Vibrant Paradoxes: The Both/and of Catholicism.* (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, Kindle edition): 2213-2231.

Christians and secularists.

One of the most egregious manifestations undermining the integrity of American society is the devaluation of marriage and family. The USCCB emphasizes the idea that humans are social beings. Humans require adequate social interactions to fully develop their potential. The absence of such critical societal institutions such as marriage and family, that form the basic unit of societal structure, weakens the position of the person, depriving them of the opportunity to partake in those critical interactions such as caring for their children and spouse, and subsequently to feel supported. These fundamental human interactions affect human dignity and the motivation of the individual in personal growth.[328] In the USCCB document, *Life-Giving Love in an age of Technology*, the bishops state:

> In marriage, man and woman are united to each other, body and soul, through a loving physical union. As embodied persons, they were created to complete and fulfill one another in love and also to unite together in bringing about a new human being as the fruit of that love. These two aspects of sexuality are essentially intertwined. The loving and permanent union of husband and wife, accepted among Catholics as a sacrament, creates the fitting environment for nurturing and protecting a new, defenseless, and dependent human being; and parents' love for their child, and the cooperation needed to give that child a home, strengthen and enrich their love for one another […]. Our modern secular culture tends to separate the unitive and procreative aspects of conjugal love from each other, to the detriment of both. This separation weakens marriage.[329]

The USCCB notes In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* that' "Marriage must be defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong exclusive commitment between a man and a woman, and as the source of the next generation and the protective haven for children. The institution of marriage is undermined by the ideology of 'gender' that dismisses sexual difference and the complementarity of the sexes and falsely presents 'gender' as nothing more than a social construct or psychological reality, which a person may choose at variance with his or her biological reality."[330]

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[328] USCCB. 2021. "Call to Family Community and Participation." In https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/call-to-family-community-and-participation. Retrieved March 11, 2023.
[329] USCCB. Committee on Pro-Live Activities. 2009. *Life-Giving Love in an age of Technology*, p. 50.
[330] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 35, (#70).

As further noted by the USCCB Pro-Life Committee, "The true meaning and purpose of marriage has become clouded over the last 40 years. This confusion has influenced why and whether young people marry. While we understand marriage as a sacrament, it's critical we learn to use non-religious language to explain it to our children and friends in ways that properly convey its truth and beauty […]. The breakdown of marriage has reached crisis mode. Today more than 50 percent of births to women under 30 occur outside marriage, according to sociologist, the increased numbers of children in poverty, in fatherless homes, and who experience abuse and neglect all relate to changing attitudes about marriage. The phenomenon of the breakdown of marriage has spread rapidly into the segment known as Middle America and is now touching nearly every extended family."[331]

The theme of marriage and family is also biased in modern American society. Secular culture and legislation allow cohabitation both heterosexual and homosexual without registering marriage. From the perspective of the law, people who live together without marriage are not regarded as spouses, and they do not have certain rights, protections, and tax benefits afforded to married couples. At the same time, secular culture does not oppose cohabitation, instead regarding it as commonplace in the contemporary world. From the Catholic point of view, it is a sinful practice that is detrimental to marriage as a social institution. Furthermore, it changes the perception of family in the contemporary United States. Regardless of the detrimental effect on marriage rendered through cohabitation and non-committal relationships, the Catholic Church cannot impose its views regarding family and marriage on secular individuals who have a positive attitude related to these relationships, because of the perception of freedom attributed to lack of commitment, and what is perceived as an increase in the choice of partners and alternative formats of relationships.

This violation of traditional marriage undermines the integrity of family, thereby contributing to social disintegration. From the perspective of the Catholic Church, the call to family is the basic right of every human that gives people the sense of fulfillment and the motivation for altruistic behavior, including the attempts to seek the common good.[332] This was

[331] USCCB. Committee on Pro-Life Activities. (n.d.). "Life Matters: explaining the reality of marriage to family and friends." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 11, 2023.
[332] USCCB. 2021. "Call to Family Community and Participation." In https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/call-to-family-community-and-participation. Retrieved March 11, 2023.

beautifully emphasized by Pope John Paul II in the following: "The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons."[333]

Similarly, Pope Francis wrote in his apostolic exhortation "Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family" that family helps people to develop their virtues, making them truly Christian. Family becomes the intermediary for an increase of pastoral activity according to the Catholic view. Pope Francis described this in the following quote in chapter 8, #290 of Amoris Laetitia:

> The family is thus an agent of pastoral activity through its explicit proclamation of the Gospel and its legacy of varied forms of witness, namely solidarity with the poor, openness to a diversity of people, the protection of creation, moral and material solidarity with other families, including those most in need, commitment to the promotion of the common good and the transformation of unjust social structures, beginning in the territory in which the family lives, through the practice of the corporal and spiritual works of mercy.[334]

The USCCB notes In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* that "the family founded upon marriage is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities." The bishops additionally stated, "policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should uphold the God-given meaning and value of marriage and family, help families stay together, and reward responsibility and sacrifice for children. Wages should allow workers to support their families, and public assistance should be available to help poor families live in dignity. Such assistance should be provided in a manner that promotes eventual financial autonomy." They further state, 'Children, in particular, are to be valued, protected and nurtured. As a Church, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of children in our own institutions and in all of society."[335] The Bishops clearly affirm that the role of a just and verdant society is to support the fundamental component of that society—the family.

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[333] Pope John Paul II. 1981. Apostolic Exhortation on the Family: "Familiaris Consortio," #18.
[334] Pope Francis. 2016. Apostolic Exhortation: "Amoris Laetitia". On Love in the Family, Chapter 8, #290." In https://www.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.
[335] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 35 (#70-71).

The disintegration of traditional marriage has negatively impacted and complicated family life dramatically. No longer can it be relied upon that a family will consist of a mother and father raising their children. Increasingly, complex blended families and alternative family structures are replacing traditional families, demonstrating that family life has diverged from the primary goal of raising children. As Bishop Ricardo of Las Cruces illustrates:

> The family today […] has become more complex, and this poses many challenges to the church and society as well. Today's family might include only a single parent, More and more, we see racially mixed marriages whose children may be looked down on. There are families composed of grandparents who provide the primary care for their grandchildren as well as families where stepparents adopt the children. There are families made up of remarried spouses, each bringing to the new partnership their own children. At times, children, including school-age ones, live with their friends' families. There are many children raised in foster homes, sometimes more than one. Some families have several children of same-sex couples, adopted children, and children of teenage mothers […] A difficult economy, increased immigration, greater longevity, delayed marriage, and even work-life struggles are all factors in the rise of multigenerational families.[336]

Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler's assessment of the disintegration of the family and the damage that is occurring to the youth of this generation highlights their yearning for that structure. He notes, "Naturally, as human beings, we need order, we need structure, we need some kind of direction in life. And I think that a lot of young people have grown up with basically none of that in their family and in society. And they're moving toward something that gives them some structure." The challenge becomes, what will give them that structure? Bishop Strickland opines the Church has the opportunity to remind this generation that it has the structure for which they are yearning. He notes, "Yes, there are challenges. But we know that the full gospel unlocks a joy in our lives that, though it doesn't instantly take away the world's problems or the confusions or the disappointments or our own sinfulness, gives us an anchor of hope and light that can pierce the darkness that so many young people are facing."[337]

With this disintegration of society's respect of human life and first two cornerstones of social life—marriage and family—the final cornerstone of society that will ultimately falter is

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[336] Ricardo Ramirez. 2015. *Power from the Margins: The Emergence of the Latino in the Church and in Society.* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books): 317.
[337] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century.* (El Cajon, CA, Catholic Answers): 37-38.

community. The principle of participation supposes that every individual can contribute to the development of humanity both in general and in society. When everyone participates in community life, the quality of life and the level of satisfaction among people increases. The person can participate in the life of the neighborhood, church community, national community. The level to which the individual desires to make change is not the most important factor because all actions are valuable. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, reminded the faithful that Bible promotes participation as an integral part of the Christian mission with the following:

> [...] The Gospel tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction. True faith in the incarnate Son of God is inseparable from self-giving, from membership in the community, from service, from reconciliation with others. The Son of God, by becoming flesh, summoned us to the revolution of tenderness.[338]

In other words, the Catholic faith supposes an altruistic attitude toward other members of the society and orientation of the person on the life in the community. As Pope Francis described in "Laudato Si", groups of activists can contribute to real changes in society because people feel more assured by the spirit of creativity and responsibility that is characteristic of such groups. It is easier to solve social problems when several activists pursue the same goal. This communal response contrasts the muted response by individuals in which a sole activist may lose motivation and lack the resources needed to fight for social justice. It is possible to conclude that participation in community life is an effective way to create a civil society where all members feel their responsibility and moral obligation towards others, which is an example of virtuous behavior for Christians.

In its Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the US Economy, the USCCB noted that a person's participation in community life relates to the idea of subsidiarity. The Catholic teaching defines subsidiarity as the quality of the person to give to others, which is an integral part of human dignity. This principle supposes that when people have the opportunity to act independently in small groups, their initiatives are effective. As a result, the state should protect small communities that change the society on the level of the city or the neighborhood. Practice shows that when people in the community are in accord concerning their goals, their worldview,

[338] Pope Francis. 2013. Apostolic Exhortation: "Evangelii Gaudium", 88.

their cultural and religious background, the results of these actions are positive.[339] It is possible to conclude that Christian and secular goals coincide in this case. Conceivably, all people want to improve the life in their community, but it is difficult for many individuals to find motivation for active participation. The doctrine of the Catholic Church, in its turn, promotes participation in community life as a virtue.

According to Catholic teaching, the balance between rights and responsibilities allows the community to be healthy. Such rights including the protection of human dignity, fundamental human rights, the right for participation in community life, the right to live in a peaceful environment, and the right to have a family, are among those facets that lead to personal happiness. Some of these rights, like participation or call to family, are connected with individual responsibilities, which allows people to feel that their actions carry value for others. The feeling of mutual connection that rights and responsibilities give to Christians allows them to feel part of the larger community. It is written in Isaiah 1:16-17: "Seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow." These lines illustrate that Christians should help others, but at the same time, they should also anticipate that others will help them in difficult situations, which facilitates life. Bishop Barron notes, "in Catholic social theory, subsidiarity is balanced by solidarity, which is to say, a keen sense of the common good, of the natural and supernatural connections that bond us to one another, of our responsibility for each other […]. Solidarity without subsidiarity can easily devolve into a kind of totalitarianism whereby 'justice' is achieved either through outright manipulation and intimidation or through more subtle forms of social engineering."[340]

Participation in community life and acceptance of the generosity of others are manifestations of the common good, which is also the social justice principle of the Catholic Church. It supposes that the actions of people influence others, and Christians must think about the consequences of their behavior and decisions. It is said in Philippians 2:3-4: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your interests, but the interests of others." These lines show that the motivation of the

[339] USCCB. 1986. "Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy," 37. Retrieved October 17, 2022.
[340] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture.* (Skokie, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries): 161-162.

Catholic person should be altruistic if they desire to live according to the Biblical teaching and, in turn, help other people.

The promotion of peace is similar to the principle of promotion of the common good because it creates an environment where all people can live without fear of harm. As Archbishop Gomez of Los Angeles states, "We need to tell our story of salvation in a new way, with charity and confidence, without fear […] this is the church's mission in every age and every cultural moment."[341] The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* defines peace as the fruit of social justice because it illustrates the positive results of righteous actions of all believers. All people profit from the actions that aim at achieving the common good. It is said in Jeremiah 29:4-7: "Seek the welfare of the city, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." These words from the Holy Scripture demonstrate that the actions of all Christians are integral in achieving the common good, and all Christians who adhere to the principles of social justice and peace, will reap the positive consequences of these actions. The USCCB notes we are obliged to "work to avoid war and to promote peace. This is of particular importance, as there is a danger in the present time of becoming indifferent to war because of the number of armed conflicts. War is never a reflection of what ought to be but a sign that something truer to human dignity has failed. The Catholic tradition recognizes the legitimacy of just war teaching when defending the innocent in the face of grave evil, but we must never lose sight of the cost of war and its harm to human life. Nations should protect the dignity of the human person and the right to life by finding more effective ways to prevent conflicts, to resolve them by peaceful means, and to promote reconstruction and reconciliation in the wake of conflicts."[342]

Equal opportunities for work and protecting human dignity are among the most important principles that help people from vulnerable populations. Prioritizing care of the vulnerable and poor is the moral benchmark by which a society's health should be measured. Pope John Paul II emphasized the importance of caring for disabled persons and immigrants in the encyclical "Laborem Exercens." Both groups of people belong to the vulnerable populations who often live in poverty because their rights at work are often infringed. Moreover, they do not have equal access

[341] Jose H. Gomez. 2021. "Archbishop Gomez: the church must confront 'woke' social justice movements that aim to 'cancel' Christian beliefs." *America: The Jesuit Review*. In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[342] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 34 (#68).

to work in the global economy because hiring disabled people and immigrants is connected with potential hardships for the employer. As a result, employers tend to disregard people who require additional documents or facilities at work because it potentially decreases productivity and invites increased governmental regulation and scrutiny. John Paul II writes in "Laborem Exercens" that "The disabled person is one of us and participates fully in the same humanity that we possess."[343] A similar humanistic and Christian approach should be applied to people who immigrated from other countries, who cannot adapt instantly to life in their new home, and who often need assistance in many aspects connected with work. The developed society must include these categories of people, giving them adequate and equal opportunities for employment, which is essential to the principle of equality and assures individuals' well-being is prioritized.

The Catholic Church discusses the equality of all people in society in the context of human rights. The situation with the priority for disabled workers, immigrants, or the poor in receiving employment opportunities is a biased question in the modern United States. As Bishop Joseph Strickland reminds us, "Read the four Gospels and just look at what Jesus does. He's constantly going out to the disenfranchised. He's constantly reaching out to the poor—the materially poor, the spiritually poor, and those rejected by society. Even those who don't believe in Jesus's divinity can admit that he provides a laudable example of how humans should treat each other. And it's a revolutionary picture—I mean, *love your enemies*? Talk about a revolution. Seven billion people loving their enemies would bring justice to the world overnight, and that's just what Jesus Christ is about, if we just look at him."[344] Giving priority to those who are in need and persons with disabilities, is the Christian altruistic approach that focuses on achieving social justice in the community. The Bible implores Christians to have an active position in caring for the poor and the vulnerable; it is through these mercies that God realizes his kindness in this world and the faithful fulfill their part in the Christian mission. It is written in James 2:14-17:

> What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

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[343] Pope John Paul II. (14 Sept 1981). Encyclical: "Laborem Exercens", 22.
[344] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*. (El Cajon, CA, Catholic Answers): 58.

The immigrants are also 'vulnerable' and the Church implores them to be treated justly. The Catholic Church does not explicitly address legal restrictions outlined in immigration legislation; sovereign countries have the right to their borders. The Church does, however, appeal to treating immigrants with justice. As such, the Church recognizes the need for this immigration, both legal and illegal, is the need to overcome poverty in their native countries and to overcome the iniquity of opportunity to improve their lives by working in the United States. Instead, the Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of promoting the rights of workers and their solidarity, which might improve the conditions of their work. This position is often criticized by politicians and some citizens because it does not promote the interests of American domestic policy. The Church concentrates on humanistic ideals, and caring for God's creations is its primary concern. Immigrant workers, in their turn, belong to the vulnerable category of people who require the support of the Church. Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark notes:

> There is an 'innate tension' that exists between issues of worldwide concern (globalization) and matters that are much closer to home (localization). Immigration is a key issue, of course, because it touches many of the challenges faced by local communities and the world at large today […]. Creating dignified conditions for quality living in countries of origin is essential to avoiding what the pope calls 'unnecessary migration,' but when this is not possible for political, economic or cultural reasons, our response must be one of respect and hospitality. The four words *welcome, protect, promote and integrate* each describe concrete actions that we are called to take on behalf of our sisters and brothers who have been forced to flee their homelands […] Strategies for welcoming those who emigrate from their countries of origin require comprehensive legislative and public policy reform here in the United States and in other nations that are experiencing difficulties with immigration […]. If the conviction that all of us are brothers and sisters is not to remain an abstract idea but to find concrete embodiment in our society, we must be willing to pray, advocate and act on behalf of all our sisters and brothers who come to us seeking a better life for themselves and their families.[345]

Work is an integral part of human life, and the Christian faith emphasizes its importance. Work allows people to fulfill their mission, improve life in the community, and experience satisfaction from the process. As it is written in Genesis 2:15, "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it." As ordained by God, 'in the beginning' there

[345] Joseph W. Tobin. 2022. "'A Heart Open to the Whole World.' Cardinal Tobin reflects on immigration." Feb 2, 2022, Vol 3. No 11. Archdiocese of Newark. In rcan.org Retrieved March 1, 2023.

is an innate dignity to work.

Pope John Paul II focuses on the question of the dignity of workers in the encyclical "Laborem Exercens". John Paul II articulated concerns connected with the technological progress that might change the essence of labor, similar to the industrial revolution. He regarded it as a potential threat to people from developing countries who cannot participate in the global economy on equal terms with those from developed countries. Their rights as workers are violated by unregulated capitalism, depriving people of their right to the dignity of work. John Paul II referred to the Biblical teaching, asserting that work is an integral part of human life:

> The person who works desires not only due remuneration for his work; he also wishes that, within the production process, provision be made for him to be able to know that in his work, even on something that is owned in common, he is working "for himself". This awareness is extinguished within him in a system of excessive bureaucratic centralization, which makes the worker feel that he is just a cog in a huge machine moved from above.[346]

In other words, work is the way to develop one's own personality and to feel that human life has a purpose. Pope John Paul II emphasizes that people and human dignity are more important than the capital and the production of things, which means that businesses should assure the rights of their employees. The workers, in turn, are entitled to organize unions to protect their rights, if they are infringed upon by the employer. Pope John Paul II proposed to introduce financial social support at sufficient levels to support a family when there is no opportunity to find gainful employment.[347] These measures might ensure that work in the capitalist and global society is more oriented toward social justice principles.

As Archbishop Jose Gomez notes, "In God's plan for our lives, work is essential to who we are, and work is essential to how we are meant to serve the kingdom. Work is, of course, practical. We need to work to put food on our tables and to provide for our families. We need to work so that we have something to give our brothers and sisters in need. But our work must always be animated by our faith in Jesus Christ [...]. We serve God in the place where we are, not only in our homes and our personal relationships, but also through the work we do and how we carry out that work. The Church has always taught that work is oriented to service: service to God, service

[346] Pope John Paul II. 1981. Encyclical: "Laborem Exercens", 15.
[347] Ibidem.

to the Church, service to others […]. Work is how we seek God's will and how we share in God's plan. It is how we provide for our families and build our communities. Through our work, we build up his kingdom on earth."[348]

The principle of stewardship surmises that Catholics should protect their God-given potential, natural resources, and the environment. This quality relates to the preservation of the heritage for future generations and for God. Pope Francis wrote his encyclical "Laudato Si" that "Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others."[349]

Catholics should not ignore environmental challenges because preservation of the Earth for future generations is the preservation of God's gift to humanity. As it is written in Psalm 24:1-2, "All the earth is the Lord's." Pope Francis describes in "Laudato Si," "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home." [350] This illustrates that caring for the environment should become the social approach that is not a question for debate. Catholics should feel the responsibility for ecology like they feel responsible for the poor because both issues are primary concerns of the society that result in serious injustice and loss of balance in the modern globalized world.

The USCCB statement *Global Climate Change A plea for Dialogue Prudence and the Common Good* expresses that the dialogue surrounding care for the environment and climate change should not be politically motivated or economically driven rather, "It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the 'human environment 'and the 'natural environment.' It is about our human stewardship of God's creation and our responsibility to those who come after us."[351] As the USCCB illustrates in the above statement, harming our environment ultimately harms humanity.

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[348] Jose H. Gomez. 2020. "Voices: Work is Essential," *Angelus.* In www.angelusnews.com. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[349] Pope Francis. 2015. Encyclical: "Laudato Si", 159.
[350] Ibidem, 13.
[351] USCCB. Committee of Justice, Peace and Human Development. 2016. "Global Climate Change A plea for Dialogue Prudence and the Common Good." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

At the same time, environmental concerns connected with consumerism are among the most dangerous manifestations of global culture. Individuals consume without understanding the negative impact of mass production of these products on ecology, which aggravates the situation with the environment further. Pope John Paul II further warned Catholics in his encyclical "Centesimus Annus" that corporations and the people who lead them regard themselves as God who can decide the destiny of the Earth by producing enormous quantities of products that humanity cannot possibly consume. It might lead to the rebellion of the planet that should destroy humanity for its cruel attitude toward nature.[352]

Bishop Timothy Dolan, implores us to evaluate more fully the "ideologies that chisel away at the culture of life, leading toward this "utilitarian and consumerist *Culture of Death*." He describes the 'trinity of culprits"—*pragmatism, utilitarianism, and consumerism.* He notes, "*Pragmatism*, of course, means that the only value is whether or not something works, if it is efficient and helps us achieve a goal. *Utilitarianism* means that the only value is whether or not something or someone is useful to me, serves my purposes. *Consumerism* posits value only in something's ability to fill a need or satisfy an urge."[353] If we approach creation purely as a means to an end, it will be only to the detriment of all of humanity.

The above theological assessment of the different manifestations of social disintegration, illustrates that the fragmentation of society from the principles of life results in the decline of society over time. The fracturing, breakdown or lapse of traditional social support systems ultimately results in harm to individuals and society. Divergence of society from the principles of social justice is at the root of this disintegration because respect of human life is the root. Disintegration of society's respect of human life, and the cornerstones of social life-- namely marriage, family and community--will ultimately lead to the disintegration of the very fabric of society. The Church proclaims that human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of the moral vision of society. Therefore, without this foundation, social disintegration accelerates.

[352] Pope John Paul II. (1 May 1991). Encyclical: "Centesimus Annus", 37.
[353] Timothy Dolan. 2012. *True Freedom: On Protecting Human Dignity and Religious Liberty*. (New York, Image): 118.

c. The Church's Teaching on Social and Economic Exclusion

Millions of American citizens experience social and economic exclusion. While social exclusion refers to the alienation of specific individuals from the concurrent societal system alongside its privileges and rights, economic exclusion involves preventing specific individuals from full participation and equality in economic life within society. Both these exclusions result from multiple factors, including poverty or being members of certain minority groups. One of the major causes of social and economic exclusion is income inequality. Pope Francis has repeatedly reiterated that inequality is the source of all evil, explaining how unequal distribution and ownership of resources can lead to the exclusion of specific individuals in the American community. Cardinal Timothy Dolan echoed this, stating, "The spread of the free market has undoubtedly led to a tremendous increase in overall wealth and well-being around the world. Nevertheless, many people live in poverty and have few opportunities to achieve prosperity."[354] According to the Church, social and economic exclusion result in the immense segmentation of specific individuals in American society from meaningful involvement in economic, social, and political life, resulting in a rise of a financial system that promotes ruling instead of serving humanity.

Social and economic exclusion contributes to instability and national security breaches, providing a platform for extremists to exploit. In addition, socioeconomic exclusion in American society can result in conflicts between certain groups, such as between the rich and the poor, and interracial and intercultural conflicts, which could spur the national level and result in national instability.

The Catholic Church in the United States proposes that to ensure the eradication of poverty and exclusion in American society, the Catholic church community, the government, and other relevant institutions should take radical measures to ensure the eradication of absolute autonomy in markets and financial speculation and to tackle the drivers of inequality and socioeconomic exclusion in society directly. Inequalities in wealth cause inequality in access to quality education and future income. As a result, the Church encourages societal institutions to focus on creating a level ground for all individuals, allowing for the fair distribution of resources such as education,

[354] Timothy Dolan, Interview with the Wall Street Journal (22 May 2014) as reported by Joan Frawley Desmond. (23 May 2014) “Cardinal Dolan’s Take on Pope Francis and “Trickle-Down Economics.” *National Catholic Register.* In ncregister.com. Retrieved October 17, 2022.

healthcare, and economic power.

The USCCB's statement on *The Globalized Economy* further illustrates the need for a pastoral approach to the injustices of the economy. "A core message of that pastoral is that the economy must exist for the person and economic life should be guided by solidarity and a clear priority for the least among us. Because the economy has moral dimensions, economic choices and institutions must be judged by how they protect or undermine the life and dignity of the human person. As individuals, all have the right to the basic necessities of life – food, education, shelter, medical care, job security, productive work, just wages and working conditions, as well as the consequent duty to provide for our families and to contribute to society."[355] Cardinal Timothy Dolan also notes this need for reform especially in the arenas of commerce and politics, noting "People here in the United States are learning the hard way that our economy cannot continue on as it has, that it needs reform, and that our dealings in commerce, business, politics, investment, and trade must be guided by biblical values and virtues."[356]

In the USCCB Catholic Social Ministry Gathering meeting, the USCCB directly advocated for the US congress to reduce poverty in the United States and abroad, provide full legal integration for Afghan refugees, provide supplemental humanitarian assistance to those impacted by the war in Ukraine and continue the Child Tax Credit thereby providing financial assistance for the lowest income families in the United States. The USCCB Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, in a joint statement with Catholic Relief Services stated:

> The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) strongly support international poverty-reducing humanitarian and development assistance and dignity of all human life and nurturing peaceful and just societies […]. The Church views international assistance as an essential tool for promoting human life and dignity, reducing poverty, advancing global solidarity, and enhancing peace and security throughout the world. International assistance is a moral responsibility to assist "the least of these" (Matthew 25). Therefore, assistance must be an expression of our solidarity with all people living in poverty, not an exercise in short-term self-interest, or self-promotion […]. USCCB and CRS' experience affirms the idea that the

[355] USCCB. 1996. *The Globalized Economy: Challenges to the Church in the U.S.* In https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/global-issues/trade/presentation-on-globalization-and-challenges-to-church-in-us-1996-10-05. Retrieved October 17, 2022.

[356] Timothy Dolan. (2009, June). Unity in faith, pluralism of cultures: Interview with the Archbishop Timothy Michael Dolan, new Metropolitan Archbishop of New York. *30 Days in the Church and in the World*. (G. Cubeddu, Interviewer) 30 Days in the Church and in the World, www.30giorni.it. Retrieved February 13, 2023.

> U.S. can play a constructive role in advancing peace, justice, and wellbeing. The numerous global challenges we face today demand a strong U.S. response, U.S. leadership will be critical to end global hunger; prepare for future health crises; care for our common home and address climate change; mitigate human suffering and address the root causes of conflict and instability; and strengthen local capacity to bring about transformational change.[357]

While the USCCB calls on America to leverage its considerable power and position for the greater good of society, there is a danger within this concentration as well. As Bishop Robert Barron notes, "A crucially important feature of Catholic social teaching, but one frequently underemphasized or misunderstood, is a clear animus against the concentration of power within a society. This perilous agglomeration can happen economically, politically, or culturally. By basic and healthy instinct, Catholic social teaching wants power, as much as possible, distributed widely throughout the community, so that one small segment does not tyrannize the majority or prevent large numbers of people from enjoying the benefits that are theirs by right."[358] Bishop Barron illustrated these imbalanced concentrations of power manifesting in social injustices, economic exclusion and social disintegration and the response of Catholic social teaching in the following examples.

> Economic order: "If one organization manages to monopolize its segment of the economy, it can set prices arbitrarily, hire and fire according to its whim, preclude any competition that might provide better products and/or higher wages for employees, etc. One thinks here of the 'trust-busting' work…in the early twentieth century and the similar concern today for breaking up Google, Facebook, Amazon, and other high-tech conglomerates that exercise an almost unchallenged dominance in their fields. A Cornerstone of Catholic social teaching is what is traditionally called 'distributive justice'—which is to say the equitable allocation of goods within a society…The bottom line is this: spreading out wealth within a society tends to make an economy both more just and more efficient."[359]

Political realm: "if one party comes to dominate a nation, a state, a city, or a community, corruption almost inevitably follows. Unchallenged, the ruling conglomerate can impose its will,

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[357] USCCB. 2023. "Catholic Social Ministry Gathering: 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' (Mt 5:9): A Catholic Message to Congress" Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development, Office of International Justice and Peace: Background on International Poverty-Reducing Humanitarian and Development Assistance-January 2023. Washington, DC. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 6, 2023.
[358] Robert Barron. 2022. *Redeeming the Time: Gospel Perspectives on the Challenges of the Hour*. (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire, Park Ridge, IL): 215.
[359] Ibidem.

compel the acceptance of its vision, and eliminate prospective opponents and critics. It is quite obvious that this sort of arrangement obtains in communist dictatorships and oppressive theocracies, but it is also apparent in local and state governments in our own country." Bishop Barron further gives the example of the inability to elect pro-life candidates in "Illinois, Massachusetts, or California" stating further, "When a political monopoly couples itself with economic power, the corruption becomes only deeper and more intractable. Once again, according to Catholic social teaching, the desideratum is breaking up and spreading out power throughout society."[360]

Cultural Arena: In this arena, Bishop Barron notes the "dangerous hyper-concentration of power" in the "kind of strict leftist ideology that exists in practically every film or television program produced in Hollywood. This is not a brutal state censorship to be sure, but it is indeed a sort of monopolization of cultural power that effectively excludes rival expressions of the good, the true, and the beautiful. Once again, it is very useful to notice the ways in which this cultural dictatorship allies itself with both political and economic power in order to be spread out as widely as possible too, permitting a range of artistic expressions at a variety of levels within society."[361]

Justice for the marginalized and excluded means recognizing the very least in society. Justice also means addressing and eradicating injustices as well. Cardinal Wilton Gregory of Washington notes, "We must also recognize that a life-affirming ethic should also draw attention to a host of other areas that should be of great concern to humanity. This includes revoking the death penalty and caring for the imprisoned; addressing all forms of injustice, including racism; caring for the poor, the sick, elderly, and vulnerable; and advancing a greater recognition of our calling in the entire spectrum of human relationships to be brothers and sisters to one another."[362]

When witnessing upheavals and injustices across the globe, it is the moral obligation of the citizens to acknowledge their culpability in these crises and work toward just solutions. When contemplating the character of physical exclusion of migrants, and the refugee 'crises' occurring across the globe, Pope Francis remarked:

> You used a word, crisis. It's become a state of crisis after a long process. For years, this process has exploded because the wars which those people leave and flee are wars waged for years. It's been a

[360] Ibidem, 215-216.
[361] Ibidem, 216.
[362] Cardinal Wilton Gregory. 2022. Cardinal Gregory's statement, following the supreme court decision. Church of the Resurrection. In https://resurrectionadw.org/cardinal-gregorys-statement-following-the-supreme-court-decision. Retrieved March 6, 2023.

> hunger for years. When I think of Africa, this is a bit simplistic, but I saw it as an example. It comes to me to think about Africa, 'the exploited continent.' They went to pick up the slaves there, then the great resources. It's the exploited continent. And, now the wars, tribal or not. But they have economic interests behind them. And, I think that instead of exploiting a continent or a nation, make investments instead so these people might have work and this crisis would be avoided. It's true, as I said at Congress, it's a refugee crisis not seen since World War II. It's the biggest. You asked me about barriers. You know what happens to all walls. All of them. All walls fall. Today, tomorrow or in 100 years, they will fall. It's not a solution. The wall isn't a solution [...]. We have to be intelligent, and whoever comes […] that migrant flow. It's not easy to find solutions, but with dialogue between nations they should be found. Walls are never solutions.[363]

The above assessment of the Church's teaching on social and economic exclusion demonstrates that alienation of and injustices toward marginalized communities from mainstream society, with its rights and privileges, prevents some individuals from the full participation and equality in economic life in society. In addition, social economic exclusion in American society can result in conflicts between certain groups, such as between the rich and the poor, and interracial and intercultural conflicts, which could ultimately result in instability of society at large. The economy must exist for the person, and economic life should be guided by solidarity and a clear priority for the least among us. The Church encourages societal institutions to focus on creating a level ground for all individuals, allowing for the fair distribution of resources, such as education, healthcare, and economic power. According to the Church, social and economic exclusion results in the immense segmentation of specific individuals in American society from meaningful involvement in economic, social, and political life, resulting in a rise of a financial system that promotes ruling instead of serving humanity.

d. The Church's Critical Approach to Consumerism as a Lifestyle

Consumerism involves a form of lifestyle which entails society's preoccupation with the selfish and frivolous acquisition of material goods. Such a phenomenon goes against God and the Catholic Church's teachings against greed and selfishness (Ps. 62:10). The Catholic Church preaches against Consumerism, taking a critical approach to ensuring the American Catholic

[363] Pope Francis. 2015. Full transcript of Pope Francis' inflight interview from Philadelphia to Rome. Catholic News Agency. In https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/32728/full-transcript-of-pope-francis-inflight-interview-from-philadelphia-to-rome. Retrieved March 6, 2023.

community maintains a spiritual and sacred life. According to Bishop Robert Barron, Consumerism undermines the American community's Catholic faith as it poses the dangers of idolatry. "When our lives revolve around Christ, we find order and harmony. Furthermore, by implication, whenever something other than Christ—money, power, pleasure, honor—fills the center, the soul becomes disharmony. The well-ordered soul begins to wobble and go off-kilter."[364] Being preoccupied with acquiring material wealth can result in the temptation to disregard God and worship worldly possessions (Jeremiah.12:1). Consumerism makes Christians assign much more value to their material possessions than their faith in God, building their identity more in worldly possessions such as the clothes they wear, the cars they drive, and all the things they consume. The amount one consumes manifests the conception of their identity and reason for existence. As a result, consumerism results in spiritual and cultural impoverishment.

According to the Catholic Church, consumerism results in chronic dissatisfaction and covetousness among the American Catholic community. Similarly, Pope Francis reiterated the damage consumerism could cause to the Catholic Church community, outlining how one can never satisfy such a culture as it leads to desolation and anguish.[365] Christians immersed in consumerism behaviors simply go against what God intended for them on Earth. The Church further warns of the significant increase in the consumerism culture across the American Catholic community. Richard Foster, an American Quaker theologian, stated, "Overconsumption is cancer eating away our spiritual vitals […] it distances us from the great masses (as) we become less able to ask moral questions."[366] Furthermore, most individuals are engulfed in the consumerism culture as a means of seeking meaning and assurance. As a result, the individual might become a slave of worldly possessions, ending in radical dissatisfaction.

In his assessment of the current state of consumerism in the modern world, especially prominent in America and Europe, Bishop Robert Barron notes that:

> The world we know today [is] a civilization marked by industrialization, mechanization, the emergence of mega-cities, and the triumph of practical reason and science. There is no question but that this type of culture has given rise to a more convenient and easeful life; it would be hard for

[364] Robert Barron and John L Allen. 2017. *To Light a Fire on the Earth: Proclaiming the Gospel in a Secular Age.* Word on Fire publishing. In www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved March 6, 2023.
[365] Pope Francis. 2015. "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cuba, to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, Visit to the Joint Sessions of the United States Congress: Address of the Holy Father," United States Capitol, Washington DC, (24 Sept 2015). In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 16, 2022.
[366] Richard J. Foster. (date unknown). In azquotes.com. Retrieved October 20, 2022.

> most of us to imagine a world without electricity, automobiles, airplanes, and computers, and few of us would deny that these inventions have been, on the whole, a boon for the human race […] this contemporary culture is also marked by an undeniable soullessness and superficiality, evident perhaps most obviously in the ugliness, chaos, and confusion of our great metropolises […] If our modern cities have an organizing principle it would be material gain, money-making, and this simply does not produce an aesthetically and morally pleasing way of life […] heroic materialism—however impressive and practically beneficial it might be—is never enough to satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart, and therefore never a sufficient organizing ideal for a human society.[367]

As Bishop Joseph Strickland notes, this consumeristic mindset permeates all aspects of our social life. He notes in our current culture, "when something's not working, the attitude is to dispose of it and get something else. We acquire and discard things so easily in the modern world, so why not people? It's an insidious mindset, one that sadly is only marginally less common in the Catholic community than in the general population." He even noted how this disposable mentality affects relationships and marriage questioning, "How do we intervene to give couples the best possible change of avoiding the disposable-marriage mentality?"[368]

This consumerism as a lifestyle is not unique to the wealthy, the middle class, nor any particular ethnic group or subgroup within the United States. Reflecting on the consumeristic culture including that of his own, the Latino culture, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, CSB Bishop Emeritus of Las Cruces, NM notes, "living in today's society with its choices and abundance, we become vulnerable to the slick images presented by the television and the press. Protests about our rights fill the media. Yet, there are no words about our obligations to love our neighbor as mandated by a life of faith. The modern media tends to dictate not only our lifestyle but also our conversation and public debate. Ours is a visual world. We buy what we see. The implication is that the unseen does not exist. This is true across cultures, including the Latinos."[369]

Bishop Baron further notes that the role of Catholic social teaching is not to be a proponent for any particular mode of modern government—communism, socialism or capitalism (referred to as a market economy). He notes, "economies in the radically socialist or communist mode have

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[367] Robert Barron. 2015.*Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries): 211-212.
[368] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century.* (El Cajon, CA, Catholic Answers): 51.
[369] Ricardo Ramirez. 2016. *Power from the Margins: The Emergence of the Latino in the Church and in Society.* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books): 443.

proven inefficient at best, and brutally oppressive at worst." While he further notes that John Paul II "appreciated the free market as the economic concomitant of a democratic polity, since both rest upon the dignity of the individual and his right to self-determination." It is equally important to recognize the folly in this system of economic governance, especially as it pertains to unfettered capitalism. Bishop Barron notes, "A market economy enjoys real legitimacy if and only if it is set in the context of a vibrant moral culture that forms its people in the virtues of fairness, justice, respect for the integrity of the other, and religion." He further notes, "This is precisely why moral relativism and indifferentism that holds sway in many parts of the West—fostered by the breakdown of the family and the attenuating of religious practice—poses such a threat to the economy."[370] Without adhering to the moral principles such as fairness, justice, respect for others and respect for life, members of a capitalistic society may adopt a purely consumeristic lifestyle in which material gains supersede all other goals. Although American society is based on this market economy, without a moral compass, individuals within this society risk devolving into selfish consumeristic lifestyles.

The assessment of Church's critical approach to consumerism as a lifestyle illustrates that society's preoccupation with the selfish acquisition of material goods, results in chronic dissatisfaction and covetousness among the American Catholic Community and society at large. Consumerism as a lifestyle presupposes that the acquisition of material goods is the epitome of life, not life itself, thereby devaluing humanity. This perverse distortion of values results in harm to individuals and to society. Therefore, consumerism makes Christians assign a greater value to their material possessions than their faith in God.

e. The Church's Response to Various Manifestations of Poverty in American Society

In the wealthiest county in the world, ironically poverty became a travesty, especially for minorities and those in rural regions. Because we live in a fallen world, sin and its various manifestations affect our daily lives deeply. Poverty is one of the manifestations of sinful humanity, whether directly or indirectly. Some end up impoverished due to their own sinful choices, while others' poverty is not a direct result of their own choices. One man's sin may affect

[370] Robert Barron. 2016. *Vibrant Paradoxes: The Both/and of Catholicism.* (Skokie, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries, Kindle edition): 2850.

another. Christ commanded us to help the poor. He proclaimed, “The poor you will always have with you.” (Mark 14:7). No matter how much we help the poor, they will always exist, therefore, we have a moral and spiritual responsibility to address not only the symptoms of sin (poverty), but the root cause of the issue (sin itself). Some of the most pervasive manifestations of poverty in American society are: erosion of the sanctity of life, immigration, racism, societal disintegration, and crime.

Pope Francis acknowledged the existence of poverty in American society and worldwide and the need to develop effective response measures for this problem. During his address to Congress in 2015, Pope Francis stated, "Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a “culture of care” and “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”[371] Over the years since his election, Pope Francis has kept pointing out the challenge of poverty and its manifestation in American society, suggesting multiple ways the Church can mitigate this challenge. Pope's sentiments regarding poverty are supported by the wider Catholic society in America, which view poverty as a significant course of increased marginalization in Catholic churches across the U.S. As a result, the Catholic Church in the United States has implemented various measures to mitigate the various manifestations of poverty in American society.

The USCCB asserted that all people are created in the image and likeness of God. Subsequently, all are equal in the view of God, the key principle to equity. As such people have the right to be born, to live in a moral environment that does not violate their principles, to develop their intelligence, and to seek truth freely. From certain perspectives, the combination of these human rights is the basic principle of religious freedom. They reflect authentic pluralism that is integral to the formation of a truly democratic community.[372] Apart from providing guidance to the faithful on Catholic social justice principles, the USCCB also advocates for justice in the public sphere by engaging local and national government entities and addressing them directly.

Equity in all spheres of human existence is the natural right of every person. Pope Benedict XVI talked about this topic in his “Address to the General Assembly of the United Nations”:

[These rights] are based on the natural law inscribed on human hearts and present in different

[371] Pope Francis. (24 Sept 2015). Address to the Joint Congress of the United States. Retrieved from Fred Imbert. “Pope to Congress: Time to act on climate change, poverty.” In www.cnbc.com. Retrieved October 20, 2022.
[372] USCCB. 2013. *Human Dignity, Sexuality, and Marriage & Family (The Catholic Faith Series Book 3)*, 26.

> cultures and civilizations. Removing human rights from this context would mean restricting their range and yielding to a relativistic conception, according to which the meaning and interpretation of rights could vary, and their universality would be denied in the name of different cultural, political, social, and even religious outlooks.[373]

The USCCB expressed the Gospel mandate to "welcome the stranger"—the immigrant. In *Forming Consciences of Faithful Citizenship,* the USCCB affirms Catholics are "to care for and stand with newcomers, authorized and unauthorized, including unaccompanied immigrant children, refugees and asylum-seekers, those unnecessarily detained, and victims of human trafficking." The USCCB further notes that 'Comprehensive reform is urgently necessary to fix a broken immigration system and should include a broad and fair legalization program with a path to citizenship; a work program with worker protections and just wages; family reunification policies; access to legal protections, which include due process procedures; refuge for those fleeing persecution and violence; and policies to address the root causes of migration." The USCCB also recognizes the "right and responsibility or nations to control their borders and to maintain the rule of law," but it also states that this enforcement of border security should be "pursued in a just and humane manner", stating further that "the detention of immigrants should be used to protect public safety and not for purposes of deterrence or punishment; alternatives to detention, including community-based programs" are also encouraged.[374]

The Church expounds on its pro-immigrant stance, especially as it applies to the immigration crisis at the US-Mexican border and the obligation of prosperous nations, such as the United States to act justly in its treatment of immigrants. Regarding this stance, there are two principles outlined within the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2241):

> The more prosperous nations are obliged, to the extent they are able, to welcome the foreigner in search of the security and the means of livelihood which he cannot find in his country of origin. Public authorities should see to it that the natural right is respected that places a guest under the protection of those who receive him. Political authorities, for the sake of the common good for which they are responsible, may make the exercise of the right to immigrate subject to various

[373] Pope Benedict XVI. 2008. "Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters, Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI." New York, 18 April 2008. In www.vatican.va. Retrieved Jan 30, 2023.
[374] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 38-39, (#81).

> juridical conditions, especially with regard to the immigrants' duties toward their country of adoption. Immigrants are obliged to respect with gratitude the material and spiritual heritage of the country that receives them, to obey its laws and to assist in carrying civic burdens.[375]

Despite the origins of the Catholic Church in America as an immigrant church, adherence to Catholic social teachings to "welcome the stranger' and be an advocate for the downtrodden are not always on display by the laity. As Cardinal Dolan reflected on an experience he had in the Archdiocese of New York:

> One would expect that we Catholics today would be on the frontlines of embracing today's refugees and asylum seekers. We know from our own ancestors how bitterness and antagonism by the people already here can hurt and scar them. Even we Irish can recall the disdain that greeted our hungry ancestors as they poured into this city, the vicious slurs and oppressive climate that the Italians later faced. Thank God, the Church is now recognized as one of the acclaimed agencies greeting the incoming people, now mostly from Latin America. Our own Catholic Charities has received national acclaim for its heroic work welcoming them. But, sadly, even some of our own have not learned, as Catholics can be found among those who are afraid of and resistant to our new arrivals. This is a shame! True enough, we Catholics also work hard for a reform of a broken border system, and defend a nation's duty to protect our borders. But, we insist that such be done fairly, justly, without rancor, and that the proud American (and Catholic) legacy of welcome and hospitality not be jeopardized.[376]

Cardinal Blaise J. Cupich of Chicago similarly stated, "Welcoming the stranger, including the immigrant, is a fundamental moral imperative of Christianity…They enrich our communities with these gifts. This is our history as a nation of immigrants…We Christians are called to welcome the stranger, the migrant, the refugee, because they too are children of God, all of us members of the same family, the human family. After all, Jesus himself was a refugee, as Mary and Joseph were forced to flee their homeland because it had become too dangerous. When Christians choose to help our immigrant brothers and sisters, we are doing as Jesus taught — we are choosing to see in them the Holy Family, who only wanted to live. We are choosing life."[377]

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[375] Catechism of the Catholic Church, (2002, 2nd ed), 2241.

[376] Cardinal Dolan. 2022. "Welcoming the Immigrant." *Catholic New York*. In https://www.cny.org/stories/welcoming-the-immigrant,24511? Retrieved Oct 20, 2022.

[377] Cardinal Blase J. Cupich. 2022. Statement of Cardinal Blase J. Cupich, archbishop of Chicago, on the city's welcoming of migrants arriving on buses from Texas. In https://www.archchicago.org/en/cardinal-cupich-s-statement/-/article/2022/09/03/statement-of-cardinal-blase-j-cupich-archbishop-of-chicago-on-the-city-s-welcoming-of-migrants-arriving-on-buses-from-texas. Retrieved Oct 20, 2022.

The cardinal's message is very clear—Open arms to immigrants and refugees benefits the receiving country, to the same if not greater magnitude, as the immigrants and refugees themselves. So, being open to these marginalized individuals is not purely altruistic; America benefits as well. America is enriched by those who have recently arrived, and this generosity is well rewarded.

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruces further notes that education is especially important for those who have immigrated. He notes that this marginalized group, especially, needs outreach. By tailoring outreach to the needs of immigrants, they will benefit greatly, but so will the Church. The future Catholic Church in the United States rests heavily on the ability of the Church to attract and retain immigrants and this retention begins in the parish. Bishop Ramirez further describes four groups in particular that, if the Church focuses resources on, will benefit greatly especially as it pertains to overcoming the pitfalls leading to poverty. These groups which the Church should attend to are *immigrant workers*, *identity seekers,* what he calls *mainstream movers*, and youth involved in *gangs and those at high-risk*. Bishop Ramirez explains:

> *Immigrant workers* need faith-based communities grounded in their culture of origin. *Identity seekers* require mentoring to integrate their faith and their lives amid culture transition. *Mainstream movers* need guidance to overcome the pitfalls of individualism and consumerism, and to value their Latino spiritual background. *Gang members and high-risk youth* need to develop their faith, experience healing, and move from anger to forgiveness. To develop intellectually, *immigrant workers* need accessible alternative systems of education. *Identity seekers* need encouragement to finish high school and guidance to pursue higher education. *Mainstream movers* need help to find financial education for higher education. *Gang members and high-risk youth* need alternative systems of education.[378]

Over the generations, immigration to the United States has been in waves. With each wave of immigration comes new cultures, varied in color and customs. Although the United States is a vast Melting Pot of cultures, acceptance of the stranger is repulsive to some. Out of this aversion to welcome the stranger and accept those who look and act differently, racism swells. In addition to the waves of immigrants, is a complex and dark history of colonial exploitation and the historical sin of slavery which has led to social unrest and systemic injustices. In its pastoral letter against racism, *Open Wide Our Hearts,* The USCCB addressed racism as destructive, persistent and evil.

[378] Ricardo Ramirez. 2016. *Power from the Margins: The Emergence of the Latino in the Church and in Society.* (Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, Kindle edition): 930.

The bishops noted:

> Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful. Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39). Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God. When this truth is ignored, the consequence is prejudice and fear of the other, and—all too often—hatred […]. Every racist act—every such comment, every joke, every disparaging looks as a reaction to the color of skin, ethnicity, or place of origin—is a failure to acknowledge another person as a brother or sister, created in the image of God.[379]

Regarding the assessment of racism in the United States, The USCCB acknowledges that the country has positively addressed racial discrimination in a number of ways, unfortunately, they acknowledge that ground also has been lost. The bishops noted that there has been significant progress in civil law, while societal behaviors and persistent prejudices indicate a need for further catechesis and further conversion of hearts. The USCCB notes:

> Too many good and faithful Catholics remain unaware of the connection between institutional racism and the continued erosion of the sanctity of life. We are not finished with the work. The evil of racism festers in part because, as a nation, there has been very formal acknowledgement of the harm done to so many, no moment of atonement, no process of reconciliation and, all too often, a neglect of our history. Many of our institutions still harbor, and too many of our laws still sanction, practices that deny justice and equal access to certain groups of people. God demands more from us. We cannot, therefore, look upon the progress against racism in recent decades and conclude that our current situation meets the standard of justice. In fact, God demands what is right and just.[380]

Bishop Edward K. Braxton of Belleville, an African American, ponders on the current state of social injustice in America: ”Have a critical mass of Americans come to a willingness to look at a most shameful aspect of its history with open-eyed honesty and set out on a self-examination and commitment to real and lasting change that uproots systemic racial bias and prejudice spawned

[379] USCCB. 2018. *Open Wide Our Hearts: The Enduring Call* to *Love, A Pastoral Letter Against Racism*, 3-4.
[380] Ibidem, 9-10.

from human slavery and the near destruction of Indigenous peoples, the original sins of this country? Have we initiated an urgent, long-overdue nationwide conversation about racism that can yield lasting results? In these dystopian times, are we finally 'woke,' or are we just in a moment that will pass? We have been sleeping for so long, perhaps since the murder of the dreamer [referencing Rev. Martin Luther King]. Are we really and truly 'woke'? Has our social consciousness been roused and raised?"[381] These are critical questions which we, as a country, must address. The word 'woke' refers to those who are alert, self-aware, and committed to change for as long as it takes. Being 'woke' requires a willingness to challenge prevailing paradigms and, through this questioning, consider paradigm shifts. Persons who are 'woke' are disposed to forge new social orders that are ideally new and better. Bishop Braxton notes, "My hope is that we are at a crossroad, a moment in history of 'Kairos' in the Christian sense of 'the appointed time in the purpose of God,' an opportune moment, a time when the grace of God will prevail."[382]

There are many ways in which humans degrade or 'enslave' others. Examples of enslavement include literal enslavement of human beings, but also social, emotional, and psychological slavery. Attitudes meant to degrade others include, as Bishop Braxton explains includes, "prejudice, racism, bias, anger, frustration, rage, violence, and bitterness in the face of systemic injustices. Regrettably, these forms of slavery endure in the United States, and they are born from the tragedy of the European 'slave trade' that captured innocent human beings from West Africa and brought them to the United States to be 'sold,' 'bought,' and 'owned' in bondage to work on lucrative plantations in southern states. Long after the cruel evil of slavery was ended, its consequences continued to cast a shadow over our nation as a racial divide […]. Painful 'breaking news' accounts call all Americans to rededicate themselves to the work of peace and reconciliation among our citizens of different races, ethnic origins, and social, cultural, educational, economic, and religious backgrounds."[383] For us as Catholics, as the members of the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, this is more than a call; it is our vocation, born of baptism.

The injustices that arise from the persistence of racism in the United States continues to result in conflict. Sadly, these injustices are not just some distant past, rather they persist in modern America as evidenced by ongoing violence and disparities in marginalized communities. As

[381] Edward K. Braxton. 2921. *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop.* (New York, Maryknoll): 14.
[382] Ibidem, 14-23.
[383] Ibidem, 55.

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz of Louisville, KY further noted, "We mourn those tragic events in which African Americans and others have lost their lives in altercations with law enforcement officials. These deaths have led to peaceful demonstrations, as well as violent conflicts in the streets and cities…Sadly, there is all too often an alienation of communities from those sworn to protect them. Our efforts must address root causes of these conflicts. A violent, sorrowful history of racial injustice, accompanied by lack of educational, employment and housing opportunities, has destroyed communities and broken down families, especially those who live in distressed urban communities."[384] The Church has been present to these communities in education, health care and various charities.

Racism is a national wound from which we continually struggle to heal. Racism can only end if we address the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve economic and social inequalities. As Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, "We pledge our commitment to build a culture of life, where all people are valued for their intrinsic dignity as daughters and sons of God. We encourage Catholics and all people of good will to study the pastoral letter, and to study and reflect upon Dr. King's witness against the destructive effects of racism, poverty, and continuous war. We call on everyone to embrace our ongoing need for healing in all areas of our lives where we are wounded, but particularly where our hearts are not truly open to the idea and the truth that we are all made in the image and likeness of God."[385]

Bishop Joseph Strickland encourages a different approach to racism. He suggests the starting place for dealing with racism must be one of introspection. He notes so much of the issues in society, including racism:

> Stems from the fallen human tendency not to reflect, not to think, but to react emotionally […]. Certainly, racism is one of the evils that we deal with. But rather than pointing the finger at other people or at "systems,' perhaps we could ask ourselves, *okay, where's my sin?* Where do *I* need to make reparation? How can I repair rash judgements I've made and biases I've acted on in the past and avoid them in the future? I also think that there are a lot of issues that get lumped in with racism when they're really rooted elsewhere. Which is why I am skeptical about activist groups supposedly working for racial or social justice that also advocate for the destruction of the nuclear

[384] Joseph E Kurtz. 2015. "USCCB President Delivers Statement on Race Relations at General Assembly: Statement of Archbishop Joseph E Kurtz of Louisville, Kentucky President of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 10, 2015." In usccb.org. Retrieved March 1, 2023.

[385] Cardinal DiNardo. (n.d.). USCCB: Society Needs "Artisans of Peace" like MLK. In https://dioceseoflansing.org/general/usccb-society-needs-artisans-peace-mlk. March 1, 2023.

> family. Do they really not see that the destruction of family life, especially black family life, is a big part of the problem, not the solution? Take away moms and dads committed to each other and to raising children in a community of love, break up that natural unit and leave children to be raised (usually fatherless) in its tattered remains, and you have a recipe for the poverty and crime that plague minority communities.[386]

Pope Francis reminded Americans, in his address to the Joint Chambers of the Congress of the United States, of four Americans who fought the racism of their day. The legacy of these four Americans--Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton-- and Pope Francis' recalling of their works to the American Congress, both reflects the Church's social justice stance and its stance against racism, universal commitment of the intrinsic dignity of all people, its history deeply rooted in religious freedom, and the responsibility of government to work toward these greater goals. The following statements illustrates these points:

> All of us are quite aware of, and deeply worried by, the disturbing social and political situation of the world today. Our world is increasingly a place of violent conflict, hatred, and brutal atrocities, committed even in the name of God and of religion. We know that no religion is immune from forms of individual delusions or ideological extremism […]. A delicate balance is required to combat violence perpetrated in the name of religion, an ideological or economic system, while also safeguarding religious freedom, intellectual freedom and individual freedoms […]. All political activity must serve and promote the good of the human person and be based on respect of her or her dignity […]. If politics must truly be at the service of the human person, it follows that it cannot be a slave to the economy and finance. Politics is, instead, an expression of our compelling need to live as one, in order to build as one, the greatest common good: that of a community which sacrifices particular interests in order to share, in justice and peace, its goods, its interests, its social life.[387]

Devaluation and disrespect of life coupled with a culture increasingly desensitized to violence in addition to poverty compose several factors that make individuals vulnerable to crime. Many in American society are imprisoned by fear and protectionism. Much of these fears arise from the misunderstanding of others; sadly, many fears have a rational basis too. Many of those within the criminal justice system, and those who commit crimes in the United States have

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[386] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 55-57.
[387] Pope Francis. 2015. "Apostolic Journey of His Holiness Pope Francis to Cuba, to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Headquarters, Visit to the Joint Sessions of the United States Congress: Address of the Holy Father," United States Capitol, Washington DC, (24 Sept 2015). In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 5, 2023.

themselves been victims of violence including childhood traumas, familial instability, sexual exploitation, physical and emotional abuse. These traumas coupled with access to substances which remove rational inhibitions to sin, such as drugs and alcohol, and replaces these inhibitions with wantonness, and coupled with the ease of access to deadly weapons, creates a medium in which crime can propagate. The poor communities especially are most vulnerable to violent crimes with the least capacity to protect themselves. In *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action,* the USCCB noted in their pastoral message, "Our families are torn by violence. Our communities are destroyed by violence. Our faith is tested by violence—in our homes, our schools and streets, our nation and world—is destroying the lives, dignity and hopes of millions of our sisters and brothers […] the Catholic community cannot ignore the moral and human costs of so much violence in our midst […]. We have to address simultaneously declining family life and the increasing availability of deadly weapons, the lure of gangs and the slavery of addiction, the absence of real opportunity, budget cuts adversely affecting the poor, and the loss of moral values."[388] Poverty is at the root of much of this crime and the impoverished are the most vulnerable. In addition, impoverished communities, especially the marginalized groups such as immigrants and African Americans, experience poverty and traumas spanning generations. They are the most vulnerable to violence, the effects of substance abuse, instability of the family and crimes.

Perhaps one of the most striking manifestations in the United States is homelessness. In a country replete with resources, the lack of safe and affordable housing is a travesty. Unquestionably, because of mental illness or substance use disorders, there are individuals who remain homeless regardless of offered assistance, but in America, there also are poor and vulnerable, those single and those with families, who are homeless too. The USCCB asserts that decent housing is both a human right and a public responsibility. The Catholic Church in the United States demonstrates its commitment through its ministerial work by being, "one of the largest private providers of housing services for the poor and vulnerable in the country."[389] Despite this commitment to housing as a human right, the problem of homelessness in the United States is one beyond the means of any one charitable organization, requiring meaningful commitment and

[388] USCCB. 2017. *Confronting a Culture of Violence: A Catholic Framework for Action.* USCCB Statement from the Committee of Domestic Justice and Human Development. In usccb.org. Retrieved April 24, 2023.
[389] USCCB Committee of Domestic Justice and Human Development. (24 May 2022). *Letters to Congress Regarding Appropriations for Transportation, Housing and Urban Development*. In usccb.org. Retrieved April 24, 2023.

investment by society to address the housing crisis and its root causes.

Stewardship represents the attitude of benevolence Christians are called to possess toward the gifts bestowed on them by God. Protecting the environment, helping the poor, handling family obligations and supporting the community are examples of stewardship. Without solidarity that permits believers to coordinate their actions and to unite them toward achieving the common good, society will struggle to survive and thrive. It is vital for Christians to remember that united efforts are stronger than individual attempts to achieve the same result. Corinthians 12:26 says: "If one member suffers, all suffer with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it." It shows that the Christian community is stronger because people feel that they belong to the group where everyone shares the same ideals as others, which makes the community, in this regard, homogeneous.

The USCCB Pastoral Letter on Stewardship notes Christian Stewardship is not limited to safeguarding material and 'human resources' nor their responsible use. To be a Christian steward "we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord […] Jesus' disciples and Christian stewards recognize God as the origin of life, giver of freedom, and source of all things. We are grateful for the gifts we have received and are eager to use them to show our love for God and for one another. We look to the life and teaching of Jesus for guidance in living as Christian stewards."[390] The Catholic Bishops of Indiana in a joint statement further stated, "As Bishops who serve the people of God, our concern is for everyone, regardless of their religious affiliation, race, ethnic background, economic or social status. As his ministers, we have been given the responsibility to carry on Christ's work in service to our sisters and brothers. [we] have a particular obligation to care for the most vulnerable members of God's family. That is why we pay special attention to the unborn, to the sick and the elderly, to prisoners, to those who suffer from various forms of addiction or mental illness, and to the education of people from many different backgrounds and circumstances. That is also why we care, in a very special way, for those brothers and sisters of ours who are poor."[391]

[390] USCCB Committee on Evangelization & Catechesis. (n.d.). "Stewardship: To Be a Christian Steward a Summary of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship." Retrieved March 13, 2023.
[391] Joseph Tobin and the Catholic Bishops of Indiana. (n.d.). "Poverty at the Crossroads: The Church's Response to Poverty in Indiana". In www.archindy.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

Regarding all of the ills facing society today, Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler recommends that the starting place must always be Christocentric. He explains:

> There is injustice in the world, there are social ills, and we are called to bring the truths of the gospel to bear on these issues, too. But I don't want to belong to a club or an activist organization; I want to follow Jesus Christ. So, issues related to our faith comes first […]. The universal call to holiness not only proceeds but it is the only thing that can bring success to our efforts to end human trafficking and racism, cure societal ills such as drug abuse, and make our air and water cleaner. Take the whole list of problems on Earth—it's endless. *Jesus Christ is the answer to everything on that list.* Before we get to the need for effective political policy, to charitable ministry, to prudent administration of the world's goods—all of which are necessary—Jesus must come first […]. For when people have a relationship with Jesus Christ, when their hearts are converted, when they live by gospel values, when they are guided by Catholic moral teaching—*then* they're going to do justice and pass good laws. If they're close to Christ, *then* they will feed the hungry, protect the environment, treat other people fairly regardless of race, and pursue every other temporal good.[392]

The Church advocates for justice for the poor and vulnerable, especially those groups marginalized in society such as the immigrant and those discriminated against based on race. The USCCB stressed the need for preferential treatment of the poor in *Forming Consciences of Faithful Citizenship,* noting "economic decisions and institutions should be assessed according to whether they protect or undermine the dignity of the human person. Social and economic policies should foster the creation of jobs for all who can work with decent working conditions and just wages." The USCCB additionally advocates for the removal of 'barriers to equal pay and employment for women and those facing unjust discrimination." The USCCB voices their support for workers' rights, including the right to organize, join a union, and to bargain for just wages and working environments. In addition, workers should have the right to do these things "without reprisal." Furthermore, the USCCB notes that "workers, owners, employers, and unions have a corresponding responsibility to work together to create decent jobs, build a more just economy, and advance the common good." Importantly, for workers struggling to find employment and for those striving to overcome poverty, the USCCB also encourages governments to recognize that "Welfare policy should reduce poverty and dependency, strengthen family life, and help families leave poverty through work, training and assistance with child care, health care, housing, and

[392] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 54-56.

transportation […] welfare policy should address both the economic and cultural factors that contribute to family breakdown. It should provide a safety net for those who cannot work."[393]

The theological assessment on the Church's response to various manifestations of poverty in American society, illustrates that the Church needs to be highly involved in addressing the needs of the poor, and not just their material needs, but their spiritual needs as well. One might argue that the Church may have more opportunities to meet the spiritual needs if they can better meet the physical needs; therefore, if the government resources, through mutual cooperation, can help the Church meet more physical needs, we should utilize those, that we might increase our opportunities to witness. However, the reality is often that even when the government and civil institutions provide the Church with resources to help the poor, sometimes they hinder the Gospel. The Church cannot and should not be part of it. The poor will always be with us—as Christians we are mandated to see them, see their needs spiritually and physically, and offer aid. We should then work with the resources the Church has, with the faith that God will use those resources to make Himself known. Despite its vast wealth and resources this poverty remains manifested in the erosion of the sanctity of life, immigration, racism, societal disintegration, and crime. The poor in America is the modern-day representation of the story of the good Samaritan—how we respond will define us as either the priest or the Samaritan.

3. The Church's Teaching on Moral Relativism and its Influence on the Religious Life of the Faithful

Relativism is the idea that truth is relative to differences in perception. Relativism holds that there is no universal objective truth, rather each point of view has its own truth. The Catholic Church, conversely, asserts that there is absolute truth. Relativism, as a denial of absolute truth, leads to moral license, denial of the possibility of sin, and ultimately of God. Contrarily, the teaching of the Church asserts that the absence of moral constraints leads to the destruction of ethics and humanism. Ultimately, moral relativism is a danger to democratic societies leading to chaos in the ethical sphere.

The USCCB insists upon the existence of objective moral norms. This is contrary to those

[393] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 36-37 (#73-76).

in American society who depict the Church's insistence on moral absolutes as 'unjust' and even 'opposed to basic human rights.' The bishops note, "Such claims usually follow from a form of moral relativism that is joined, not without inconsistency, to a belief in the absolute rights of individuals. In this view, the Church is perceived as promoting a particular prejudice and as interfering with individual freedom."[394] The USCCB asserts that Catholics are obliged "to form their consciences in accord with human reason and the teaching of the Church. The bishops further note that "conscience is not something that allows us to justify doing whatever we want, nor is it a mere 'feeling' about what we should or should not do. Rather, conscience is the voice of God resounding in the human heart, revealing the truth to us and calling us to do what is good while shunning what is evil. Conscience always requires serious attempts to make sound moral judgements based on the truths of our faith."[395] The US bishops further describe several elements necessary for the formation of conscience and making decisions based on these questions:

- A desire to embrace goodness and truth, by studying Sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church.
- Examine the facts and any background information on a question at hand.
- Prayerful reflection.
- Develop the virtue of Prudence.
- Recognition that a good end is not justified by an immoral means.

The USCCB asserts that morality is indeed based on absolutes. Ultimately, the US bishops note, as humanity seeks "to advance the common good—by defending the inviolable sanctity of human life from the moment of conception until natural death, by promoting religious freedom, by defending marriage, by feeding the hungry and housing the homeless, by welcoming the immigrant and protecting the environment—it is important to recognize that not all possible courses of action are morally acceptable. We have a responsibility to discern carefully which public policies are morally sound. Catholics may choose different ways to respond to compelling social problems, but we cannot differ on our moral obligation to help build a more just and peaceful world through morally acceptable means, so that the weak and vulnerable are protected and human

[394] USCCB. (14 Nov 2006). "Ministry to Persons with Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care." United states Conference of Catholic Bishops. In www.usccbpublishing.org, p. 17.
[395] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 18 (#17).

rights are defended."[396] The USCCB Committee on Doctrine explains, "Catholic moral theology has traditionally recognized the importance of experience for developing a connatural ability to discern in particular situations that is in accord with virtue. While scripture, reason (reflecting on the natural law), and Church teaching provide universal norms on certain acts one may never do morally, many other kinds of acts are morally good or bad depending on the particular circumstances. In such cases, although there are indeed universal moral norms, these must remain general to a certain degree. The moral actor must always make a prudential judgement taking into account the circumstances of a particular situation, thus mediating between the universal and the particular. The experience of moral actions helps to refine one's instinctual judgement about what is and what is not in accord with virtue."[397]

These statements demonstrate that a well-formed conscience, based on faith, reveals the truth. The challenge in a pluralistic, under catechized and increasingly non-religious society is the lack of a reference point for morality—it is increasingly no longer God. As Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler, Texas notes, "The world is not just post-Christian; it is post-God. There is an angry resistance to truth and authority. If there is no God, then there is no authority, and no one can tell me what to do. That's how we operate now. Moral Anarchy. There's a whole tone in the press, in government, in universities—even Catholic ones—saying we need to throw off the mantle of oppression."[398]

a. Criticism of Moral Relativism in the Sphere of Ethics of Sexual Life

The existing situation in modern American society is the vivid illustration of the absence of absolute moral rules, which leads to exacerbation of emotional and even existential crises. When an individual cannot distinguish right from wrong and cannot perceive their own calling, their purpose and even sense of being becomes distorted. In secular society, individuals are left to search for answers within themselves because religion is neither an accessible nor applicable source for these moral norms. This crisis is described in Jeremiah 5:30-31: "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests' rule in their direction; my

[396] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 19, (#20).
[397] USCCB. 2010. *Statement by USCCB Committee on Doctrine on "Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of the Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler*, p. 19.
[398] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 12.

people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?" Furthermore, much like in the time of the prophet Jeremiah, it is not difficult to see false prophets who popularize their ideologies in contemporary secular society, claiming that their values are progressive and liberal.

Pope Francis criticized moral relativism, calling it the danger to the peaceful coexistence of people and the sign of spiritual poverty. According to Pope Francis, a common view on ethics is required to avoid conflicts because it is impossible to develop a universal system of values in the context of moral relativism. He supported the views of his predecessor, Pope Benedict XVI, who regarded moral relativism as the dictatorship ideology in modern developed countries. Pope Francis claimed that truth is the main element in establishing peace, but this notion is inseparable from the stable system of moral values that do not depend on individual views on reality. [399] We can surmise that the Catholic Church regards moral relativism as the destructive ideology that endangers social order. Pope John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis addressed the concerns connected with the spread of moral relativism in the contemporary secular world. When the goal of all members of a society is to pursue their desires and satisfy the needs of their egos, the entire culture changes. Ideological foundations that used to be Christian in the past are perverted and substituted by new views on morality that impose no limits on society.

The American bishops assert that moral responsibility comes with the freedom that God endowed on people, which is consistent with the official position of the Holy See. Bishop Joseph Strickland further explains, "It's not the Church that invented our moral laws. Those laws step from the nature God created us with, and God gives us positive commandments based on those laws as signposts for living the human journey in a healthy way. They're the operation manual for mankind. When we violate a commandment, even in a way that is not serious it diminishes our lives."[400] The USCCB Committee on Justice, Peace and Human Development explains that Catholics should make moral choices that harmonize their actions with divine plans, and this balance is the major aspect of human happiness. According to their perspective, people have the intellectual and moral capacities to make the right choices, and understanding the norm is innate knowledge.[401] It is written in Proverbs 9:10: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and

[399] Pope Francis. (22 Mar 2013). "Audience with the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See: Address of Pope Francis." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 13, 2023.
[400] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 47.
[401] USCCB. Committee on Justice, Peace & Human Development. 2012. "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," p. 1-2.

the knowledge of the Holy One is insight." It allows Catholic clergy to state that faith in God reveals the truth to people, which is the guiding power in moral decision-making.

Collectively, the official stance of the US bishops regarding moral relativism in the sphere of ethics of sexual life is in alignment with the Church's tradition, Magisterium, Catholic moral theology, and natural law. These stances diverge significantly from what is perceived as the mainstream American beliefs in the realm of human sexuality. As Bishop Barron notes, "Many of the Catholic Church's teachings are vilified in both the high and popular cultures, but none more than its doctrines concerning marriage and sexuality." He further explains that the Churches views on sex are:

> Characterized as puritanical, life-denying, and hopelessly outdated—holdovers from the Bronze Age. Above all, critics pillory the Church for setting unreasonable limits to the sexual freedom of contemporary people. Church leaders, who defend traditional sexual morality are parodied […]. Throughout the history of religion and philosophy, a puritanical strain is indeed apparent. Whether it manifests itself as Manichaeism, Gnosticism, or Platonic dualism, the puritanical philosophy teaches that spirit is good and matter is evil or fallen […]. But authentic biblical Christianity is not puritanical. The Creator God described in the book of Genesis made the entire panoply of things physical—planets, stars, the moon and sun, animals, fish and even things that creep and crawl upon the earth—and found all of it good, even very good. Accordingly, there is nothing perverse or morally questionable about bodies, sex, sexual longing, or the sexual act. In fact, it's just the contrary […]. It is fundamental to Catholic spirituality and morality that everything in life must be drawn magnetically toward love, and must be conditioned and transfigured by love. Thus, one's business concerns must be marked by love, less they devolve into crass materialism; and one's relationships must be leavened by love, lest they devolve into occasions for self-interested manipulation; even one's play must be directed toward love, lest it devolve into mere self-indulgence. Sex is no exception to this rule. The goodness of sexual desire is designed, by its very nature, to become an ingredient in a program of self-forgetting love, and hence to become something rare and life enhancing.[402]

The sexual revolution has caused irreparable harm to human dignity. Unquestionably, uncommitted relationships and unfettered promiscuity is not uplifting or freeing, rather these behaviors lead to anxiety, low self-esteem, separation, and an avalanche of social and health problems. The USCCB notes that "Men and women discover the call to love written in their very

[402] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture.* (Skokie, Word on Fire Catholic Ministries): 240-241.

bodies," and "because of the beautiful meaning and dignity communicated by our bodies—which communicated our very selves—our bodies should be treated with the greatest respect. We, and therefore our bodies, are not meant to be *used* but *loved*."[403] The corrosive damage of the sexual revolution remains an urgent pastoral concern. The USCCB notes that in the pastoral ministry of the Church, the harmful effects of illicit sexual behavior that degrades human dignity can be seen "in the confessional and in our daily ministry and work with families." Regarding specifically the immense injury caused by pornography, the bishops specifically recognize the harm in "children whose innocence is stolen; men and women who feel great guilt and shame for viewing pornography occasionally or habitually; spouses who feel betrayed and traumatized; and men, women and children exploited by the pornography industry."[404] They note that "while the production and use of pornography has always been a problem, in recent years it has grown exponentially, in large part due to the Internet and mobile technology. Some have even described it as a public health crisis." The US bishops further note, "everyone, in some way, is affected by increased pornography use in society. We all suffer negative consequences from its distorted view of the human person and sexuality."[405] The bishops further note that pornography's connection to other sins cannot and should not be diminished including, self-gratification through masturbation, as well as its "direct connections with sins such as adultery, domestic violence, the abuse of children in child pornography, and sex trafficking. It can also be implicated in contraception use and abortion, given that it promotes and even celebrates promiscuity and a view of sexuality devoid of love or openness to new life."[406] The US bishops especially acknowledge the prevalence and impact of moral relativism in the sphere of sexual life on American society in the following:

> Erotic, over sexualized, and pornographic images are more present in American society than ever before. It is commonplace to see these images while reading magazines and social media content, shopping online or at the mall, or watching movies and television. Mainstream entertainment itself has become hypersexualized. Novels that at one time would have been classified as "erotica" are now mainstream, to say nothing of the overtly sexual romance novel genre. Video games, music lyrics, music videos, clothing, and even costumes have become progressively more sexualized, including content targeted to children and adolescents. Maintaining purity is a serious challenge in

[403] USCCB Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family life and Youth. 2015. *Create in me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, p. 3.
[404] Ibidem, 1.
[405] Ibidem.
[406] Ibidem, 7.

this environment, as is learning appropriate boundaries that are necessary for living chastely and having healthy relationships.[407]

The Catholic Church's stance regarding human sexuality is unchanging and it is squarely based on the recognition of marriage as the fundamental unit of society. The USCCB echoes the Universal Church's stance on marriage. The US bishops note, "The family founded on marriage is the basic cell of human society. The role, responsibilities, and needs of families should be central national priorities."[408] In this statement, the US bishops recognize that instability of marriage leads to instability of the nation; it follows, therefore, that it is in the nation's best interest that marriage be "defined, recognized, and protected as a lifelong exclusive commitment between a man and a woman."[409] It is within this context, between a man and a woman joined in matrimony, that the sexual act should be exclusively limited. The US bishops cite the "two principal sources of traditional Catholic moral theology [as] Scripture and the natural law […] in formulating sexual ethics."[410] The bishops further note that the Church's Magisterium "has taught clearly and consistently" that "homosexual behavior, premarital sex, contraception, and artificial insemination," are "morally wrong."[411]

The USCCB also discerns the moral implications related to homosexuality and LGBTQ+ lifestyles which is regarded as a morally acceptable thing in the secular society. American culture promotes the idea that having homosexual inclinations is normal and acceptable. Increasingly modern society promotes these lifestyles in media, imaging and marketing thereby normalizing them, through imagery. As the homosexual lifestyles are increasingly viewed as normal, there is no need to hide these desires. The Catholic Church opposes the idea that these lifestyles are normal and natural, but still American clerics develop ministry programs for people with homosexual inclinations because these people need spiritual help to cope with this attraction, and acceptance and respect of their humanity is paramount. The current posture of pastoral care in the American Catholic Church focuses on helping people to overcome negative emotions they experience

[407] Ibidem, 9.
[408] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 35 (#70).
[409] Ibidem.
[410] USCCB. 2010. *Statement by USCCB Committee on Doctrine on "Inadequacies in the Theological Methodology and Conclusions of the Sexual Person: Toward a Renewed Catholic Anthropology by Todd A. Salzman and Michael G. Lawler*, p. 2.
[411] Ibidem, 18.

regarding their homosexual inclinations. At the same time, it does not promote the idea that it is normal to submit to this temptation. This distinction is vital in the description of the USCCB teaching that is different from secular claims of moral relativism that promote homosexuality as an acceptable and natural behavior.[412]

The USCCB encourages basic human rights be afforded to all individuals, regardless of sexual orientation or lifestyle. They further note, "this can and should be done without sacrificing the bedrock of society that is marriage and the family and without violating the religious liberty of persons and institutions." [413] Regarding the legal recognition of same-sex unions, the USCCB notes that this legal recognition, "poses a multifaceted threat to the very fabric of society, striking at the source from which society and culture come and which they are meant to serve. Such recognition affects all people, married and non-married: not only the fundamental levels of the good of the spouses, the good of children, the intrinsic dignity of every human person, and the common good, but also at the levels of education, cultural imagination and influence, and religious freedom."[414]

Cardinal Robert McElroy does not officially diverge from the Church's teachings concerning human sexuality, rather he openly expresses divergence from the "exclusion of remarried women and men or LGBT persons from the Eucharist" as this exclusion, "flows from the moral tradition in the church that all sexual sins are a grave matter. This means," as he further expresses "that all sexual sins are so gravely evil that they constitute objectively and actions that can sever a believer's relationship with God." His argument to reconsider the Church's pastoral approach, especially regarding receipt of the Eucharist, to specifically remarried individuals and LGBTQ individuals is as follows:

> For most of the history of the Church, various graduations of objective wrong in the evaluation of sexual sins were present in the life of the Church. But in the 17th century, with the inclusion in Catholic teaching of the declaration that for all sexual sins there is no parity of matter (i.e., no circumstances can mitigate the grave evil of a sexual sin), we relegated the sins of sexuality to an ambit in which no other broad type of sin is so absolutely categorized. In principle, all sexual sins are object moral sins within the Catholic moral tradition. This means that all sins that violate the

[412] USCCB. 2006. "Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care." In usccb.org, p. 1-2. In https://www.usccb.org/resources/ministry-to-persons-of-homosexual-iInclination_0_0.pdf. Retrieved October 20, 2022.
[413] USCCB. 2009. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan: A Pastoral Letter of the USCCB*, p. 24.
[414] Ibidem.

> sixth and ninth commandments are categorically objective mortal sins. There is no such comprehensive classification of moral sin for any of the other commandments. In understanding the application of this principle to the reception of Communion, it is vital to recognize that it is the level of objective sinfulness that forms the foundation for the present categorical exclusion of sexually active divorced and remarried or LGBT Catholics from the Eucharist. So, it is precisely this change in Catholic doctrine—made in the 17th century—that is the foundation for categorically barring LGBT and divorced/remarried Catholics from the Eucharist.[415]

Cardinal McElroy describes what he views as a discrepancy in the application of the understanding all sexual sins are" automatically objective mortal sins" within the Catholic moral tradition noting when a husband and wife engage in a single act of sexual intercourse utilizing any artificial contraception, this too is considered a level of evil so severe that it is "objectively sufficient to sever one's relationship with God." He suggests the following examples, also should then be considered so severely: when a spouse engages in physical or psychological abuse; exploitation of employees; discrimination against a person based on gender, ethnicity, or religion; and abandonment of one's children. He further notes, "The call to holiness requires both a conceptual and intuitive approach leading to an understanding of what discipleship in Jesus Christ means […]. The call to holiness is all-encompassing in our lives, embracing our efforts to come closer to God, our sexual lives, our familial lives, and our societal lives. It also entails recognizing sin where it lurks in our lives and seeking to root it out. And it means recognizing that each of us in our lives commits profound sins of omission or commission. At such moments we should seek the grace of the sacrament of penance. But such failures should not be the basis of categorical ongoing exclusion from the Eucharist." Lastly, Cardinal McElroy observes, "Those who oppose elements of the pastoral mission of Pope Francis frequently argue that doctrine cannot be superseded by the pastoral. It is equally important to recognize that the pastoral cannot be eclipsed by doctrine."[416]

Cardinal Timothy Dolan expresses that he is in complete agreement with Catholic moral theology, the Magisterium, and the traditions of the Church. He notes in a pluralistic society, one in which the Church's teachings are seen as antiquated at best and malevolent at worst, his approach to the perception that the Church is anti-gay is to directly engage this misperception. He

[415] Robert W. McElroy. 2023. "Cardinal McElroy responds to his critics on sexual sin, the Eucharist, and LGBT and divorced/remarried Catholics." *America: The Jesuit Review.* In www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved March 2, 2023.
[416] Ibidem.

notes engaging protestors both at the USCCB annual meeting and in his own dioceses. He engaged in dialogue with protestors. Following these dialogues, the protestors "understood more clearly what the Church is actually saying […] we may balk at certain behaviors, but we are unflagging defenders of the rights of human dignity of all men and women." Cardinal Dolan notes that the message of the Church should be that it is "absurd to identify yourself with your sexual urges." He explains:

> When somebody comes to me, as people often do, and says, 'I must tell you, I am a homosexual,' or 'I am gay,' I say, 'Well thanks for your confidence. Nice to meet you, sit down, you're welcome here, but as a matter of fact, no you're not. You happen to be John Jones, who is a child of God and redeemed by the blood of his only begotten Son, destined to spend eternity with him. When God looks at you, he sees a work of art. That's who you are. You happen to be sexually attracted to men, but that doesn't define who you are.' Now I happen to think that's rather liberating, it's ennobling, but our culture doesn't see that. There's the great challenge, to make people see that we are not our sexual urges […]. A church, or any authority, like a parent, who would stand up and say this is who you are, this is your birthright, and there are certain things that you can and can't do because it detracts from who you are, this is thought to be verboten today […]. Ultimately, this is not about trying to control people's lives by telling them what they can't do. It's about trying to guide them, walk with them, along the path to true happiness and fulfillment, the kind of happiness that lasts a lifetime and extends to eternity. Somehow, we've got to find a way to broadcast the idea that the Catholic Church is in the happiness business.[417]

The rise in the last twenty years of movements advocating for the rights of LGBTQ community has led many across the nation to question Christianity's classical convictions regarding sexual morality. What previously was an unquestioned consensus regarding sexual morality now is tantamount to hate speech. Bishop Barron notes that "the current cohort of young people are increasingly both nonreligious and nonspiritual. The divorce from the doctrines and practices of the classical religions has finally resulted in the withering away of the convictions that those dogmas and patterns of behavior once inculcated."[418]

Perhaps second only to life, no other topic in secular American culture has evoked more consternation and the earnest need for response and guidance by the Church than issues

[417] Timothy Dolan, John L. Allen Jr. 2012. *A People of Hope.* (New York, Image Books): 65-66.
[418] Robert Barron. 2018. *Arguing Religion: A Bishop Speaks at Facebook and Google.* (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire): 109.

surrounding gender ideology. The USCCB Committee on Doctrine recognizes that modern medical technology "offers an ever-increasing range of means—chemical, surgical, genetic—for intervening in the function of the human body as well as for modifying its appearance."[419] With these advances in medical technology, however, interventions can now be undertaken "that are injurious to the true flourishing of the human person." The Committee on Doctrine further notes that "the Church has always affirmed the essential goodness of the natural order and called on us to respect it."[420] They further note, "A crucial aspect of the order of nature created by God is the body-soul unity of each human person." The bishops further explain that "the soul does not come into existence on its own," nor could it ever "be in another body, much less be in the wrong body. *This* soul only comes into existence together with *this* body."[421] Regarding human sexual differentiation, the bishops note, "Just as every human person necessarily has a body, so also human bodies, like those of other mammals, are sexually differentiated as male or female."[422]

In keeping with the Church's moral tradition, there are essentially only situations accepted by the Church where technical medical "interventions on the human body may be morally justified: 1) when such intervention aims to repair a defect in the body; 2) when the sacrifice of a part of the body is necessary for the welfare of the whole body."[423] In this regard, the bishops note that any type of intervention intended to produce a "more desirable order" for a body or a "redesigned order" is immoral. Regarding specifically technologic interventions for "gender dysphoria' or 'gender incongruence' aimed to "exchange the sex characteristics of a patient's body for those of the opposite sex or for simulations thereof" or "in the case of children, the exchange of sex characteristics is prepared by the administration of chemical puberty blockers, which arrest the natural course of puberty and prevent the development of some sex characteristic in the first place," the bishops affirm that "interventions are not morally justified either as attempts to repair a defect in the body or as attempts to sacrifice a part of the body for the sake of the whole."[424]

Regarding restrictions specifically on Catholic health care services, the USCCB Committee on Doctrine specifically states that Catholic health care institutions and services:

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[419] USCCB. (20 March 2023). *Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Human Body.* Statement by the Committee on Doctrine, p. 1 (#2).
[420] Ibidem, 2 (#4).
[421] Ibidem, 3 (#4).
[422] Ibidem, 2 (#5).
[423] Ibidem, 5-6(#8).
[424] Ibidem, 10 (#14-15).

> Must not perform interventions, whether surgical or chemical, that aim to transform the sexual characteristics of a human body into those of the opposite sex or take part in the development of such procedures. They must employ all appropriate resources to mitigate the suffering of those who struggle with gender incongruence, but the means used must respect the fundamental order of the human body. Only by using morally appropriate means do healthcare providers show full respect for the dignity of each human person […] any technological intervention that does not accord with the fundamental order of the human person as a unity of the body and soul, including the sexual difference inscribed in the body, ultimately does not help but, rather, harms the human person.[425]

Archbishop Alexander K. Sample of Portland, additionally provided catechesis and pastoral guidelines related to Gender identity theory. The guidelines acknowledged the increase in claims and questions in Western society, especially noting the "significant change in how young people conceptualize and articulate their self-understanding, especially when it comes to gender," noting that this change in self-understanding is "due to many of the cultural influences from social media and the like," noting that the number of people with "trans-identification' under the age of 25 has doubled since 2017. "In the midst of this shifting landscape, many priests, parents, and educators have been seeking support from the Church for the raising of children." The guidelines note that "Catholic institutions must respond to this complex cultural phenomenon with compassion, clarity, and fidelity to the truth, which is most fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ," and their intent with these pastoral guidelines is to provide "support and accompany gender-questioning students and their families in a way that ensures our Catholic institutions fulfill their Catholic mission."[426] The guidelines further note "To some, supporting aspects of social transitioning may seem benign, even humane, such as using someone's preferred pronouns and actively affirming his or her perceived gender. However, while well-intentioned, this kind of endorsement may help shepherd a young person on a path of unnecessary medicalization. Social transition is often the first step toward hormones and surgery […] providing young people with love and social support need not be equated with endorsing the GAC (Gender Affirming Care) model."[427]

Often the risk of suicide in transgendered individuals is cited as the reason support and

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[425] Ibidem, 11-12 (#18-22).
[426] Alexander K. Sample. (25 Jan 2023). *A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory: Catechesis and Pastoral Guidelines.* (Portland, OR, Archdiocese of Portland): 1.
[427] Ibidem, 5.

proceed with GAC. Proponents of this approach assert that these procedures are 'ultimately lifesaving' thereby reducing the risk of self-harm and suicide in this population. These claims, however, are not supported by scientific evidence, particularly when it comes to treating gender dysphoric young people.[428] A 2020 study noted that there was indeed an initial reduction in suicidality for individuals undergoing gender affirming care, however after its completion, self-injury and suicidality remained high, demonstrating that medical transitioning does not eliminate self-harm and suicidality in this population, and, at worst may exacerbate these impulses.[429] The guidelines, instead, suggest that the Catholic response to gender identity theory should be whole-person affirmation. "Whole-person affirmation, rather than restricting affirmation to a subjective sense of gender identity" means "affirming the entire person: body and soul […]. The first and most important truth that each young person needs to hear is this: you are infinitely loved. You are a living, breathing icon of God, and in this very moment, God is willing your existence, because he delights in you. Whole-person affirmation also affirms the goodness and sacramentality of the body. Our Body reveals our personhood. This is not something we need to force the body to do; the body is always doing it. Nonetheless, a positive view of embodiment also acknowledges its burdens. Being a body is difficult and painful at times; the limits and vulnerabilities of being a body reveal our interdependence on one another and ultimately our dependence upon God, and our need for his healing."[430]

Unquestionably, the sexual revolution has dramatically and indelibly changed American society. The subversion of moral norms and the perversion of human sexuality has failed to liberate this generation from the 'oppression' of religious absolutes, rather they are straddled with increasing ideological confusion, depression, and lack of genuine human connection and commitment. This quest for freedom from sexual morality has shackled many in American society to loneliness and despair.

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[428] Ibidem, 6.

[429] Jaclyn MW Hughto, Gun HA, Rood BA, Pantalone DW (2020) "Social and Medical Gender Affirmation Experiences Are Inversely Associated with Mental Health Problems in a US Non-Probability Sample of Transgender Adults." Arch Sex Behav. 49(7), p. 2635-2647.

[430] Alexander K. Sample. (25 Jan 2023). *A Catholic Response to Gender Identity Theory: Catechesis and Pastoral Guidelines.* (Portland, OR, Archdiocese of Portland): 10.

b. Proclaiming the Catholic Principles of Married Life and Caring for the Stability of the Family

The protection of marriage and the protection of families is not just in the interest of the Church, but it is truly in the interest of all American society. Traditional marriages, between one man and one woman, and subsequently the stability of the family, are under assault in American society today. The USCCB reminds us that "our bodies tell us that we come from one another […]. We are not self-made or fundamentally isolated. Instead, we are each a son or daughter. We are in relationship to others from the beginning of our existence, first to our mother and father, and through them to the entire human family. Our bodies also tell us that we are 'for' another, that we have the capacity for fruitful communion with another, in particular with a person of the opposite sex if called to marriage. Written in our bodies is a call to spousal, fruitful love. This call is realized in marriage […]. In giving ourselves in love, we fulfill the meaning of our existence."[431]

The attitude of the Catholic Church to marriage remains traditional, which opposes the religious worldview to the secular perspective. It is written in Genesis 1:27-28: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

The Catholic Church further views marriage as an enduring love and commitment calling the American Christian community out of their selfishness. The Catholic Church encourages the Catholic community across the United States to fulfill God's will by ensuring family stability and committing themselves to one partner for the rest of their lives. When a man and a woman marry, they unite becoming one flesh, meaning they are inseparable for the rest of their lives (1 Corinthians 7:3-5). One of the primary duties of married couples is to ensure family stability by supporting each other, provide mutual support through tough times, guard the sanctity of marriage, and be a source for their extended family (Ephesians 5:22-33). Marriage has a salvific intention as marriage becomes the path to heaven for those united in the sacrament of holy Matrimony.

The foundational aspect of marriage is not based on an emotion, rather is based on the decision to selflessly love another. This decision to love is not limited, rather it is a lifelong

[431] USCCB. Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family life and Youth. 2015. *Create in me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography*, Washington, DC, p. 3.

commitment to selfless giving. The USCCB describes this decision to give of oneself to another in the following:

> In the case of marriage, the principle and original self-gift is the unitive, mutual self-gift of the spouses to each other. In their marriage promises, the spouses pledge love and fidelity for as long as they live. The transmission of this life is a sublime, concrete realization of this radical self-gift between a man and a woman. […] The unitive and the procreative meanings of marriage are joined because they are two aspects of the same self-giving.[432]

Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of Las Cruses also expresses this need to consider marriage and family in the context of love, but also in the context of relationships. He explains three key points about family. First, he notes, "because human beings are made in the image and likeness of God, they are relational, just as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are a community of people. To be made in God's image is to be made for community, especially the one that is most basic to human, namely marriage and family." He further notes, "the family mirrors the Trinity, beginning with the marriage between two people who become one […]. The family, according to church teaching, is rooted in love, not just a sentiment, but the giving of complete self in self-sacrificing love […]. The family is the best place for all social relationships, where we learn to live justly, gratefully sharing goods, and this lays the foundation for a civilization of love.[433]

The USCCB recognizes the challenge to marriages in modern American society. Unquestionably, the demands of contemporary society, such as balancing home life and work responsibilities, economic worries and social burdens all can contribute significant stress in marriage. The bishops specifically note four such challenges to marriage that are especially concerning in American Society:

- Contraception: The bishops note that there are two "inseparable" purposes of the act of sexual intercourse: the "unitive significance" and the "procreative." They note, "each marital act signifies, embodies, and renews the original and enduring covenant between a husband and wife. That is what makes intercourse exclusively a *marital* act." They further explain, "deliberately intervening, by the use of contraceptive practices, to close off an act of intercourse to the possibility of procreation is a way of separating the unitive meaning of marriage from the

[432] USCCB. (17 Nov 2009). *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan: A Pastoral Letter of the USCCB*, 1.
[433] Ricardo Ramirez. 2016. *Power from the Margins: The Emergence of the Latino in the Church and in Society*, 277.

procreative meaning. This is objectively wrong in and of itself and is essentially opposed to God's plan for marriage and proper human development."[434] In addition to contraception, the bishops note that, "the procreative capacity of man and women should not be treated as just another means of technology, as also happens with *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) or cloning. When this happens, human life itself degrades, and becomes, more and more, something produced or manufactured in various ways, ways that will only multiply as science advances."[435]

- Same-sex unions: The bishops note that the proposition that persons of the same sex can "marry" attempts to "redefine the nature of marriage and the family and, as a result, harms both the intrinsic dignity of every human person and the common good of society." Further they note that "same-sex unions are incapable of realizing this specific communion of persons."[436] In terms of family, the USCCB notes that "A child is meant to have a mother and a father […]. Same-sex unions are incapable of such a witness."[437]
- Divorce: The USCCB remains steadfast on the Church's teaching that "marriage is meant to be a lifelong covenantal union", but notes that "conflict, quarrels, and misunderstandings" are ubiquitous and they "also reflect modern stresses upon marriage: the conflict between work and home, economic hardships, and social expectations", they further encourages that couples in troubled marriages seek help from "programs and ministries offered by the Church, that can help to save marriages, even those in serious difficulty." The US bishops acknowledge that "divorce may be the only solution to a morally unacceptable situation", such as "a home where the safety of a spouse and children are at risk", assuring that they support and offer assistance to those tragically caught in abusive marriages." Regarding those who have divorced and remarried civilly, the bishops offer encouragement noting, "Although the Church cannot recognize such subsequent unions as valid marriages, she hopes that people in this situation will participate in parish life and attend Sunday Eucharist, even without receiving the Sacrament."

[434] USCCB. 2009. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan: A Pastoral Letter of the USCCB*, 18-19.
[435] Ibidem, 20.
[436] Ibidem, 22.
[437] Ibidem.

The bishops additionally "encourage divorced persons who wish to marry in the Catholic Church to seek counsel about the options that exist to remedy their situation including the suitability of a declaration of nullity when there is no longer any hope of reconciliation."[438]

- Cohabitation: The USCCB firmly states, "to have sexual intercourse outside of the covenant of marriage is gravely immoral because it communicates physically the gift of oneself to another when, at the same time, one is not willing or able to make a total and permanent commitment." The bishops further observe that "couples offer various reasons for cohabitating, ranging from economics to convenience. Frequently, they have accepted the widespread societal belief that premarital cohabitation is a prudent way to determine if they are truly compatible. They believe they need a trial period before proceeding to the lifelong commitment of marriage." However, they cite that "at the heart of cohabitation lies a reluctance or refusal to make a public, permanent commitment. Young people need to develop the virtue required for sustaining such a lofty commitment." Lastly, the bishops state, "Cohabitation can also have a negative impact on children […] the unstable nature of cohabitation puts these children at risk."[439]

Cardinal Dolan makes it clear that the "pivotal teaching on sexuality, which is that sexuality mirrors the love God has for us, so it has to have those same characteristics, meaning lifelong, life-giving, and faithful. Anything outside of that can't be done. I understand that's a very tough sell, but fundamentally it's a very positive, beautiful vision of human love. A lifelong, life-giving, faithful marriage between a man and a woman, open to children, is, simply put, the only way God intends sexual love to be expressed."[440]

The Catholic Church epitomizes family as an essential component in American society, playing the life-giving role in the Church and a source of the Church's ongoing vitality. The Second Vatican Council paved the way for the Church's pastoral approach to marriages, providing the Christian community with various teachings and principles of married life and caring for family stability. One principle of the Church on marriage is that it is a binding, life-ling covenant between

[438] Ibidem, 24-26.
[439] Ibidem, 26-27.
[440] Timothy Dolan, John L. Allen Jr. 2012. *A People of Hope.* (New York, Image Books): 68.

man and woman. This commitment is foundational to the family and is intrinsic to its purposes. As the USCCB further explains, "marriage has two fundamental ends or purposes towards which it is orientated, namely, the good of the spouses as well as the procreation of children. Thus, the Church teaches that marriage is both unitive and procreative, and that it is inseparably both."[441] Love is not limited. When in a committed, marital relationship spouses decide to love each other, that love will manifest and grow. In the context of a Christian marriage, "it is the nature of love to overflow, to be life giving. Thus, it is no surprise that marriage is not only ordained to growing in love but to transmitting life […]. Married love itself is ordered to the procreation of children, for, after all, the first command given to Adam and Eve is 'be fertile and multiply' (Gen 1:28)." [442] The fruit of this decision to love, which are children, in turn result in the exponential growth of this love. The bishops note, "children are a gift in a myriad of ways. They bring joy even in the midst of heartaches; they give added direction to the lives of their parents. Children, who are the fruit of love and meaningful commitment, are the cause of love and meaning."[443]

Though not all marriages will be blessed with children due to infertility or other medical reasons, the bishops note, "a couple may be tempted to think that their union is not complete or truly blessed. This is not true. The marital union of a man and a woman is a distinctive communion of persons. An infertile couple continues to manifest this attribute." The bishops additionally note that the responsibility of a couple to be life -affirming does not end, when the capacity to bear children has ended. Married couples have an ongoing responsibility to continue to extend their love by "staying involved in the lives of young people, and especially their grandchildren, as spiritual mentors, teachers, and wisdom figures. They can also continue to be nurturing through the exercise of care for those who are needy, disabled, or pushed to the margins of society, and by their support for or participation in works of charity and justice."[444]

Describing this Trinitarian image in marriage and family life further, the USCCB notes:

> Like the Persons of the Trinity, marriage is a communion of love between co-equal persons, beginning with that between husband and wife and then extending to all the members of the family […]. This communion of life-giving love is witnessed within the life of the family, where parents and children, brothers and sisters, grandparents and relatives are called to live in loving harmony

[441] USCCB. 2009. *Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan: A Pastoral Letter of the USCCB*, 11.
[442] Ibidem, 14.
[443] Ibidem.
[444] Ibidem, 15.

> with one another and to provide mutual support for one another […]. These relations among the persons in communion simultaneously distinguish them from one another and unite them to one another […]. The Trinitarian image in marriage in family life can be seen in a second way. Just as the Trinity of persons is a life-giving communion of love both in relationship to one another and to the whole of creation, so a married couple shares in this life-giving communion of love by together procreating children in the conjugal act of love.[445]

Christian couples and their family more than mirror this Trinitarian love, they participate in it. The US bishops explain further that "through the Sacrament of Matrimony, Christian couples are configured to Christ's love for the Church. Because of this participation in the love of Christ, the communion of persons formed by the married couple and their family is a kind of microcosm of the Church."[446] They further explain that the family is referred to as the "'domestic church' because it is a small communion of persons that both draws its sub sentence from the larger communion that is the whole Body of Christ, the Church, and also reflects the life of the Church so as to provide a kind of summary of it."[447] Regarding protection of marriage as the union between one man and one woman, the USCCB notes that this is a matter of justice. The bishops further explain, "it would be a grave injustice if the state ignored the unique and proper place of husbands and wives, the place of mothers and fathers, and especially the rights of children, who deserve from society clear guidance as they grow to sexual maturity. Indeed, without this protection the state would, in effect, *intentionally* deprive children of the right to a mother and father."[448]

Comparing the ideal of the Holy Family, the Trinitarian love of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and recognizing the family as the domestic church may seem idealized and unobtainable to some. As the Cardinal Thomas J. Tobin notes, "these are certainly challenging and lofty words, and sometimes the reality of family seems so different […]. Family life is not always serene. It encounters real obstacles in the world today. Our society, especially the popular media, does little to support authentic family values. There are immense financial pressures on families. The pace of society is such that it is nearly impossible for families to spend much time together: Parents, sometimes both of them, work long hours, and even the children are trapped in a rat race of sporting events and social activities. The kids are worn out by the time they're teenagers."[449]

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[445] Ibidem, 37.
[446] Ibidem, 39.
[447] Ibidem.
[448] Ibidem, 23.
[449] Thomas Tobin. 2001. *Without a Doubt: Bringing Faith to Life*. (Steubenville, Emmaus Road Publishing): 329.

The impact of the disintegration of the family has not impacted all communities equally. In America, the Black community has especially been affected negatively by the destabilization of the family. Because of this destabilization, it is especially important, as Bishop Edward K. Braxton explains, that Catholics "work with other Black Christians and the larger Black community to confront the serious problems that plague the Black community." He further notes that "57 percent of all the Black children born in America are born to unwed fathers and mothers." He additionally expresses that "our young people must be effectively taught the importance of growing to maturity, obtaining an education, securing employment, and getting married *before* they begin their family. The pattern of three generations of unwed mothers in a single family may be the single greatest internal obstacle to the emotional and economic stability of the Black family in America." In addition, he expresses "we must not abandon our commitment to education. Catholic schools have traditionally distinguished themselves, not only by their academic programs, but by their dedication to helping young people develop authentic human, Christian values."[450]

Increasingly, it cannot be assumed that a family consists of parents and their children. As Bishop Ricardo Ramirez notes that the family has become more complex, including single parent homes, multigenerational homes, children raised by grandparents, stepparents, family friends, adoptive parents and foster parents. Children are also raised by same-sex couples and by teenaged parents. Some children even have special needs, such as physical, mental, or emotional debilities or children who may have one or both parents that are incarcerated or drug addicted.[451] These once extreme familial circumstances are becoming commonplace, and ministering to these increasing complex families is a necessary and difficult challenge for the Church.

Marriage is the foundation of family, and the family is foundational to community and society. The sexual revolution has resulted in immeasurable damage to marriage and, as a result, immeasurable damage to the family and, by extension, the whole of society. In the encyclical *Humanae Vitae*, Pope Paul VI was unambiguous regarding the Church's stance on artificial methods of birth control. Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler summarized the harm that the sexual revolution has perpetrated society. He notes that many Catholics, including those in leadership, reject the teachings of the Church, especially as it pertains to artificial contraception. This

[450] Edward K. Braxton. 2021. *The Church and the Racial Divide: Reflections of an African American Catholic Bishop.* (New York, Maryknoll): 232.
[451] Ricardo Ramirez. 2016. *Power from the Margins: The Emergence of the Latino in the Church and in Society*, 317.

rejection, and subsequent acceptance of the tenets of the sexual revolution, has been only to the detriment of marriage and family and, but extension, society. Bishop Strickland draws a parallel to the Arian Heresy and the current challenges facing the society and the Church in the following:

> If you go back to the Arian Heresy, you'll see that a majority of the bishops were Arian. In the 1960s, many, if not a majority of, bishops rejected *Humanae Vitae.* It was a marker for the sexual revolution. So, it's not a surprise that today you see a lot of polls about how Catholics have rejected that teaching. I think that the Church's emphasis on the moral teachings of sexuality is so important or highlighted so much because it is so vital. The sexual revolution has done very serious damage to humanity. I think people are going to say, as we look back on this sexual revolution from a more distant future, that it really messed up humanity. To repair the damage, we must start with helping people be formed to really live what marriage is, because marriage is the only place where sexual life is lived in a healthy way […] we have the idea that two men or two women and even other "configurations" can be marriages. Yet these quasi-conjugal relationships are broken by their very nature; they're not healthy, they're not going to flourish on the human level, and they can't be signs of what marriage means on the sacramental level. They're not healthy human relationships even before you bring immoral sexual aspects into the picture.[452]

The protection of marriage and the protection of families is not just in the interest of the Church, but it is truly in the interest of all American society. Traditional marriages, between one man and one woman, and subsequently the stability of the family, are under assault in American society today. The sexual revolution, born out of moral relativism in the sexual sphere, has subsequently led to a rise in self-degrading sexual behavior that diminishes human dignity, artificial contraception, abortion, gender confusion and exacerbation of gender dysphoria, divorce, and cohabitation. The effects of these societal destabilizers are magnified by the acceptance of alternative lifestyles as 'societal norms' including the parity of same-sex unions with traditional marriage and gender ideology. Not accepting these lifestyles is now relegated to hate speech. These changes have not stabilized the family, they have degraded it, and with its stabilization, society also is degraded. Just as families render an invaluable service to society, society has a reciprocal obligation to protect and support families—American society is failing at this mission and in doing so, failing itself.

[452] Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 48-49.

c. Assessment of Relativism in the Sphere of Order and Organization of Social Life

The Church warns against relativism in the social life sphere of order and organization. Social relativism manifests one of the significant problems facing the Catholic faithful across the United States, as it is based on the idea that societal values and practices are neither inherently good nor bad; they are simply different, allowing for disagreements between these values. While enroute to his papal visit to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI responded to this crisis in values facing American Society. He expressed, "Various different cultural traditions converged in the Declaration of Human Rights, above all, an anthropology that recognizes man as a subject of rights preceding all institutions, with common values to be respected by all. This Visit, which is taking place precisely at the moment of a crisis in values, therefore seems to me to be important in order to reconfirm together that everything began at that moment and to recover it for our future."[453]

Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the entire body of the US Bishops stated, "The American preoccupation with personal freedom and autonomy causes us to lose sight of both our dependence on, and our responsibilities toward, others." Pope Benedict saw this preoccupation as harming even the Church, "giving rise to a form of piety which sometimes emphasizes our private relationship with God at the expense of our calling to be members of a redeemed community."[454] Once again, this has the effect of dividing belief from action, so that we fail to reflect the faith in our common (or community) life. The key to addressing all of these problems is moral formation.

Though it might seem that removal of moral restraints is implicitly connected to personal freedom, this philosophy actually misrepresents the true meaning of freedom. As Cardinal Dolan notes:

> People often confuse freedom with licentiousness, the chance to do whatever we want, when we want, where we want, with whomever we want [...] and get out of my way so I can 'be myself!' Saint Paul wisely cautions us that those who equate freedom with such permissiveness become slaves to passion, whims, and the almighty self-will. So authentic liberty would be [...] Freedom from sin, not a green light to sin; Freedom to love and obey God, not fashion, inordinate urges, or

[453] Pope Benedict XVI. 2008. "Interview of the Holy Father Benedict XVI during the flight to the United States of America. In https://www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 23, 2023.
[454] Pope Benedict XVI. (16 April 2008). "Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters: Celebration of Vespers and Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America, Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI, National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception." Washington DC. In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 23, 2023.

> fads of culture; Freedom to be responsible, not reckless […]. No wonder those patriarchs who founded this country—like John Adams, George Washington, and Thomas Jefferson—were firm that only a vibrant sense of religion, and a basic sense of right and wrong—they called it 'natural law'—embedded within us, could keep this noble experiment in ordered liberty and democracy from turning into mob rule, or an 'anything goes' society.[455]

Pope Benedict XVI emphasized the need for the American Catholic church community to maintain their traditional doctrine and apply it when making decisions throughout their interactions within society. Pope Benedict XVI noted, the Catholic community, especially the bishops and pastoral ministers, must maintain the Catholic Church's strong and conservative traditions regardless of how American society views them. The Pope further emphasized the need for Sunday worship to be a necessity rather than an option for the Catholic community, preaching against concurrent societal norms which have popularized Sunday mass attendance to be optional.[456] Similarly, Bishop Robert Barron stated, "When a person has fallen in love with God, both his ethical commitments and aesthetical pleasures become focused and satisfying. But when the religious is lost, ethics devolves into, first, a fussy legalism, and then is swallowed up completely by the lust for personal satisfaction".[457] This quote reiterates the importance of spirituality against social relativism, encouraging Christians to seek God's guidance in their life choices.

Unquestionably, America as a pluralistic society isn't uniform in belief or action. The Catholic Church in America resides within this plurality and plurality resides within it—within its congregations, within its clergy and religious, and within its leadership. These differing beliefs, lacking uniformity in their compass, results in disagreement, and disagreement may devolve into vitriol. Catholics have both a right and a duty to participate in the democracy in which they reside. Aside from living out their faith, Catholics are called to engage, not retreat from society. The bishops remind American Catholics that this resulting dialogue must remain civil. The USCCB notes that:

> As Catholics, our strong tradition of social teaching compels us to be actively engaged in the

[455] Timothy Dolan. 2022. "Our Culture's Confused About Freedom." *Catholic New York*. In https://www.cny.org. Retrieved March 23, 2023.
[456] Pope Benedict XVI. (16 April 2008). "Apostolic Journey to the United States of America and Visit to the United Nations Organization Headquarters, Celebration of Vespers and Meeting with the Bishops of the United States of America: Address of his Holiness Benedict XVI, National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC" www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 23, 2023.
[457] Robert Barron. (26 Aug 2008). "Kierkegaard, Woody Allen, and the Secret to Lasting Joy." *Word on Fire.* In www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved October 20, 2022.

> building up of our communities. This is achieved by being involved in the political process—and yet today, many shy away from such involvement because our national and local conversations are filled with vitriol and harsh language, often directed at people themselves. Then personal attacks replace honest debate, no one wins. This kind of attack, no matter the reason, only serves to further divide our communities. What is needed is good, honest, civil dialogue. This means that we must treat everyone as worthy of being at the table, worthy of our respect, and worthy of being heard. In short, it means treating everyone as our neighbor […]. We undermine our commitment to human life and dignity when we fail to see the dignity in those who have a different viewpoint […]. A commitment to civil dialogue can help us to make real and authentic human connections, which create a new space to model love for our neighbors and respect for the dignity of all.[458]

The Church asserts its right and responsibility to address moral issues with authority. The USCCB Committee on Doctrine stated "While there may be individuals who disagree with the teaching of the Church, such divergent views cannot be considered authentic Catholic teaching or the basis for reliable guidance regarding faithful Catholic moral life. It is a serious error, therefore, to claim that the teaching of the Pope and the bishops represents merely one voice among many legitimate voices within the Catholic Church, all of which are vying to be heard and accepted."[459] The USCCB, in *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,* the U.S. Bishops further assert, "There are some things we must never do, as individuals or as a society, because they are always incompatible with love of God and neighbor. Such actions are so deeply flawed that they are always opposed to the authentic good of persons. These are called 'intrinsically evil' actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. A prime example is the intentional taking of innocent human life, as in abortion and euthanasia. In our nation, 'abortion and euthanasia have become preeminent threats to human dignity because they directly attack life itself, the most fundamental human good and the condition for all others' (Living the Gospel of Life, no. 5). It is a mistake with grave moral consequences to treat the destruction of innocent human life merely as a matter of individual choice. A legal system that violates the basic right to life on the grounds of choice is fundamentally flawed."[460] Cardinal Dolan described this threat to human dignity, and ultimately humanity's own security, when life is disregarded in the

[458] USCCB. Committee on Justice, Peace and Human Development. 2020. "*Civilize it: Dignity Beyond the Debate*." In www. usccb.org. Retrieved March 25, 2023.
[459] USCCB. (n.d.). *Statement Concerning Two Pamphlets Published by Professor Daniel Maguire*. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 8, 2023.
[460] USCCB. 2015. *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, p. 19 (#22).

following:

> Think about it: if the fragile life of an innocent baby in the womb of her/his mother— which nature protects as the safest place anywhere—can be terminated, who is secure? If conveniences, 'choices,' or 'my rights' can trump the life of the baby in the womb, what human life is unthreatened? When the law allows vulnerable life to be destroyed, forces health care workers to do it against their consciences, and demands that our tax money subsidize it, what message are we giving about the dignity of the human person and the sacredness of life? [...] As with other issues of human rights, it is essential that there be equal justice under law for the baby. So, while we rally for equal protection of the law for the baby, let us also rally around women tempted to terminate their baby's life, providing care, compassion, accompaniment, proper medical attention, alternatives such as adoption, and a culture that protects babies and moms before and after birth.[461]

One of the greatest risks to a pluralistic society is not pluralism, but self-centeredness. More than any other generation, the iGen generation is preoccupied with individual freedom and individual choice. The culture of death stems from this self -centeredness. Contraception and abortion are manifestations of this culture of death; euthanasia too is rooted in the illusion of control and self. Bishop Robert Barron notes that Gen Z or iGen's preoccupation with individual choice stems from their collective upbringing. He notes, "from their earliest years, iGen'ers have been presented with a dizzying array of choices in everything from food and clothes to gadgets and lifestyles. And they have been encouraged, by practically every song, video, and movie, to believe in themselves and follow their own dreams. All of this self-preoccupation and stress upon individual liberty stands sharply athwart the religious ideal of surrendering to God and his purposes."[462] Bishop Barron recalls a disturbing billboard he saw on a roadside in California that sadly summarized the challenges with reaching the youth of this generation, "My life, my death, my choice", he further noted that this statement sat "very uneasily indeed with St. Paul's assertion "Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14:8)." [463] It is precisely this distorted sense of freedom—a sense of freedom so removed from the God-centered freedom understood through the Christian faith and a freedom far removed from what the founding fathers of the United States—that those "who wish to evangelize the next generation"[464] must understand

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[461] Timothy Dolan. 2021. *Human Rights Begin in the Womb*. Catholic New York. In https://www.cny.org. Retrieved March 23, 2023.
[462] Robert Barron. 2022. *Redeeming the Time: Gospel Perspectives on the Challenges of the Hour.* (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire): 27.
[463] Ibidem.
[464] Ibidem.

and must be willing to dialogue.

The enduring effects of moral relativism in American society are apparent in the society—in self-degrading sexual behavior, artificial contraception, abortion, gender ideology and in the decline in marriage and destabilization of the family. The need for ministry to this generation is growing and the approach needs to be novel. As Bishop Barron notes, "Especially in our Western context, the streets and the existential margins are where we find the 'none's,'" it will not be within the walls of our churches and church buildings, "yet we still seem to devout most of our money, time, and attention to the maintenance of these institutions and their programs. Might it not be wiser to move into the space where the unevangelized, the fallen-away, the unaffiliated dwell?" My humble suggestion is that a serious investment in social media and the formation of an army of young priests specifically educated and equipped to evangelize the culture through these means would be a desideratum."[465] The only hope in impacting the trajectory of moral relativism, and its impact on America's ever increasingly secular society, is to get this message to those not within the walls of the Church.

4. Theological Assessment of the Digital Revolution and its Impact on the Religious Life of the Faithful

Technology has revolutionized the way that we all live. How we communicate, how and where we live, how we acquire and prepare our food, how we are educated and how we educate others—all of these have drastically changed and continue to evolve through the ever-advancing technologies of this age. As Christians we believe that this intelligence was not intrinsic to humanity but endowed by our Creator. The USCCB Pastoral Letter on Stewardship reminds us that as Christian stewards "we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with increase to the Lord."[466] Intellect is a gift, and technology is the fruit of this gift. As God has blessed us with intelligence and the technological advances that have blossomed from this intelligence, then we are mandated to cultivate these for the good of humanity, use them responsibly, share them justly and lovingly and return them to Lord.

[465] Ibidem, 34.
[466] USCCB Committee on Evangelization & Catechesis. (n.d.) "Stewardship: To Be a Christian Steward A Summary of the U.S. Bishops' Pastoral Letter on Stewardship." Retrieved March 13, 2023.

a. The Church's General Stance on the Digital Revolution

The Catholic Church has never opposed technological development but encourages that new technologies should serve as the means of improvement of the quality of life and well-being of all humans. The Church regards technologies as a resource that helps to achieve the common good, which is the universal objective according to her social teaching. As a result, the Catholic Church embraces technological progress because it leads to the development of the society, and to equal distribution of opportunities among all people. At the same time, the Church acknowledges that technological progress might have negative consequences, including aggravation of unemployment and economic inequality, uncontrollable migration, and destruction of traditional moral norms. These potentially detrimental attributes of technology demonstrate that the Catholic Church should have a cautious and balanced attitude toward technological revolution; its concerns are justified, regardless of the positive attributes of technology.

Bishop Robert Barron notes, when contemplating the current state of digital technologies that terms related to advancements, such as 'search engine' was unknown previously, but is 'common parlance' today. He further notes, "There are dozens, if not hundreds, of these complex tools designed to scour the World Wide Web for information. Google, Yahoo, Bing, and many others give us something that our ancestors could only imagine in their wildest fantasies: practically instant access to most of the information available to the human race […]. Whatever our minds (if not our hearts) desire is readily available for our consumption." He further notes, "This moment in our civilizational development has an intriguing connection to religion. It is a curious feature of our intellects that they restlessly, even relentlessly, seek. By a very deeply-rooted instinct, we want to know, and accordingly, we stubbornly ask questions and endeavor to find answers. But when we come upon the answers we searched out, we aren't satisfied; rather dozens more questions emerge, frequently ones we never thought we had […]. And this questing, quite obviously, goes infinitely beyond what is strictly necessary for biological survival […]. To see this as simply an epiphenomenon of the evolutionary drive to survival strikes me as hopelessly reductionistic."[467] Unlike with animals, the quest for knowledge for humans is not exclusively based on the need for survival. The desire for knowledge is innate to humanity and it is ever

[467] Robert Barron. 2018. *Arguing Religion: A Bishop Speaks at Facebook and Google.* (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire): 60.

expanding. Unquestionably, this desire will only further humanity's quest for new technologies.

Nowhere in scripture does it condemn tools or technology. Tools and technology have the capacity to help humanity live out its callings. Tools and technology are not intrinsically evil, although they can be used or misused for good or evil purposes. The story of Cain and Abel illustrates the truth about the purpose and use of technology. Both brothers were created by God, and both had specific skills and talents. To accomplish tasks, both used tools and early technologies. Cain, however, misused his talents, strength, and abilities to kill his own brother—his fellow image bearer—for evil and selfish purposes.

Noah's Ark that is described in Genesis 6:14-8:19 is another example of the technological progress that allows God to save animals and humans from ultimate destruction. At the same time, the story about the Tower of Babel embodies the misuse of technology that ultimately violates ethics and divine laws. As it is described in Genesis 11:1-10, God destroyed the Tower of Babel because humans wanted to compete with God and to overcome Him, which was unacceptable. These examples from the Holy Scripture illustrate the dual perception of technologies.

Evidence of the early Church's support of progress is found in the New Testament as well. For instance, it is written in John 14:12: "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father." It is possible to interpret these lines about following the example of Jesus Christ in the moral sense but at the same time, it reflects the need for the ongoing improvement that is integral to human progress. When Jesus cured ill people, his intention was to improve the lives of individuals invoking the power of God. It is said in Matthew 11:5 that "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy[a] are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor." It is possible to assume that medical progress and technologies follow the example of Jesus Christ, which makes technological advancements blessed by God.

The passages from the Bible regarding the use of technologies are predominantly positive. The Christian faith supports development and use of technologies that help people to achieve the common good, to help those who are in need, and to develop talents. Those excerpts from the Holy Scripture that appear to be against technological progress actually exhibit the moral concerns related to misuse of these advances and violation of the principles of ethics, which aligns with the

rationale behind the negative reaction of the Church. This position on technologies from the Bible coincides with the official stance of the Catholic Church on technological progress in contemporary society.

From the perspective of the Church, innovations and technology are viewed as positive since it improves life when people use them wisely or as intended. It would be inappropriate to stick to the old traditional way of life although it might seem safe. As it is written in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Christians should actively pursue the positive attributes of modern technologies, including education, communication, work, medicine, etc. Technological advancement made the opportunities available to people more equitable than they had been in the past.

Pope Benedict noted that social media was fundamentally changing how people communicated. He stressed that this change could not be ignored by the Church, rather we are obliged, as Catholics, to use this technology to bring the Church's teachings into the world, what he referred to as the "digital continent."[468] As Pope Francis echoed this obligation of the Church to embrace digital technology in his message for the 48th World Communications Day, he stated "Communication is a means of expressing the missionary vocation of the entire Church; today the social networks are one way to experience this call to discover the beauty of faith, the beauty of encountering Christ. In the area of communications too, we need a Church capable of bringing warmth and stirring hearts." Pope Francis further noted, "The Revolution taking place in communications media and in information technologies represents a great and thrilling challenge," he implored Catholics to respond to this "challenge with fresh energy and imagination as we seek to share with others the beauty of God."[469]

The USCCB recognizes digital technologies offer both opportunities and challenges to the Catholic Church in America. The bishops note that these opportunities and challenges can be grouped into three primary categories—visibility, communication, and accountability:

Regarding *visibility,* the bishops state, "Because of the high volume of content and sites

[468] USCCB. (n.d.) "Communications: Social Media Guidelines. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[469] Pope Francis. (2014 Jun 1). "Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

and the dynamics of search engines and computer networking, social media require constant input and monitoring to make the Church's presence effective. To keep members, a social networking site such as a blog needs to have new content on a regular basis. In the case of social media, the axiom, 'build it and they will come' is not applicable. It may seem paradoxical, when considering the fluidity of social media, but good planning and strategizing is as essential, if not more so, when approaching social media, versus traditional media."[470]

Regarding *communication*, the bishops note, "social media can be powerful tools for strengthening community, although social media interaction should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face gatherings. Social media can support communities in a myriad of ways: Connecting people with similar interests, sharing information about in person events, providing ways for people to engage in dialogue, etc. […] A well-considered use of social media has the ultimate goal of encouraging 'an authentic culture of encounter' or to use the parlance of practitioners, 'creating engagement.'" [471]

The third and final category that the USCCB notes presents both opportunities and challenges for Catholic Organizations is *accountability*. "Social media provides tools for building community. Membership in Communities also requires accountability and responsibility. Users of social media expect site administrators to allow dialogue, to provide information, and to acknowledge mistakes. The explosion of information available to social media consumers has meant that they often only use information from trusted sites or sites recommended by those whom they trust […]. Many communication experts are describing social media as a paradigm shift in how humans communicate, a development as important as that of the printing press and the innovation of electronic communication."[472]

The USCCB General Secretariat chair, Bishop John Webster notes regarding digital technologies and their application in social media, "There is more to do […]. The USCCB staff, bishops and consultants […] know that we have to increase content available to the faithful who use Spanish as their primary language. We need to learn to speak in a style that is accessible to a generation accustomed to 15 second commercials as 140-character texts, who prefer content that allow them to respond and comment. The challenges of this moment in communications

[470] USCCB. (n.d.). "Communications: Social Media Guidelines. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[471] Ibidem.
[472] Ibidem.

technology are a boundless opportunity for evangelization, if we are willing to speak […] and listen." Bishop Webster further notes, "The back-and -forth digital communication that is spreading like wildfire across our dioceses is our chance to bring the Gospel to millions of Catholics. We have to be in the digital conversations. And we have to listen, too."[473]

The Catholic Church acknowledges the various opportunities technology offers, primarily when utilized positively and efficiently by believers and the pastoral community. Various technological inventions have helped improve the lives of American community members, primarily through inventions in the medical field, which have helped promote the health and well-being of believers by saving lives and ensuring effective treatment. According to the Church, technology is part of God's creation manifested through man's intelligence to improve man's welfare and development.

b. Assessment of the Risks Arising from the Use and Abuse of Digital Technologies

Americans understand they live in a society heavily influenced by digital technologies and one that is rapidly changing by these technologies. As the USCCB statement, *Renewing the Mind of the Media*, acknowledges "Even people who do not consume a great deal of media are well aware that they live in a society whose environment and values are affected by media influence for good or ill, and they can be affected themselves, even indirectly." Unquestionably, media, especially digital media affects our lives. The bishops further note that while the internet, computer technologies, satellite, cable, and television have enhanced our lives, their misuse also has a "dark side" which "obscures the value of these contributions." The bishops attribute much of this misuse to "large corporations in the entertainment and communications industry" who "reap substantial benefits by targeting young people, in particular, through a variety of media."[474]

Overreliance on technology can make believers technologically enslaved people, less inclined to interact with others and over-dependent on technology to address issues better managed in-person. This breakdown in personal communication remains a concern for the Church leadership in America. Cardinal Blasé Cupich notes, "It is difficult to tell how social media is

[473] John Webster. 2012. Chair "Using the New Media for the New Evangelization: Address of Bishop John Webster Given at the USCCB General Assembly Meeting June 2012." USCCB Communications Committee. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[474] USCCB. 1998. "Renewing the Mind of the Media" USCCB Statement issued by NCCB/USCC. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

going to advance evangelization. I say this because I think evangelization happens in more personal ways rather than through electronic means. At this same time, social media is able to connect people to one another, and that can be an entry point. However, I do think that in the long run, people have to meet person-to-person in order for real evangelization." [475] Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York's concerns go beyond interpersonal communication. His concerns cut to the heart of family and community. He notes, "Experts in behavioral sciences and sociology seem to share my apprehension. These scholars write that personal contact—verbal, face-to-face quality conversations and healthy leisure where we simply 'spend time' as family or friends—is going the way of the rotary telephone. Now we prefer to text, e-mail, Facebook or Twitter—with a personal phone call or letter even becoming quaint, and quality time in each other's company rare. And now the days that a classic, civil culture sets aside for such lofty projects as visiting, conversing, or sharing a meal together—such as the weekly Sabbath and holidays such as Thanksgiving—are in jeopardy."[476]

The specific areas of media, both new and old, that the USCCB notes influence young people and adults to engage in morally and socially destructive forms of behavior are:

- The internet when used and misused for sexually explicit content, advertisements or to transmit messages of violence and hate.
- Talk radio, assaulting its listeners with angry or indecent remarks.
- The music industry which permits obscene and violent messages in lyrics or loud, suggestive or destructive behavior in music videos.
- Violent or sexually suggestive video games with imagines of violent, lawless, and sadistic worlds portrayed as glamorous and heroic.[477]

The USCCB stresses that the "contemporary means of communications have made the depiction of pornography and graphic, gratuitous violence more intense and widespread. Though not legally obscene or as offensively violent, nearly equally objectionable uses of sex and violence have become prevalent even in some forms of mainstream media […]. Pornography, excessive violence, and other irresponsible use of sex and violence in the media gravely harm the moral and

[475] Gimpel K. 2018. "An interview with Cardinal Blasé Cupich." *Profiles in Catholicism.* In https://www.catholicprofiles.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[476] Timothy Dolan. 2012. A Prayer of petition this Thanksgiving. *New York Post*. In https://nypost.com. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[477] USCCB. 1998. "Renewing the Mind of the Media" USCCB Statement issued by NCCB/USCC. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

psychological health of both society and a whole and its individual members—children and adults."[478] Regarding the implication of digital technology and the rise of the use of pornographic material, the USCCB states the following:

> The rise of the Internet presents the most dramatic difference between pornography in decades past and more recently. While online media can be a fruitful avenue for evangelization and personal encounter, the Internet also runs the risk of appealing to a desire for instant gratification and replacing human presence with "virtual reality." Online pornography is instantly accessible, seemingly anonymous, mostly free, and has the appearance of being endlessly novel. This potent combination has had devastating effects on many men and women. The widespread availability of the internet means that pornography is in the home, at work, and often literally at one's fingertips with the prevalence of mobile devices. The Internet's perceived anonymity can entice a person to view images or engage in activities that he or she would hesitate to do off-line, and the novelty of Internet pornography can itself be intoxicating, affecting brain chemistry and seducing viewers to keep clicking.[479]

Bishop Barron describes the damage digital pornography has inflicted on Americans, especially young men and women who, because of this excess consumption of sexually explicit material, have damaged their ability to have normal relations. He notes:

> All of this wanton viewing of live-action pornography has produced, many are arguing, an army of young men who are incapable of normal and satisfying sexual activity with real human beings. Many twenty-somethings are testifying that when they have the opportunity for sexual relations with their wives or girlfriends, they cannot perform. And in the overwhelming majority of cases, this is not a physiological issue, which is proved by the fact that they can still become aroused easily by images on a computer screen. The sad truth is that for these young men, sexual stimulation is associated not with flesh and blood human beings, but with flickering pictures of physically perfect people in virtual reality […]. And this in turn makes them incapable of finding conventional, non-exotic sex even vaguely interesting.[480]

The USCCB summarizes four points from the Pontifical Council for Social Communications that describes the evils of behavior or character that result from pornography, namely:

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[478] Ibidem.
[479] USCCB Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth. 2015. *Create in Me a Clean Heart: A Pastoral Response to Pornography Use*, p. 10.
[480] Robert Barron. 2016. "Porn and the Curse of Total Sexual Freedom." *Word on Fire*. In www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

- It can have a progressively desensitizing effect, gradually rendering individuals morally numb.
- It can be addictive, causing some viewers to require progressively more perverse material to achieve the same degree of stimulation.
- It can undermine marriage and family life since it demeans their sacred value.
- In some cases, it can incite its uses to commit more overtly violent crimes such as rape, child abuse, and even murder (cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Pornography and Violence in the Media: A Pastoral Response*, Nos 14-17).[481]

The theological assessment of the risks arising from the use and abuse of digital technologies illustrate how heavily Americans are influenced by digital technologies. Overreliance on technology can make believers technologically enslaved people, less inclined to interact with others and over dependent on technology to address issues better managed in person. This breakdown in personal communication remains a concern for the Church leadership in America. Furthermore, the use of digital technology for illicit activities such as pornography damages individuals morally, spiritually, and even physically. This misuse of technology leads to further moral and societal decay.

c. The Church's Guidelines for the Positive Use of Digital Technologies

The Church exists in order to evangelize. New technologies, new media, and the internet in particular, offer tremendous opportunities and an equal number of challenges to those who take seriously the work of evangelization. The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform, and, with God's grace, transform adults, teens, and children. It is important to make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time, ensure the integrity of the message we proclaim. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet to be developed technologies.

Despite the secular character of American society, it is critical to understand the bedrock of the Christian mission in the formation of the United States, and that this mission remains today. There are challenges that the faithful and the clergy face when they try to approach contemporary

[481] USCCB. 1998. "Renewing the Mind of the Media". USCCB Statement issued by NCCB/USCC. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.

society because evangelization is regarded as the attempt to interfere with secular ideals by many people. At the same time, it is not acceptable for Christians to resign their mission of evangelization, as Pope Francis writes in his work of Apostolic Constitution "Episcopalis Communio" where he asserts that the agreement of the Catholic Church not to participate in community life is sinful carelessness.[482]

Pope Francis writes that the synod should focus on understanding the urgent social and cultural agenda. The Catholic Church should react to the changes in modern society because those people who believe in God are left without spiritual and moral guidance, while other people who are not members of the Church community, cannot hear God's message in the secular world. It is possible to illustrate this hypothesis about the necessity of religious promotion with the following lines from Apostolic Constitution "Episcopalis Communio" where Pope Francis writes:

> On the contrary, it is a suitable instrument to give voice to the entire People of God, specifically via the bishops, established by God as "authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church", demonstrating, from one Assembly to another, that it is an eloquent expression of synodality as a "constitutive element of the Church".[483]

Pope Francis claimed that technological advancements that help people achieve the common good and protect human dignity are supported by the Catholic Church. As a result, Catholic legislators should undertake serious research on the moral attributes of technological with the following words by Pope Francis:

> All of us are called to foster the spirit of solidarity, starting with the needs of our weakest and most disadvantaged brothers and sisters. If we are to heal our world so harshly tried by the pandemic, and build a more inclusive and sustainable future in which technology serves human needs without isolating us from one another, we need not only responsible citizens but also capable leaders inspired by the principle of the common good.[484]

Therefore, there are multiple means of using technological advancements morally for the common good, as the experience of the Catholic Church demonstrates. Technology permits

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[482] Pope Franci. 2018. "Apostolic Constitution Episcopalis Communio," 3-6. In http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/papa-francesco_costituzione-ap_20180915_episcopalis-communio.html. Retrieved March 1, 2022.

[483] Ibidem, 24-25.

[484] Pope Francis meeting with International Catholic Legislators. (27 Aug 2021). Retrieved from Devin Watkins. "Pope urges Catholic lawmakers to guide technological advances." In https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-08/pope-francis-catholic-legislators-network-safer-technology.html. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

Catholics to share the Biblical teaching with others, to support people using such Internet platforms such as YouTube, social media, and blogs. It is crucial to understand that there are various ways in which God speaks to people, and online communication can be one of these ways. Moreover, technology allows Christians to communicate with people they cannot directly interact with due to distance or other physical restrictions. Consequently, it makes the Catholic Church more inclusive and more popular among people. Parishes and congregations across the United States and across the world utilized these technologies to Live Stream Masses and other services during the height of the global shutdowns related to the COVID 19 pandemic. While, for Catholics, this was not a substitute for in-person Mass, the faithful remained in contact with their churches and the Word despite the lockdown. Though this does not fit the classic definition of "two or three gathered" in the name of Jesus, the collective prayer by the faithful, through this technology, certainly met the spirit of solidarity.

It is possible to describe the Catholic Church as a change agent because it helps people to understand their place in life, establish relationships with God, and change society in general. In other words, the active change is the part of the Christian mission and the pastoral work, which explains the positive attitude toward technological innovations in the Church's life. As it was already mentioned, technology improves worship, making it more accessible to people. Presently, all Catholics can watch the Mass online or read the encyclicals written by popes. There is free access to Christian books and articles that explain the disputable questions connected with faith or simply help people find spiritual and theological support when needed.

The Church advises the American Catholic community to familiarize themselves with various technologies commonly used in daily activities. Familiarizing oneself with daily technologies allows one to improve digital literacy, which helps one easily differentiate between such Technology's harmful and beneficial applications. Believers can then use this knowledge to avoid the adverse effects of technology and embrace the positive ones helping develop themselves spiritually, mentally, and physically. In addition, learning about standard technology can increase one's understanding of such technologies allowing them to be positively productive by implementing their knowledge for positive use and the Church's growth. As Bishop Robert Barron notes, "We find ourselves at a moment in the history of communication comparable only to the early sixteenth century. The printing press constituted a revolution not only in communication technology as such but more specifically in the propagation of the Gospel. Something very similar,

but even more explosive, is at work today. Social media provided tools for the announcing of the Good News that Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal, Newman and even Fulton Sheen never dreamed possible. The best way that I can celebrate the 10,000,000 views on YouTube is to invite many others to join me in our modern Areopagus in declaring Christ from the rooftops and to the ends of the world."[485]

The USCCB issued a set of guidelines for the positive use of digital technology. The guidelines acknowledge that social media are the fastest growing form of communications in the United States. The guidelines also note that the Church cannot ignore social media and digital technologies, but at the same time the Church must engage social media in a manner that is safe, responsible and in a civil manner. Furthermore, the guidelines encourage respect, dialogue, and honest relationships—in other words individuals should aspire for true friendships. The guidelines are built upon the message from Pope Benedict XVI's 2010 World Communications Day which stated, "to do so requires us to approach social media as powerful means of evangelization and to consider the church's role in providing a Christian perspective on digital literacy."[486] Similar to the Guidelines published initially in 1998 mentioned above, the updated guidelines in 2012 again pointed to visibility, community and accountability as three principal areas that the Church should emphasize and aspire to make a positive mark on with its engagement in social media. When developing the guidelines for the positive use of digital technology, the US Conference of Bishops encouraged users to consider the following six elements:

- *Define appropriate boundaries for communication:* Communication from the Church, in particular, should adhere to recognized and accepted codes of conduct, especially as it pertains to the protection of children and young people. It is additionally important to note that when official Church social media sites 'post' on positions are viewed as controversial in secular society, it is critical to adhere to the Church's teachings on these topics (examples offered include gay rights, abortion, immigration, health care reform).

[485] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire): 266.
[486] Pope Benedict XVI. (16 May 2010). "Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the 44th World Communication Day. The Priest and Pastoral Ministry in a Digital World: New Media at the Service of the Word." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 13, 2023.

- *Include examples of Codes of conduct:* The USCCB stresses that appropriate conduct is not just expected of those managing the social media sites representing the Church, it is also an expectation of those visiting the social media sites maintained by representatives of the Church. As such this "Code of Conduct" should be available for review and visitors should be "made aware' of the consequence of violations to this code.
- *Define instructions:* In addition to the Code of Conduct, instructions should be available on how to block and/or report those who violate the Code.
- *Provide recommendations on how to deal with difficult 'fans'*: It is important to trust one's instincts when dealing with persons who are engaging in derogatory or argumentative behavior and to recognize when to take conversations 'offline' or simply 'end' the dialogue.
- *Provide trusted sites for reference and recommend that site administrators have a thorough knowledge of these sites*: Administrators need to provide quality "links" for those searching, thereby "helping redirect the tone and substance of an online conversation."
- *Remind site administrators that they are posting for a broad audience:* Finally, the USCCB reminds us that "social media are global platforms. Online content is visible to anyone in the world who comes to their sites."[487]

Several prominent Catholic leaders are active in the digital space in various formats. They offer their recommendations for effective engagement with digital technologies and within the 'digital space.' As Bishop Joseph Strickland of Tyler notes:

> I tweet; A lot of people are aware of that! I've always said that St Paul would have used Twitter if it had existed then. He used the communication tools of his day—letters and word of mouth. Today he would be tweeting, he would be doing podcasts, he would have a YouTube channel and a blog. Social media has its pitfalls, certainly. Sometimes I get off in the weeds or lose my temper. That's not helpful, and I try to avoid that, but it doesn't mean we should ignore all the light and truth we can share through these media. I Believe we have to use the tools that this age gives us. The Church has always done this, sometimes people point to the invention of the printing press as a point of unraveling for the Church, but that is shortsighted. On Balance, the print medium has been of

[487] USCCB. (n.d.) "Social Media Guidelines." In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 13, 2023.

> incalculable benefit in evangelization, catechesis, and apologetics. […] An advantage of using Twitter is that one can put gospel truth and ideas of faith into the information stream instantaneously. The clear disadvantage with Twitter and any modern social media is that it does not go deeply into any topic.[488]

Bishop Robert Barron noted, from his experience lecturing at Google and Facebook, when dialoguing about religion in a pluralistic society about religion, especially with those who harbor little knowledge of religion or who approach religion with animus, as he had encountered in the 'digital space' is it necessary to do so respecting the intellect of those who are being encountered. An example of this dialogue from his talk at Google titled, *Religion and the Opening Up of the Mind* he noted, "Religion […] is born of the human being's essentially unlimited capacity to quest, both intellectually and spiritually. Far from shutting down the mind—as is so often claimed by its critics—religion expands the mind and pushes it further, toward a properly infinite goal."[489] Bishop Barron has had more than 20 years of experience in the 'digital space' through his ministry *Word on Fire*. Through this experience he notes:

> There is a great deal of energy around matters religious, and though lots of sharp words are regularly exchanged, very few of the people on the internet really know how to have an *argument* about religion. They don't know, at least in regard to matters religious, how to marshal evidence, construct syllogisms, draw valid conclusions, listen and respond to objections, etc. Much of this incapacity is a function of an assumption that is operative in both the high and the low culture—namely. That when it comes to religion, there are only two lively options: either aggressive, even violent imposition of one's views, or a bland and universal toleration of all opinions. And underneath that assumption is the even more fundamental conviction that religion is finally irrational, a matter of complexes and fantasies rather than reason.[490]

Bishop Barron asserts, it is important to present a dialogue in the digital space, but in this space, it is also important that those endeavoring to engage in this dialogue must be prepared to have cohesive, intellectual arguments. He notes:

> Men and women of our culture, conditioned by materialism, relativism, and the prerogative of self-assertion, must be habituated to a certain manner of being in the world before they can speak to one another fruitfully about matters of faith. They must come to understand—and put into practice—

[488]Joseph Strickland. 2020. *Light and Leaven: The Challenge of the Laity in the Twenty-First Century*, 44.
[489] Robert Barron. 2018. *Arguing Religion: A Bishop Speaks at Facebook and Google.* (Park Ridge, IL, Word on Fire): 2.
[490] Ibidem, 2.

the convictions that authentic faith is not opposed to reason; that scientism must be put to rest; that mere toleration must not be tolerated; that voluntarism must be eschewed; and that opponents must seek to really listen to one another.[491]

The Catholic Church is rich in the tradition of sound philosophical arguments. Success in the modern secularized digital space does not require abandonment of these traditions as a means of formulating an intellectual argument for dialoging, rather effective dialogue in this digital space calls us to embrace these rich traditions. Bishop Barron suggests using intellectual arguments, such as those framed by St Thomas Aquinas as the exemplar for engaging religious questions in secular society. He expounds on the above statement with the following points:

- *Faith is not opposed to reason:* "authentic faith is not infrarational; it is suprarational. The infrarational—what lies below reason—is the stuff of credulity, superstition, naivete, or just plain stupidity, and no self-respecting adult should be the least bit interested in fostering or embracing it. It is quite properly shunned by mature religious people as it is by scientists and philosophers. The suprarational, on the other hand, is what lies beyond reason but never stands in contradiction to reason. It is indeed a type of knowing, but one that surpasses the ordinary powers of observation, experimentation, hypothesis formation or rational reflection."[492]
- *Scientism must be put to rest:* "Scientism defined [by Bishop Barron] as the reduction of all knowledge to the scientific form of knowledge. This epistemological reductionism is rampant today, especially among younger people, Scientism itself is not scientific but rather philosophical, for it is a rational intuition regarding the epistemological order."[493] Furthermore, he notes scientism stands athwart the practically universal consensus that there are indeed nonscientific paths to knowledge. Who can seriously doubt that philosophy, literature, drama, poetry, painting, and mysticism are not only uplifting and entertaining but also truth-bearing?"[494]
- *Mere toleration must not be tolerated:* "One of the most revered ideas in the contemporary West is tolerance, especially in regard to religion. Concomitantly, one of the very worst insults that you can hurl at someone today in our cultural context is that he or she is

[491] Ibidem, 2.
[492] Ibidem, 6.
[493] Ibidem, 17-19
[494] Ibidem, 19.

intolerant of others […] in our postmodern society, toleration of religion typically goes hand in hand with the radical privatization of religion, the relegating of faith to the arena of interiority and its proactive to the level of a hobby."[495]

- *Voluntarism must be eschewed:* "Voluntarism is the view that things are true because I want them to be true."[496] Bishop Barron further notes, "Can you see how the adoption of voluntarism has directly transformed our public spaces—especially institutions of higher learning—into ideological battlefields? No one argues anymore; they shout one another down and claim victim status."[497]
- *Opponents must seek to really listen to one another:* "As a necessary condition for constructive religious dialogue that all participants put their egos aside and listen to one another, seeking truly to understand the other's position and point of view."[498]

The Catholic Church also encourages believers and the American Catholic community to ensure early and timely teachings for their children on the effective use of technology such as the internet for productive rather than destructive purposes. According to Pope Francis, Christians can help educate their children on technology by "assisting minors who have been affected and providing for their rehabilitation, assisting educators and families, and finding creative ways of training young people in the proper use of the internet in ways healthy for themselves and other minors." [499] Promoting early teaching and guidance to children helps the parent provide relevant information about technology and the use of mobile phones and the internet, explaining the various positive and negative aspects of the internet. In addition, parents can promote positive technology use by teaching their children various internet resources depending on their age, which could help improve their knowledge and promote positive behavior. Similarly, parents should teach their children how to avoid temptation and ensure parental guidance and restrictions on internet gadgets within their children's access.

Finally, Cardinal Blasé Cupich again reminds us that the Church exists to evangelize. He further opines, "It is difficult to tell how social media is going to advance evangelization. I say this because I think evangelization happens in a more personal way rather than through electronic

[495] Ibidem, 27.
[496] Ibidem, 37.
[497] Ibidem, 43.
[498] Ibidem, 46.
[499] Pope Francis. (6 Oct 2017.) "Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Participants in the Congress on "Child Dignity in the Digital World." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

means. At the same time, social media is able to connect people to one another, and that can be an entry point. However, I do think that in the long run, people have to meet person-to-person in order for real evangelization to take place."[500]

The Church's guidelines for the positive use of digital technology illustrates that new technologies, new media, and the internet in particular, offer tremendous opportunities and an equal number of challenges to those who take seriously the work of evangelization. The use of technology is rapidly growing to form, inform and, with God's grace, transform those seeking the Word. It is of great importance to make every effort to ensure the safety of producers and consumers of social media, while at the same time, ensure the integrity of the message proclaimed by the Church. This requires responsible, focused, and intentional use of new and yet to be developed technologies.

d. The Positive and Negative Side of the Use of Digital Technologies in the Life and Pastoral Ministry of the Church

As God has blessed us with intellect, and this intellect has led to technological advances, including digital technologies, we are obliged to use these advances for His glory. Using the media correctly and competently can lead to a genuine inculturation of the Gospel. Unquestionably, technology has revolutionized the way we live and the way we communicate. We shouldn't shy away from these technologies, especially when it comes to their use in ministry. Yet, we also must recognize that all tools and technologies have the capacity to be used for good and for ill. We must also discern when technology simply cannot and should not supplant human interaction.

In his Apostolic Letter, "*The Rapid Development*," Pope John Paul II stated, "In the communications media, the Church finds a precious aid for spreading the Gospel and religious values, promoting dialogue, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation […]"[501] This statement already describes multiple positive aspects of digital technologies for pastoral ministers in their endeavors to spread the gospel. One significant positive use of digital technologies is the enhancement of the Sunday experience. Technology is playing an increasing role in worship and communal prayer. The use of technology must be intentional. As an example of its use in many

[500] Gimpel K. 2018. "An interview with Cardinal Blasé Cupich." *Profiles in Catholicism.* In https://www.catholicprofiles.org. Retrieved March 12, 2023.
[501] John Paul II. 2005. Apostolic Letter: "The Rapid Development" addressed by Holy Father John Paul II to those Responsible for Communications. In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

American Catholic churches is the integration of digital screens within the worship space. These screens serve several functions, including videos, participation aids (such as song lyrics and hymnal page numbers), art and environment intended to visually aid in homiletics, and interactive aids. All of these uses have significant potential to enhance and even streamline the worship experience. Using digital screens for musical liturgy, as an example, frees parishioners from needing a hymnal in their hands, allowing the congregation to more freely be engaged in the worship music. Using screens for visuals during a homily, for example, may stimulate the congregation more fully allowing them to be consciously and actively engaged. There are some drawbacks as well. Some parishioners may find the use of screens in the worship space as distracting. Some parishioners may focus more on the screens than the liturgy, while others may plainly find screens both distracting and difficult to adapt. The use of these technologies does not change the intention of the Mass. Liturgy remains the priority, source and summit of Mass—the intentional use of digital technologies should only ever supplement not supplant liturgy. When considering the use of technology in worship, the following must be considered:

- Its use must draw the congregation more deeply into the liturgical action—toward the Lord.
- Liturgy is participatory and the use of any media must support this; the congregation are not passive observers.
- Using images must not distract from the symbols and rights of the liturgy itself.
- The Church has a rich history of art; these are meant to support the central elements of worship, visual arts must not expand beyond their supportive role, drawing attention to themselves—digital technology has the potential to be vivid, prominent and stimulating, as such they must remain in a supportive role.
- When using digital imagery, it must harmonize with the readings, liturgy, seasons and lives of the congregation.
- The central aspects of the liturgy must be rich, full, authentic and capable of engaging the congregation even before the addition of digital aids.
- In all liturgical planning and preparation, care must be taken that this richness not be reduced to only a few ‘themes.

- Just as heavy reliance on printed materials may give the false impression that the Liturgy is just a text, heavy reliance on digital technologies may also not give a false impression—the liturgy is the action of Christ and his Church.

Overall, when used correctly, the use of digital technologies has the potential to be for this generation liken to the magnificent stain glass windows of the generations before. This technology has the potential to enhance the worship experience. It cannot and should not be, however, a replacement for the true intention of the liturgy—communion.

Social media and other technologies have "been a tremendous boon to the Church and have aided our evangelical mission extraordinarily,"[502] as noted by Bishop Barron. The advancement in technology has resulted in an increased presence of the Church through various media and other technologies. As a result, mass and social media have taken over most of the Church's social functions, helping provide spiritual and moral guidance to the American Catholic church community.

In 2014, the USCCB launched the Catholic Communication Campaign (CCC), which was focused on technology. The bishops recognized technology as an essential tool "to aid in the practice of faith, in worship and in opportunities for witness." This campaign was launched, as Bishop Joseph J. Tyson of Yakima, Washington, the Chairman of the USCCB CCC subcommittee expressed, to aid in the cost associated with technological outreach. He further noted, "When people think of evangelization, they don't usually think first of communications […]. But in order to live the faith, someone has to tell us about it. Whether that was our parents, grandparents, a friend, or colleague, we all learned about the faith through communication." Bishop Tyson further expressed that the intention of the CCC was to "carry out our duty to tell the world about our faith and to strengthen and catechize the faith of our brothers and sisters." He noted further, "many Catholics around the world live in isolation and modern technology allows them to stay in touch with other Catholics and grow in their faith."[503]

In his message for the 48th World Communication Day, Pope Francis stated that technology was a "gift from God." He further challenged the Church to ask how communication can "be at

[502] Robert Barron. (29 Jan 2020). "Bishop Robert Barron on Social Media's Power to Build and Destroy." In https://www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved October 23, 2022.
[503] USCCB. 2014. "Catholic Communication Campaign Uses Technology to Share the Faith." USCCB Catholic Communication Campaign. In www.usccb.org. Retrieved March 17, 2023.

the service of an authentic culture of encounter."[504] As Bishop Jose Gomez noted, in Her mission of evangelization, "The Church must always be where her people are. More and more, our people are on the Internet. They are using these new media and technology to build friendships and community, to express their spiritual needs, and to nourish their faith. I have long believed that as a Church we need to increase our pastoral presence in this digital "environment." The Church has always found ways to use new media to spread the Gospel—beginning with the printing press, then radio, television and cable, and now the Internet. The early Christians were able to spread the Gospel so rapidly because the Roman Empire had a vast network of roads. This enabled missionaries to travel to every part of the known world to preach the good news face-to-face. I believe we have a similar opportunity now in the avenues opened up by the Internet."[505]

Bishop Robert Barron is one of the most experienced and prolific users of digital technologies in the US Catholic Church today. His essential mission is evangelization and sharing the faith. He initiated a media ministry known as Word on Fire in the infancy of YouTube. He noted that when he commenced this outreach through YouTube, that the initial intent was merely to experiment with the new media, He noted that he "thought that we should initially try to invade this space with the Gospel" making first "short video commentaries on movies, music, current affairs, cultural happenings, etc."[506] Over the years, the ministry built an audience; this audience is a measure of this Internet based evangelization movement.

The American Catholic has utilized different digital technologies in communicating to the Catholic community, bringing together the members of the Church, especially the young, and spreading and preaching the gospel with a wider reach. One of the most common and prevalent representations of the Church through the media is the use of mainstream media. Over the years, American Catholic churches have utilized common mainstream media platforms, including print, radio and television. For example, the Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN) is a cable television network based in the United States presenting Catholic-related programs across the United States, Canada, and to various worldwide believers.[507] This television network helps ensure

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[504] Pope Francis. (1 June 2014). "Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communication Day: Communication at the Service of an Authentic Culture of Encounter." In www.vatican.va. Retrieved March 17, 2023.
[505] Jose H. Gomez. 2011. "Evangelizing the Digital Continent." *Angelus*. In https://angelusnews.com. Retrieved March 17, 2023.
[506] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire): 264-265.
[507] Fredy Simanjuntak, Johannes Tarigan, Talizaro Tafonao, Alexander Djuang Papay, Vicky Baldwin Goldsmith, Dotulong Paat. (7 Jul 2022). "The Metamorphosis of Church Spirituality During the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Proceeding of the International Conference on Theology, Humanities, and Christian Education.* Atlantis-Press.

the Catholic community in the United States remains updated and informed of Catholic related events across the nation and worldwide, helping improve their knowledge about the Church's affairs. Though television remains an important media, the younger generation's reliance on social media and internet-based technologies means that outreach to them must be in this space. Bishop Barron notes that new media must be enhanced with the content of 'old media.' He additionally notes that the message must be more than superficial stating, "I think the danger is people get out in the new media, but what they communicate is often very superficial and then that world becomes so tendentious and contemptuous."[508]

Bishop Barron additionally notes that if the intent is to be used to evangelize to the youth, especially the 'none's' in the digital space, then the argument must be articulate, well cited and engaging those who may not share the same beliefs or any belief in God. Engaging, and not fearing this space has tremendous potential for evangelization. Interestingly, he notes, "the atheists have been my most active friends on the Internet." Content that challenges well known atheists in secular society, often receives strong reactions from followers in social media. Over the years, Bishop Barron has come to enjoy the give-and-take with his detractors, noting that some of the dialogues are lengthy and "sometimes quite sophisticated arguments have unfolded, somewhat in the manner of Platonic dialogues." Barron additionally notes that, because YouTube provides demographics on viewership, he is able to know that the majority of *Word on Fire* viewers are young men in their twenties and thirties, "the very group that the Church has a notoriously hard time reaching. That the Internet allows me to engage young men who would never darken the doors of a Catholic church or come to a church-sponsored event is a source of great encouragement to me." He additionally notes that he was advised by "experts" to lose the Roman collar and "appear in civilian clothes, so as to attract a more secular audience," noting, "I never took that advice, thank God. I always want it to be clear that I am a Catholic priest speaking on behalf of the Catholic Church—and I don't think that young people are the least bamboozled by awkward attempts at 'relevance.' Just the contrary." He further notes, "if intellectually serious believers absent themselves from the wider conversation and retreat to their libraries and classrooms, the

https://doi/org/10.2991/assehr.k.220702.040. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

[508] Joe Torres. 2016. "US Bishop Stresses use of Social Media in Reaching Youth: Bishop Robert Barron's address to the International Eucharistic Congress in the Philippines." UCA News: Union of Catholic Asian News. In www.ucanews.com. Retrieved March 17, 2023.

public space will belong to the atheists and secularists."[509]

Perhaps one of the most valuable uses of digital technology is outreach to the homebound and infirmed. 'Mass for shut-ins' is not a new concept. Every Sunday for more than half a century, the Mass for Shut-Ins has provided comfort, hope and healing to many across North America. Digital technology offers additional opportunities, beyond radio and Television to reach the homebound to include them in the life of the Church, such as watching and discussing sermons, posting transcripts of homilies on the parishes website, social media site or Blog, Christian education, online courses, and live-streaming Mass (not just on Sunday service). All of these steps require outreach to the homebound to assess their technological needs and provide education to the homebound and their caregivers on the digital tools available to them and a primer, if needed, on how to use these resources.

The USCCB advises ensuring sanctity during these televised or radio broadcasts, following the detectives of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM). According to the USCCB, live broadcasts should ensure the integrity of the liturgical year, promote a current and unhurried pace, notify viewers of prerecorded and live Mass programs and apply a sense of noble simplicity. Therefore, despite the increased presence of the Church in media and new technologies, the Catholic Church should adhere to its commandments and rules to ensure they lead believers on the right path.[510]

The inventions in digital technologies have changed the world into a global village, allowing for faster and more efficient communication between individuals from distant locations remotely. As a result, pastoral ministers can easily connect with the Catholic community and other denominations in preaching the word, allowing for the exchange of vital information and sharing valuable knowledge. As Cardinal Dolan notes, the value of digital technological advances in the life and pastoral ministry of the Church is "how […] we get the message out." Comparing this technology to the historic use of papal addresses for communication, "I probably reach more people than the 100,000 in the square if I tweet a message," but he also acknowledges, "We [must] adhere to the best and highest standards" because ,"how we say something is just as important as what we say," Furthermore, Cardinal Dolan reminds, "never ever pass up a chance to speak about

[509] Robert Barron. 2015. *Seeds of the Word: Finding God in the Culture*. (Skokie, WA, Word on Fire): 264-265.
[510] USCCB. (Jan 2014). "Guidelines for Televising the Liturgy". In www.usccb.org. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

Jesus, to speak about the truth."[511]

In addition, the United States Catholic Church has also implemented social media over the years to communicate and get in touch with its congregation. A majority of Catholic churches within the United States have social media pages and handles that enjoy a massive following. For example, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has more than 193,000 followers on its Twitter handle, with more than 261,000 followers on its Facebook page believers.[512] In addition, various social media sites and applications, including YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and even WhatsApp, have experienced an increased presence of the Catholic Church to connect more with the American community, especially the young technology natives. Furthermore, the Church uses these platforms to publicize, promote and encourage the community to improve its ministry efforts. Aside from communication, churches also use these platforms to sell religious merchandise, including prayer books, rosaries, Bibles, hymn books, and anointing oil.

Although technology significantly helps in the growth and development of the Church, it also comes with several downsides. For example, using mobile phones and tablets in churches allows for easy access to scriptures and teachings, their dependence might result in materialistic behavior in the church, which might pose a significant risk to the believers. Different technological companies keep developing new gadgets with various improvements occasionally. However, depending on these technologies can affect the American Catholic community in their belief and practice of their faith by diverting their focus and attention to material possessions and their physical comfort at the expense of their spiritual growth and nourishment.

Similarly, technology, especially the use of the internet, is also disadvantageous as it allows nonbelievers to spread misinformation about the Catholic Church to the American Catholic community to convert them or convince them against the church believers. According to Pope Francis, "Disinformation is probably the greatest damage that the media can do, as opinion is guided in one direction, neglecting the other part of the truth."[513] The current technological age has seen a rise in conspiracy theories and misinformation on social media platforms, websites, and

[511] Elise Harris. (2 May 2014). "Be Bold in proclaiming the truth, Cardinal Dolan tells the Media: Cardinal Dolan address to the Communications conference at Rome's Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, April 29, 2014, reported by Elise Harris." Catholic News Agency. In Catholicnewsagency.com. Retrieved March 15, 2023.
[512] Simanjuntak, et al (2022).
[513] Pope Francis. (12 Jul 2016). "Interview with the Holy Father for the Belgian Catholic Weekly, "Tertio". Vatican Press. In www.vatican.va. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

blogs, which aim at corrupting the faith and belief of Catholic believers, especially the young generation of believers. As a result, the Church suffers resistance and rebellion from the younger generation, which affects its growth and perception in the American community.

Technology also leads to unintended alienation and isolation of some church members, especially those not well conversant with current technologies. The dependence on various digital technologies, such as the use of social media and church websites as the sole means of passing vital information to the community of believers, can significantly alienate certain members of churches who are either technologically illiterate or are not well informed on the use of these technologies. Such a move may result in the formation of cliques and groups in a church, with the young computer natives preferring to interact while leaving out the older generation. As a result, the older generation may feel isolated and alienated in church functions affecting their participation in church functions and services. The feeling of alienation can also result in the lack of proper access to vital information from their church, causing confusion and ineffectiveness in the church's work for believers.

The Diocese of San Jose encourages a balanced approach to the use of technology in the Church's ministries. Its use is meant to augment the work of the Church. Unquestionably, advances in technology continue to increase the opportunities for evangelization for the Church. Utilizing digital technology for outreach is especially important when working with minors and vulnerable adults. The internet and other technologies are essential tools in today's society for this outreach. "Technology, however, should not become an expedient and convenient means to evade the complicated and messy work of building human relationships. Technology at times falls short in truly enhancing the connectedness of human-to-human, face-to-face social interaction. True community and relationship building within faith-based relationships follow the example of Jesus Christ—walking, talking, sharing meals, and praying face -to -face with others. Those who work in the Church should demand a more authentic relationship with those whom they serve." The bishops of the diocese of San Jose note that "while technology might provide an open door to connect with individuals, deeper connection will best occur face-to-face." One of the positive aspects of digital technologies is that anonymity may permit users to bare their 'souls' online because there is no perceived consequence. For discussion that may be perceived as "embarrassing" this anonymity may liberate them to begin a dialogue. The danger to using technology in this manner is that "it is entirely possible to form inauthentic relationships on-line—

almost like acting, taking on a persona, or just playing a role." Additionally, "it is difficult to judge peoples' emotional or spiritual states only on the basis of what they say on-line."[514]

Technology can also negatively impact the church's growth in multiple ways, such as replacing physical and real-life connections between believers and pastoral ministers.[515] According to Scot McKnight, an American Anglican theologian, "For human connection and communication, technology can enhance the process, but it cannot replace it."[516] In addition, the dependence on technology might result in increased isolation and reduced social skills and interactions. Such an impact can cause a feeling of disconnectedness among church members, which can cause a drop in the number of churchgoers and participants in church programs and functions.

Technology can also result in distraction and lack of concentration during the Mass. With more than 95 percent of the United States population owning at least one mobile phone, bringing such gadgets to church can affect believers' concentration and attention during sermons which might fail to capture essential teachings and messages. In addition, using visual technology in Church for entertainment purposes and for displaying readings can distract small children who may miss out on vital teachings during Mass. Mobile phones and other small gadgets can also affect the completion of projects by affecting individuals' concentration and commitment resulting in delays and unproductivity.

The theological assessment of the positive and negative sides of the use of digital technologies in the life and pastoral ministry of the Church illustrates that technology has revolutionized the way we live and the way we communicate. We should not shy away from these technologies, especially when it comes to their use in ministry. Yet, we also must recognize that all tools and technologies have the capacity to be used for good and for ill. We must also discern when technology simply cannot and should not supplant human interaction.

We are called to meet people where they are at. As noted above, there is a significant amount of noise and banter, lacking substance, reason, and a cohesive message pertaining to religion, especially the Catholic Church. What is important to note is that people are still searching.

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[514] Diocese of San Jose. (n.d.). "Pastoral Guidelines for the use of Technology." In www.dsj.org. Retrieved March 13, 2023.

[515] Michael G. Xiarhos. 2016. "The Connected Pilgrim: The potential for transformation in the social media age." *Doctoral Dissertations Salve Regina University.* AAI10245215. In https://digitalcommons.salve.edu/dissertations/AAI10245215. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

[516] Scot McKnight. (11 Jun 2021). "Increasing Capacity." *Jesus Creed".* In https://www.christianitytoday.com/ scot-mcknight/2021/june/increasing-capacity.html. Retrieved October 23, 2022.

There is a yearning to know more. The internet and technology have evolved into the primary vehicles by which American society acquires knowledge. The onus is on the Catholic Church to be in this space, meet the spiritual, intellectual, and even emotional needs of those searching. The Church must continue to enter the dialogue in this space. Institutions of higher learning have become the ideological battlefields of this generation—the battle continues to spill into the public realm, especially including the digital space.

III. Renewal of the Pastoral Care of the Catholic Church in the USA. Conclusions and Postulates

Part III, the final section of this dissertation, proposes a renewal of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States. This follows the methodical paradigm, See-Judge-Act, as proposed by Cardinal Cardijn, known by the paradigm as "Act". These proposals are the result of an analysis of social and cultural changes (Part I) and their theological evaluation (Part II). Predicated on this analysis, the author makes specific recommendations and practical propositions for the pastoral practice of the Catholic Church in the United States. These proposals and postulates synthesize a cohesive and practical pastoral strategy intended to address these contemporary challenges. Specifically, Part III evaluates pastoral care through the concern for the deepening and development of religious faith, ways to combat social disintegration, poverty, and social exclusion, provide direction for the renewal of moral formation of the faithful, and use of Christian media and digital education in religious life.

It is not sufficient to merely analyze these contemporary social and cultural changes, nor the Church's past and present stance on this change. The renewal of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States, and its practical application to the present crisis of faith mounted by this contemporary societal change, is necessary to address the decreasing popularity of the Catholic Church among Americans and, by extension, declining affiliation. Both inadequate action and inappropriate actions by the Church may have egregious effects. For this reason, Part III features practical content and applicable responses to contemporary social and cultural change that is predicated upon the conclusions of previous two parts. Furthermore, the focus of Part III on the existing concerns for deepening and development of religious faith allows for problem-oriented solutions to the decline in engagement of the faithful and society-at-large into the discipline of faith-based life. Additionally, through the renewal of pastoral care, effective ways of counteracting social disintegration and social exclusion are proposed, as well as, through pastoral care, finding directions of renewal of the moral formation of the faithful. Lastly, through the lens of pastoral theology, this thesis evaluates the current state of Christian media and digital education connected with those Catholics still actively participating in their faith community and the outreach of Catholicism, through these media, to non-practicing Catholics, Christians of other denominations, members of other faith traditions, the religiously non-affiliated, and even atheists.

The Catholic Church must react in a balanced and prompt way to the cultural and social change of the 21st century in the United States. The phenomenon of secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and rapidly evolving technology are the most significant trends in contemporary society that present drastic pressures on the American Catholic Church. It is the responsibility of the Catholic Church to see the negative manifestations of these phenomena and judge them according to the Christian perspective on morality. The pastoral plan of the Catholic Church must preserve tradition while welcoming positive innovations simultaneously, which is both complicated and necessary, in a constantly changing pluralistic society.

1. Concern for the Deepening and Development of Religious Faith

The development and deepening of the Catholic faith, especially in the secular context of modern society remains an onerous challenge. As a result, the Catholic Church is charged with approaching people more effectively and acknowledging the increasing need for prolific dialogue. Contemporary American society is influenced by secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and technological changes that alter the way people perceive faith. Although the Holy See tries to respond to what appears to be an avalanche of change in modern culture, the Catholic clergy should also react on the local level to these concerns. It is vital for the Catholic Church to see the changing needs of modern people, to hear the official position of the Holy See, and to choose optimal and balanced ways of reforming the Catholic Church to keep up with the evolution of Her mission among a modern and evolving world.

The phenomenon of secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and the digital revolution are eroding the foundation of the Catholic Church in America. The basic unit of this foundation, and that of society, is the family. Improving the Church's presence in the family is among the priorities for the Catholic Church—the family is the domestic Church. The fundamental responsibility of family is formation of children—spiritually, morally, intellectual, and physically. For a Catholic Church, family is the first interaction for children and adolescents with their Catholic identity, which foregrounds the need for pastoral care in family life. Moreover, family is the social unit where Christians can develop their best qualities, such as communication, patience, honesty, empathy and love, and work on personal improvement. Through the marital relationship, spouses learn how to love and care for one other, find compromises, and approach others with altruistic intent through assistance, love, and support for each other and their relatives. Children learn

through the example of their parents, which exemplifies the importance of being a role model for them, and empowering children to grow into healthy, productive, and other-centered individuals. These actions require much spiritual work, and the Catholic Church must be more attentive to the family unit in its pastoral work.

The Catholic Church concentrates on the development of faith in the family unit, emphasizing the role of both parents in the upbringing of children. The Catholic pastoral plan should be centered around the strengthening of the traditional model of the family. The Catholic Church strongly emphasizes the importance of the mother's presence and active role in the family. What too often is undervalued is the role of the father. Without the strong image of the father, the traditional family cannot exist. The role of fathers in the traditional Christian family is paramount, as supported by the Bible. God created men and women for procreation and blessed their union. God gave people the responsibility to care for their children, which defines their duty of Christian stewardship and their responsibility to adhere and follow this duty. God is referred to as the Father, further emulating the importance of the role of the father's figure in the Christian doctrine. It is written in John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." The parable of the prodigal son from Luke 15:14-32 also describes the attitude of the father toward his son. This story illustrates how the father so loves his child that he can forget everything if the son repents his sins and returns home. And it is true for both, the divine Father and earthly fathers as well. In other words, the Bible emphasizes parallels between God's function as the spiritual Father of all people and the functions of the man who is responsible for his family.

Secularism promotes the ideas connected with the destruction of traditional gender roles, claiming that it is a progressive and liberating experience. Though, practice shows that the destruction of gender roles, leads to the gradual destruction of the traditional family. People who cannot find their gender identity experience stress and depression because they are not satisfied with their lives. Men do not regard themselves as the head of the family because the secular cultural agenda promotes the idea of gender equality. Their role and identity in society has been detrimentally diminished. In this particular case, the destruction of traditional masculinity leads to the loss of respect of fathers in families and their exclusion from family life, which leads to the gradual decay of family life. At the same time, the Church must display compassion towards non-traditional families, and especially be wary of appearing discriminatory toward their children. As

the American saying goes, “You can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your family.” The last two generations of Americans especially are the product of destabilization of these traditional norms—a destabilization not of their asking. This generation of clergy, too, are of the same vintage. Pastoral programs must be informed by traditions, but they must also understand and meet the flock with compassion and wisdom.

While this compassion toward varying life circumstances is necessary, it is also vital to show young people positive images of individuals who embrace their traditional gender identity successfully. These examples should permeate all spheres of pastoral care, including Church life, family communication, education, and media presence. The holistic approach to this question allows the Catholic Church to promote the values that were the only acceptable norm for millennia, and their effectiveness in stabilizing culture was proven through time. In other words, the emphasis on the positive experience of the past allows the Catholic Church to illustrate to modern people the importance of traditional views on family, gender, and relationships between men and women. These examples cannot and should not be construed as displays of misogyny nor toxic masculinity, rather they should be examples of mutual respect between the genders, working collaboratively toward the common goals of rearing their children, participating in their Church and the life of society, and contributing to common good.

The rhetoric of the Catholic Church should be conservative yet understandable and relatable to modern Americans. The Church’s discourse is completely different from the secular discourse that opposes traditional values and views, claiming that it is the oppressive patriarchal culture that modern people should change. In this case, the notion of the patriarchal society in general and the patriarchal family, in particular, have the negative connotation that supposes oppression of women, the dominance of white men, and racial and gender inequality. Since the papacy of John Paul II, the Catholic Church has presented the personalized model of family known as “communio personarum". In no way was this personal model of the family meant to degrade the value of individuals within the family, rather its intention was to acknowledge the intrinsic value of all persons within the familial relationship. The intention of this model is to acknowledge the value that each member of the family brings. Therefore, it is imperative that the Church emphasizes the positive attributes of the personalized model of the family, including the safety of women and children, the responsibility of men for their family, and the positive results of traditional upbringing that allows children to have a healthy and balanced psyche.

The secular discourse, including the feminist trends that dominate the public views in modern American society, purporting the negative characteristics of the patriarchal tradition, disregarding all positive attributes of this model, and neglecting the negative consequences of relegating the traditional family to misguided misogynism. Catholics cannot change these tendencies because they are dominant in the American secularist culture, and they correspond to the contemporary lifestyle. At the same time, Catholics play an active role in changing this discourse. Promoting positive examples of traditional families where the roles of the mother and the father are equally respected is the most effective solution. Many pious Catholic families prefer not to discuss modern views on family life with those who do not share their values. Their presence in social media is minimal, and young people are not able to see the example of the family that might motivate them to strive for something more traditional. This presentation allows the traditional family to be an alternative to non-traditional constructs, not an opposition to these families. For this reason, it is crucial to ask Catholic families to promote their views on family actively. When viewed as a viable alternative, it diminishes the secular views on gender identity, gender roles, and family structure as the only reasonable opportunities for young adults and adolescents yearning to transition to this phase of life.

The Catholics couples with the strongest foundation for their marriage are those who understood the essence of mutual love, respect, and support from their parents. These people were brought up in a religious family, they were believers from their childhood, and they saw the role model of harmonious relationships in the family of their parents. They remember the mild emotional love and kindness of their mother; they also remember the stable supportive love of their father. These traditional gender roles that combine with the traditional Catholic view on family and relationships formed the balanced perspective of children on relationships between the married couple. Although these relationships are perceived as idealized and unattainable, and in today's society almost factitious, they do indeed still exist.

As a result, paying attention to a child's upbringing and family atmosphere are the priorities in pastoral care. The important detail is that the subjects of this pastoral work are adult people, not children who learn by the example of their parents. It means that clergy should concentrate on married couples and young adult Catholics when they address the questions connected with family. It is the responsibility of adults to create a psychologically healthy atmosphere at home that corresponds to the Catholic doctrine and the Holy Scripture. The pastoral care is also important in

this case, because it provides married Catholics with spiritual guidance regarding questions of faith and relationships in the family. This guidance is especially necessary for the context of the secular culture that is promoted in all spheres of daily life, and it is difficult for Catholic adults to ignore these tendencies.

Strong traditional family that lives according to the Divine Laws and supports mutual respect among spouses have the best opportunity to protect their children from adopting secular perspectives on relationships. It is equally important to recognize that even children who experience stable, traditional families with Christian morals are not raised in a bubble, away from secular society's influence. The influence of secular ideology can lead to destructive consequences that parents want to avoid, and the gradual destruction of the traditional family as the social institution is among these examples. The lines from 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 describe the essence of love in the Christian family:

> Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

Although love for each other and God's love protect Christians and their families, the Catholic Church should support traditional family activities because this type of relationship is endangered in the secular American society.

The parish is the most important instrument of pastoral care at the disposal of the Catholic Church to promote the positive model of traditional family life. This smaller community where congregants are invited to engage and belong to their religious family, facilitates the promotion of faith among believers. When believers see positive examples of family lives in their Catholic community, they may try to adopt these traits and learn by example. Catholic families need to be called by their shepherds to share their experiences with other members of the community to enhance this sphere of life.

The major concern is that this type of pastoral outreach requires adequate theological and psychological training of all pastoral workers. It is especially challenging because Catholic clergy may also have problems with family life, stemming from their own family of origin. Their theological background may be sound, but they have problems with understanding and relating to

human psychology and specifics of family relationships. For instance, some may have had a difficult childhood and adolescence prior to the seminary that has yet to be resolved adequately in their adulthood, and the help or recognition of need for this help may not be accessible. Additionally, they often lack experience in family relationships due to sparse education on this topic, which makes it challenging to establish sufficient authority with believers who may be seeking advice for problems in their family. Furthermore, many priests either by their own choosing or because of circumstances related to their own ministry, find themselves isolated both from their brother priests and members of their community. This isolation may inhibit the experience necessary to have an adequate response to the familial challenges of whom they serve, especially in times of crisis. The solution to such isolation, which could be detrimental to priestly ministry, include: ongoing human formation of a priest, the strengthening of community life with other brother priests, and building healthy pastoral relationships with those entrusted to their pastoral care.

Promotion of the attainability and desirable attributes of the traditional family must remain a priority of the pastoral response toward modern society's assault and degradation of marriage--especially for young adults and adolescents contemplating marriage and transitioning to parenthood. Equally, if not more important than this promotion is the intrinsic recognition that marriage is a union of two broken, imperfect persons, destined to at least stumble. For the Church, encouraging engagement of the couple with their faith and as part of their foundation is extremely important. Recognizing that clergy and pastoral staff must meet the broken where they are at is paramount. In North America several Christian based ministries exist. The following highlights two peer ministries, originating in North America, whose purpose is to provide peer-based support of traditional marriage. Both are Catholic in their origin. Both, at their core, have presenting teams, which consist of two married couples and a Catholic Clergy who, over the course of the program, share the stories of their own broken marriages, through the stages of romance, disillusionment, misery, and reawakening. World Wide Marriage Encounter (WWME) began in Spain in 1962 and then transitioned to the US in 1968 as Catholic Marriage Encounter before becoming WWME. It focuses on helping couples enrich their marriages, through communication, love, mutual respect, and faith. Their mission is to "Proclaim the value of Marriage and Holy Orders in the Church and in the World. Since its inception, WWME has ministered to 3.5 million couples, 27,000 priests

and religious and expanded to 100 countries.[517]

Retrouvaille similarly is a peer-to-peer ministry born out of the recognition that marriage in today's society is indeed a challenge. This ministry focuses specifically on marriages with marital problems, those considering separation, are already separated, or divorced. Although Retrouvaille's roots trace to WWME, its mission is to provide an ongoing program of support, including a weekend program, twelve post weekend sessions prioritizing continued relationship building and providing further techniques through which couples may learn and grow in their communication and a monthly support group for couples who have completed the program.[518] Both WWME and Retrouvaille International have Catholic priests and religious involved in the program and as sitting members in every aspect of their organization, both on the local and state levels and at the level of the Board of Directors. Clergy provides direction, spiritual support, prayer, but also are integral in the day-to-day decisions of these organizations. Both programs are Catholic in their origin and orientation; both programs are open to helping marriages in other faith backgrounds and denominations, including those without any particular profession. By participating in peer ministries such as these, the pastoral message is clear—marriage matters; the family is the domestic Church; and the shepherds are among their flock.

Therefore, enhancing traditional gender roles, support of the traditional role of fathers in the family, and positive portrayals of healthy marriages from their inception through their natural end are priorities that pastoral care must concentrate on in the Catholic Church of the United States. These aspects influence family life significantly, and the magnitude of influence of secular ideas on religious families should not be underestimated. Again, people do not live in an informational vacuum, which means that even pious Catholics may adopt secularist views on gender roles, roles of parents in the family, the structure of the family, etc. Showing positive examples of the traditional Catholic family where women and men's gender roles are equally important and valuable is an effective way to develop faith, deepen it among believers, and spread God's wisdom among non-believers. Acknowledging the challenge of choosing marriage in today's society, and remaining faithful to that marriage, is an important first step for the Church. The Church must also

[517] WorldWide Marriage Encounter. *Copyright 2021*. In https://wwme.org/about-us/beliefs-and-values. Retrieved Mar 19, 2022.
[518] Retrouvaille. *A Lifeline for Married Couples*. (n.d.). In https://www.helpourmarriage.org/program_information. Retrieved Mar 20, 2022.

be present for couples struggling with this commitment, knowing the resources at her disposal, and be a part of the solution.

The flourishing of family, the domestic church, is integral to the flourishing of the Church. The idea of this mutual reliance on others for flourishing seems contrary to the fierce call to individualism in western ideology. The command to "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28) was not exclusively a reference to procreation, rather it is a reminder also to evangelize. If the family embodies the soil where the seed of faith is first planted, the parish is the garden. As noted by the USCCB:

> The parish is where the Church lives. Parishes are communities of faith, of action, and of hope. They are where the gospel is proclaimed and celebrated, where believers are formed and sent to renew the earth. Parishes are the home of the Christian community; they are the heart of our Church.[519]

Just as a neglected garden is unlikely to produce a bountiful harvest, the neglect of parishes, and the individuals within these communities, is unlikely to be fruitful. The flourishing of the parish, therefore, begins with intentional and thoughtful evangelization. This evangelization must enrich all aspects of Christian life. Considered in this way, evangelization can be viewed as "a process fostering ongoing conversion within the Christian community that seeks to initiate people ever more deeply into the mystery of God's love (the Kingdom), as it manifested most fully in the dying and rising of Jesus."[520] Evangelization tils and enriches the soil, allowing the seeds of faith to grow. This process must be deliberate. This process must focus on proclaiming the Good News, respond to the needs of the community and it must do so with a clear and practical process by which a parish can accomplish its evangelization mission namely, "the invitation for Catholics to share their faith."[521] Focusing exclusively on the parish, however, would deny an opportunity to foster the growth of faith beyond the walls of the parish. To truly "be fruitful and multiply" the Church must recognize that the seeds of faith may fall onto ground that is less than ideal, ground outside of the ideal soil of the parish. The seeds of faith may fall on the edges of the parish, those Catholics or marginalized or questioning their faith, those at risk of falling away, those who feel

[519] USCCB. 1994. *Communities of Salt and Light: Reflections on the Social Mission of the Parish.* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference), #1.
[520] Robert J. Hater. 2001. *Catholic Evangelization: The Heart of Ministry.* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt): 7.
[521] Ibidem, 4.

ostracized by life choices, by broken marriages, by sin, by youth, by sexual orientation or by other life circumstances. The seeds of faith may fall completely beyond the boundaries of the Church, on the rocky ground, the thicket of thorns or the heavily trodden paths of the secular world. A holistic evangelical plan must, when possible, clear the stones and thicket and provide an avenue beyond trampling feet of the progressively secular society, permitting the growth beyond the confines of the parish. The laborers are few, but the tools to work the soil at the margins of the garden of the parish and beyond have never had a greater reach than now.

A classic approach to the process of evangelization includes three essential steps: pre-evangelization, evangelization, and catechesis. In this model, pre-evangelization "sets the stage for evangelization," including welcoming, "kindness, charity, and social concern that prepare people to receive God's word. Once the climate is set, evangelization helps people learn about Jesus and the Church. As evangelization proceeds, and people look toward a faith commitment, catechesis begins."[522] The challenge with this model is that the focus is on the setting for evangelization and only catechizes after an initial faith commitment. Rather than limiting a strategy focused on those who cross the threshold of the parish and make a faith commitment, a more holistic approach should be undertaken. Catholics comprised roughly twenty percent of the American population and, as secular culture encroaches further on the minds and hearts of Americans, without a pastoral plan for evangelization, this number will dwindle further. This holistic plan, therefore, requires a plan for evangelization to three specific populations:

- The congregation within the parish, those on the good ground of the garden;
- Those on the margins of the parish at risk for falling away—divorced, disenfranchised, under-catechized, those living lifestyles contrary to Catholic teaching;
- Non-Catholics and "none's".

The evangelization pastoral plan for the parish—enriching the soil within the garden:

Evangelization is at the essence of Christian life. It is not exclusive to the sharing of outward expressions of Christianity toward non-Christians, rather "it happens whenever a Christian share, directly or indirectly, Jesus' Good News."[523] Evangelization is often misconstrued by Catholics, viewed as an element essential to protestant movements rather than belonging to the

[522] Ibidem, 5.
[523] Ibidem, 6.

Universal Church. Evangelization is, however, an integral part of Catholicism and "the energizing spirit of all Church ministries and the Christian's life in the family and world."[524] Ultimately, "evangelization is the invitation to accept the good news of God's love. Evidence of God's love, which first comes from life itself and sets the stage for Jesus' revelation, can be referred to as *implicit* evangelization. Examples include the beauty of creation, the love from a parent, the compassionate listening of a friend, or the community life of a parish. Even if Jesus' name is not mentioned, evangelization happens in implicit ways, thus preparing for more explicit manifestations of Jesus' saving word."[525] *Implicit* evangelization can be contrasted with *explicit* evangelization which would be intentionally proclaiming "the role of Jesus, God, Kingdom and Church in God's plan of salvation and gives deeper insights into God already present in implicit evangelization."[526] Both implicit and explicit evangelization are essential to the pastoral plan for the parish as they are manifestations of the 'Word' and 'Deed' and of the salvific mission of the Church.

The explicit elements of a pastoral plan for the parish must include concerted focus on the proclamation of God's Good News of salvation, a firm knowledge of the Bible and Tradition, recognizing that evangelization is not a separate ministry, but an integral aspect of all ministries, and providing an intentional structure for evangelization. This concept of ensuring fidelity to the Bible elevates the quality of evangelization. It is insufficient to merely leave parishioners 'feeling good. about attending Mass or participating in parish activities and ministry. They must, through this participation, be given the opportunity to deepen their relationship with a person through whom salvation is possible—Jesus Christ. As noted by Przygoda:

> It is important not to be focused categorically on the number of the faithful but rather concentrate on the quality of their faith, i.e. the quality of their relationship with God's people. If parishes are to be the centers of spiritual life and the hubs of the Church's renewal mission, pastoral care should revolve around various ways of formation leading to sanctity. The sanctity, based on love, should

[524] Ibidem, 6.
[525] Ibidem, 7.
[526] Ibidem.

be evidenced through marriages and families, and then in the local community, the environment of life, work, and leisure.[527]

For successful evangelization within the parish and its ministries, it is not sufficient that only the ordained have knowledge of the Bible and Catholic Tradition. Though they may not have the same level of expertise, those in ministry, especially in its leadership must have a working knowledge of the Bible and Catholic Teachings. "A Christian evangelist's first responsibility is to know Jesus' life and teaching…The most basic principle of Catholic evangelization is stress Scripture and help people understand Jesus' message, so they can apply it to their lives and share it with others, this begins with the family and is fostered in the parish. If Catholics do not give high priority to this principle, parish renewal has only limited success. People need to know God's word for Catholic evangelization to bear fruit."[528] For this reason it is important to provide both opportunities for education for those involved in evangelization and to ensure that the message presented by members of the ministry team is consistent with the Bible and Catholic Teaching, especially as it pertains to the message conveyed in explicit evangelization. Furthermore, if the content presented through this evangelization veers from the Bible and Catholic Teaching, it is imperative that the pastoral team, especially the pastor, provide guidance and correction when necessary. This correction, as with all forms of fraternal correction, must be done with a spirit of love and with gentleness. "It is imperative that we set aside the assumption that those who minister for the Catholic Church, those who are engaged on our parish councils, committees, and apostolates and those in our pews have had an encounter with Christ and are all evangelized. We mistakenly assume that those who participate in the multitude of ministries in the Church are evangelized but this is often not the case."[529] Understanding these deficiencies in knowledge and catechesis requires explicit leadership and guidance from the parish pastor.

Every element of parish life presents an opportunity for evangelization. As such it is critical to recognize that evangelization is not separate from ministry, but it must be integrated within all

[527] Wiesław Przygoda. 2022. "What Parish for the 21st Century? Parish Renewal Guidelines in the Context of Current Cultural Changes in Europe" *Bogoslovni vestnik/Theological Quarterly* 82 (2022) 2, p. 455 (445—457) DOI: 10.34291/BV2022/02/Przygoda.
[528] Michael White and Tom Corcoran Rebuilt. 2013. *The Story of a Catholic Parish, Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter.* (South Bend, IN, Ave Maria Press): 168.
[529] Julianne Stanz. 2013. *Pastoral Ministry Plan for the Department of New Evangelization: Parishes Called to Be Holy, Fully Engaged, Fully Alive.* (Green Bay, WI, Diocese of Green Bay): 8.

ministries. Participants and leaders within the various parish ministries must understand that evangelization is at the heart of what they do. The role of the pastor is to foster this culture of evangelization. "Since evangelization is not a separate ministry but is an integral aspect of all ministries, the pastor is the center of every evangelization effort. Even if he designates someone else to oversee its practical planning, he still needs to ensure that all parish ministries support evangelization and incorporate it into their work."[530] This holistic approach to parish evangelization improves the spirit of cooperation and purpose needed for success of the salvific mission of the parish.

Just as a garden haphazardly planted would be difficult to harvest, so to a disorganized parish may yield fruit but, without structure, this yield will be impaired. An intentional and structured evangelical program, built on knowledge of the Bible which optimizes the time and talents of the parish's pastoral team and volunteers, is necessary for successful evangelization. At minimum for success a parish should designate a parish evangelization coordinator, identify parishioners willing to partner in evangelization, and discern the best approach based on the community and its needs.

The parish evangelization coordinator should be someone both interested and knowledgeable about evangelization, or at least open, willing, and capable of learning about evangelization and small group management. Once this person is identified and adequately trained, the next step would be to identify parishioners for the evangelization team who, with the evangelization coordinator, will help manage evangelization activities that best suit an individual community. Once this foundation has been laid, the pastoral plan must then focus on the following four elements: the *essential encounter*, *invitation and welcoming*, *worship*, and *witness*.

Parish evangelization's focus on the *essential encounter* is intended "to ensure an encounter with Christ is kept at the center of planning for the new evangelization. This should not be understood as a one-time experience, but a lasting and ongoing conversion in the life of the faithful."[531] This focus on encountering Christ must be directed toward "parish leadership, to those who have been baptized Catholic (those practicing and those who have fallen out of familiarity

[530] Michael White and Tom Corcoran Rebuilt. 2013. *The Story of a Catholic Parish, Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter*, 170.
[531] Julianne Stanz. 2013. *Pastoral Ministry Plan for the Department of New Evangelization: Parishes Called to Be Holy, Fully Engaged, Fully Alive.* (Green Bay, WI, Diocese of Green Bay): 8.

with the Catholic Church) and to those who have not been baptized."[532] It is essential to not assume that the a parishioner, staff member or even those in ministry have experienced an encounter with Christ, therefore it is essential for "parishes to identify, define and commit to fostering a parish culture where intentional disciples of Christ are formed," and doing so requires identifying, promoting and developing, "intentional discipleship formation processes for Catholics sustained by a lasting encounter with Christ."[533]

Individual dioceses can further assist parishes in this mission by identifying and disseminating "best practices in the area of encounter, invitation and welcoming, worship and witness by interviewing the pastor and parish staff of parishes where there has been sustained positive growth in: 1) Mass attendance; 2) Giving; 3) Baptism/Marriages; 4) Sacramental life; 5) Outreach and services to the poor and marginalized."[534]

Being open to welcoming the stranger is essential to the Christian mission. For this reason, *invitation and welcoming*, must be a focus of evangelization for a parish plan. True welcoming requires introspection. Parishes must honestly evaluate how they are being inviting and welcoming. They must be willing to implement new strategies, abandon behaviors that are not working and maintain those that are working. The parish evangelization team must honestly ask who they might be excluding. As such, the parish evangelization team should develop and adhere to guidelines and resources for parish hospitality and welcoming. Often, receptionists and administrative assistants at parishes and schools, and ushers are on the front line of this initial welcome. For this reason, explicit training and even the offering of workshops for those on the front line of reception is a worthy investment.

The next critical area of focus for a parish evangelization plan is *worship*. The Eucharist is the summit of Catholic life. For the majority of Catholics, the Mass is the entirety of their contact with their faith and it represents their primary "opportunity to encounter Christ in the sacrament of the Eucharist. As such, the Mass is a powerful instrument for evangelization, and every effort should be made to cultivate an environment that intentionally fosters intentional discipleship during Sunday Mass. Attention and care should be directed at the welcoming process, the music, the preaching and to the integration of families with young children into the community. Attention

[532] Ibidem, 8.
[533] Ibidem.
[534] Ibidem, 9.

should also be given to bridging the gap between Sunday Mass and a life of discipleship."[535]

All baptized Catholics are called to bear *witness* to their faith. "An active living of Catholicism involves intentionality and integration of work, socialization, worship etc. A Catholic cannot compartmentalize their faith but must prioritize their faith as it binds together every area of their life. It is in and through this active living of Catholic life that the temporal order of the world will be renewed and transformed."[536] Therefore, the intention of the parish plan for evangelization must intend to "foster an experience of conversion and renewal in the heart of every believer leading to a more active living of Catholic life," to equip their pastoral team to "form joyful and credible witness in the world, attracting others to be disciples of Jesus Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, to encourage all to overcome their fear of sharing their heartfelt understanding of Jesus with others and how to talk about the Gospel in the daily life," and ultimately "to identify and put into practice their unique calling to serve their neighbors."[537]

Once the *explicit* elements of the pastoral plan for evangelization are considered, the *implicit* elements of the plan should be evaluated. The *implicit* elements of a pastoral plan must include knowing the needs of the community and responding to those needs and being present.

Knowing people's needs and responding to them is intrinsic to the success of the parish evangelization plan. The ministerial efforts of a parish need to connect with the everyday lives of the parishioners. Evangelization efforts and catechetical efforts must connect with the actual situations in parishioner's lives. Failure to do so will limit the effectiveness of parish evangelization. "People's needs vary from area to area, parish to parish, family to family. Consequently, it is a mistake to believe that one blueprint addresses all evangelization needs; only after a parish appreciates its member's physical, psychological, and spiritual needs can it effectively meet these needs."[538]

The final implicit element of a pastoral plan for evangelization is to *be present*. Being present is not simply relegated to being around people. "The evangelizer is challenged to be really present. This means making people feel important and listening to their unspoken words and

[535] Ibidem, 17.
[536] Ibidem, 19.
[537] Ibidem.
[538] Michael White and Tom Corcoran Rebuilt. 2013. *The Story of a Catholic Parish, Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, Making Church Matter*, 169.

feelings, Personal presence means taking time with others."[539] This physical and emotional presence conveys a message of genuine caring. Sincere and genuine presence has a tremendous effect not only for the psyche of individuals and parishioners, it also improves the probability of success of any evangelization program. For this reason, intentional and active listening is a skill that those involved in parish evangelization must master and use.

Ultimately clear and intentional communication is fundamental to the success of any pastoral plan for a parish, especially in the context of the ever present and increasingly hostile encroachment of secularized society. This leadership starts from the top—the pastor and the pastoral team. "Words have power, and we know from Scripture that God's Word has ultimate power. When spoken, His Word does not return to Him void."[540]

The evangelization pastoral plan for the periphery of the parish—enriching the soil for those at the margins:

The implicit, and yet unintentional, message often heard by those on the periphery of parish life and most at risk for falling away from their faith—those divorced or in broken relationships, those in relationships outside of the bonds of a sacramental marriage, including civilly married, singles in a relationship and members of the LGBTQ+ community, those who have chosen abortion or who have or are currently using contraception, those struggling with addictions, those struggling financially, those who feel ostracized by the community because they are ethnically different, and the youth whose lives are constantly inundated with secular imagery and ideology that conflicts with the tenets of their faith—is that they are not welcome and that their life, lifestyle, questions or concerns exclude them from the Church. In reality, the Church does not exclude anyone. The Church rather offers a path to salvation, regardless of life circumstances and choices, by offering a path through repentance. The Church loves the sinner but hates the sin. More importantly, not being open to this welcome would place the Church in direct opposition to the very example of Christ who dined with sinners and the outcast and, through this bountiful mercy, love and forgiveness emulated the path to salvation. The pastoral plan for evangelization to those on the periphery of the parish, whose number increases exponentially, must be focused on clearing the stones and thorny thickets encroaching on this periphery, through that same mercy, love, and

[539] Ibidem, 171.
[540] Ibidem, 224.

forgiveness.

As the Church, we must acknowledge that we are also culpable in the placement of these stones that choke the very roots of the tender seedlings of faith, through harsh judgements, hardline policies and unwelcoming behaviors that drive these rocks ever deeper into the soil. As the Church, we must also acknowledge that sin and scandal of the Church leadership allows the thicket of the secular world to encroach every further. This has been especially detrimental to the youth of our Church, and yet, as a church we are obliged to rebuild this trust. As noted by Przygoda:

> The Catholic Church is obliged to accompany people on their path to salvation, in any environment and at any stage of their journey. It is especially important with regard to young people—to first find them and establish some form of communication, then rebuild the trust in the institution of the Catholic Church, recently weakened by cases of sexual abuse of minors by clergymen. Only then can an attempt be made to engage young people in a dialogue in which there will be room for a conversation about living a meaningful life and about fulfillment in love, which is possible in a well-arranged marital and family life, among other avenues.[541]

The explicit pastoral plan for evangelization must have continued focus on the aforementioned four elements, the *essential encounter*, *invitation and welcoming*, *worship*, and *witness*, and it must also be particularly prepared and focused on *apologetics*, *invitation beyond the boundaries* of the parish, *mercy*, and *reconciliation*. To evangelize to this group in particular, it is imperative to understand what rocks surround them—anger, fear, hurt, frustration, doubt, rejection, and ignorance of faith—and to be well prepared to remove these as able.

The first step is to recognize that the pastor must be well prepared personally for questions, concerns, complaints, but also well prepared with resources when necessary. As Bishop Barron notes, "young Jews have the weakest sense of their own religious heritage, but second only to the Jews in this dubious distinction were young Catholics. This is nothing short of tragic. We have an extremely smart, rich, and profound tradition, including the incomparable Scriptures, treasures of theology, spirituality, art, architecture, literature, and the inspiring witness of the saints…Most Catholics stopped their formal religious education in the eighth grade, or perhaps in senior year of

[541] Przygoda, Wiesław, Kazimierz Święs, and Piotr Rozpędowski. 2023. "Sexual Morality of Young Poles as a Challenge for Religious Education." *Religions 14* (2): 277. In https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14020277.

high school. No wonder we are relatively poor evangelists."[542] For this reason, pastors and evangelization teams need to be armed with knowledge. Perhaps worse that this lack of knowledge and lack of understanding, is the ready availability of mistruths, half-truths and untruths in society and on the internet regarding the Catholic faith. Those representing the faith, pastors and evangelization teams alike, must be prepared to answer tough questions on faith, tradition, dogma and history to combat the onslaught of information, both true and false, available through secular sources. And we must be willing to tell our story. "Every single day the Catholic Church feeds, houses, and clothes more people, takes care of more sick people, visits more prisoners, and educates more people than any other institution on the face of the earth could ever hope to."[543] The Church should not run from this history, it must embrace it and proclaim it proudly.

Evangelization to the youth at the margins of our parishes is particularly important if the Church hopes to thrive into future generations. Catholic schools must be 'undeniably Catholic' not Catholic in name only. Recognizing that many Catholic high school students reject their faith shortly after they graduate plainly demonstrates that what is occurring in Catholic high schools today is not working. The fallout of many scandals of the past thirty years has been for schools to shy away from all things Catholic, while claiming they offer a Catholic education. Furthermore, to boost their enrollment, and because the education at Catholic schools has a reputation for being superior to that of public schools, they market themselves to non-Catholics, thereby diluting the fraternity needed for young Catholics to learn from each other about their faith. Plainly stated, Catholic schools cannot occupy themselves with creating 'safe spaces' for those in their schools with differing beliefs than Catholicism while neglecting the space needed for young Catholics to learn and live authentically their faith. This must be an area of particular investment, and must also be a place where the Church and its representatives, their teachers, boldly embrace the truths and rich history of the Church. "The ironic thing is that most young people are looking for someone who has the courage to look them in the eye and tell them the truth. Young people want above all to be their own person, but not just any version. They yearn deeply to be the-best-version-of themselves. Sometimes they are aware of that yearning and sometimes they are not. To discover

[542] Robert Barron. 2022. "Practical Strategies of Evangelization." *Word on Fire*. www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved August 31, 2023.
[543] Matthew Kelly. 2010. *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*. Second Ed. (New York, Beacon Publishing): 15.

and realize their highest potential they need and want guidance."[544] If the Church and its representatives, their teachers, do not fulfill this need, the secular world will.

It is also essential to recognize that most catechesis does not occur in Catholic schools, as the cost of this education is out of reach for many families. "More than two-thirds of Catholic students do not attend Catholic Schools. This means that their primary faith education outside the home takes place in CCD [Confraternity of Christian Docrtine] classes."[545] Too often, CCD teachers are retired volunteers who, to these students, may appear out of touch and outdated. Additionally, the resources allotted to these programs are often scant. For this reason, CCD classes must be well staffed and well-appointed and must focus on the *essential encounter*, *invitation and welcoming*, *worship*, and *witness*.

True focus on *invitation* is the explicit action in the pastoral plan for those on the periphery. "Evangelization can focus on the conversion of the nations, or on the Catholicizing of Protestant Christians, but it can also focus much more narrowly on the re-activizing of inactive Catholics."[546] Plainly stated, an open invitation to 'come home' by friends or family that is offered without judgement can do far more than any large-scale campaign. The key to success in this invitation is, when that inactive Catholic crosses the threshold of the parish, they must find welcome. As Matthew Kelly notes:

> The early Church was unstoppable…it was because they followed this simple strategy. They believed that the values and principles of the Gospel were the best way to live. They nurtured friendships. They were deeply committed to a life of prayer. They were courageous in telling their story. They were generous and welcoming…The primary vehicle that God wants us to share the truth, beauty, and wisdom of his ways with the modern world is not the mass media or the Internet. The vehicle God wants us to use is friendship. Friendship is the original model of evangelization, and it is the model that will triumph in the modern context. Friendship establishes trust and mutual respect, which together bring about the openness and acceptance that give birth to vulnerable dialogue.[547]

The next focus of the pastoral plan is *mercy*. "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O

[544] Ibidem, 291-292.
[545] Ibidem, 292.
[546] Robert Barron. 2022. "Practical Strategies of Evangelization." *Word on Fire*. In www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved August 31, 2023.
[547] Matthew Kelly. 2010. *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*, 297-298.

Lord who could stand? But with you is forgiveness, that you may be revered. (Ps 130:3-4) Plainly put, we are all sinners and yet we are all called to Holiness. If a pastor believes their flock to be sinless, he is a fool; if he looks in the mirror and sees one who is blameless, he is both a liar and guilty of the sin of pride. Shunning those on the periphery--those divorced or in broken relationships, those in relationships outside of the bonds of a sacramental marriage, including civilly married, singles in a relationship and members of the LGBTQ+ community, those who have chosen abortion or who have or are currently using contraception, those struggling with addictions, those struggling financially, those who feel ostracized by the community because they are ethnically different, and the youth whose lives are constantly inundated with secular imagery and ideology that conflicts with the tenets of their faith—means shunning the very body of Christ. If the Lord does not mark our iniquities, who are we to mark others? This does not mean that the Church should embrace the sins—it should embrace the sinner. Homilies and other forms of evangelization must, therefore, embrace the truths of the Church, but do so with a pastoral sensitivity to those whose lives are seduced by the secular path, and present a better Way. In the same way, the pastor and evangelization team must embrace questions and doubt, not as defiance of the faith, but as part of the spiritual journey. As noted by Kelly:

> Questions are an integral part of the spiritual journey. The temptation is to despise questions and the uncertainty they represent. But uncertainty is a spiritual gift designed to help us grow. From time to time, great questions arise in our hearts and minds. When that happens to you, don't let your heart be troubled. Learn to enjoy the uncertainty. Learn to love the questions. The questions are life.[548]

Perhaps the largest stone that must be moved is fear. Fear is unquestionably the dominant emotion of modern society—fear of loss, fear of rejection, fear of criticism, fear of pain, fear of expressing our 'true emotions' that are the resultant judgements or emotions that may occur from others. These fears can overwhelm and, at times, imprison individuals. "Fear stops more people from doing something incredible with their lives than lack of ability, contacts, resources, or any other single variable. Fear paralyzes the human spirit."[549] It is fear that dominates the secular society, and it is fear that prevents many from asking for help when their spiritual journey conflicts with their secular life. "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the acquired ability to move beyond

[548] Ibidem, 237.
[549] Ibidem, 305.

fear. Each day we must pass through the jungles of doubt and cross the valley of fear. For it is only then that we can live on the high places, on the peaks of courage."[550] *Mercy,* therefore, starts with acknowledging the courage it takes to overcome fear and ask questions. For this reason, mercy requires the pastoral team to be present, be welcoming, invite questions with honest answers, delivered with love, not judgement, be prepared with resources when needed, and be companions on the journey.

The final focus for the pastoral plan for those on the periphery of the Church is *reconciliation*. Just as fear may appear to be an unmovable stone for most, so too is shame. In Love and Responsibility St. Pope John Paul II describes how shame can be absorbed by love. He states, "Shame is…swallowed up by love, dissolved in it."[551] This love is most deeply offered in the sacrament of Confession. Those on the periphery are most in need of this love, and yet least likely to seek this sacrament. For this reason, forgiveness and love, through the sacrament of reconciliation, must be available when they are; but mercy, love, guidance and compassion, *invitation* and *welcoming* must be available even when they are not.

The evangelization pastoral plan for beyond the parish—providing good soil outside of the garden, reaching society:

Historically, there are three primary steps for the pastoral plan for evangelization: Pre-evangelization, evangelization and catechesis. While these are intrinsic qualities to evangelization, a more holistic approach would also include ongoing focus on the congregation within the parish and those on the margins of the parish at risk for falling away, as mentioned above. The pastoral plan for evangelization, beyond the walls of the parish, directed at society, must include pre-evangelization, evangelization and catechesis, but it must also consider *Identifying the space* (physical or digital), and the previously described for elements of evangelization that being *essential encounter*, *invitation and welcoming*, *worship*, and *witness.*

Evangelization to those beyond the parish walls, those of different faiths, agnostics, atheists, and 'none's' in the scarce patches of soil, amidst the rocky paths and the dense thicket of society presents the greatest challenge to Church, and yet it is as necessary today as it was in the days of St. Paul. It is critical in this space to never presuppose faith but to propose it anew. "People

[550] Ibidem, 305.
[551] Karol Wojtyła. 1993. *Love and Responsibility*. Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 181.

need to be taught the faith, but they first need someone to prepare them for it. They need to see the nothingness of life without God and then find instruction in silence and interiority. This is the work of pre-evangelization."[552] Acts of human intervention alone, without God are in vain. Ultimately, divine intervention is needed. As described by Professor Przygoda:

> It should be remembered that dialogue with non-believers can be compared to an activity sowing seeds of truth. On the other hand, germination, growth and fruits of the above sowing it must be left to the intervention of God himself. Therefore, in dialogue with non-believers, it is necessary to maintain inner peace and not strive at all costs for the "harvest".[553]

The *essential encounter* with those outside of the Church differs greatly from those within the walls. First, the priority is *where* to make that connection, that essential encounter. This is a digitally connected society, and that connection is increasing exponentially. The Church must continue to expand Her digital footprint within the digital space; the Church must invest in this media and this investment must be high quality. A recent example of a successful venture into this space was the launch of the APP Hallow. Initially launched and developed in 2018 and then, advertised broadly in American media over Lent 2023, Hallow quickly became the number one "Catholic Meditation and prayer APP."[554] The APP was developed by Alex Jones, a Catholic revert from atheism, and involves prominent American Catholics who are well known in the secular space, including the music industry and Hollywood, and relies on Catholic "advisers" including several bishops, priests, religious, and lay theologians. Furthermore, it is designed with a likeness and ease of use similar to popular secular APPs making it "intuitive and inviting." In addition, the APP facilitates regular prayer by tracking a "prayer' streak, joining a community prayer group, and allows for the sharing of reflections. "The Hallow community tab has the feeling of a sincere, soul enriching Twitter feed."[555] For many, media like the Hallow APP is their first *encounter* with the Church. For those resistant to accepting an invitation to a parish, an invitation to download an APP may seem innocuous, and as such, they may be more inclined to engage. The Catholic Church in the United States, must collectively invest in this and similar digital avenues

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[552] Robert Mixa. 2021. "Pre-evangelization: Prepping the World for Faith Like Benedict XVI". *Word on Fire.* www.wordonfire.org. Retrieved August 31, 2023.
[553] Wiesław Przygoda. 2015. "Pre-evangelization – extravagance or pastoral necessity?" In: *Peripheries of faith as a challenge for the Church*, ed. W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski OFMConv, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2015, pp. 17-40 [excerpt from the book in pdf].
[554] Alex Jones. (n.d.). "Our Story: The Beginning" *Hallow*. In www.hallow.com/about/. Retrieved September 2, 2023.
[555] Amelia Jarecke. 2021. "Finding God in All APPs." *America: The Jesuit Review*. In https://www.americamagazine.org. Retrieved September 2, 2023.

to increase the opportunities for essential encounters outside of the wall of the Church, and through these encounters, facilitate *invitation*, *welcome*, *worship* and *witness*.

Other opportunities for witness in this digital space include blogs, YouTube, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Reddit etc. This evangelization to the youth, especially the 'none's' in the digital space, the argument must be articulate, well cited and engaging. This space has tremendous potential for evangelization, but also poses some risk. For this reason, the onus is on the Church to be present, be well educated on the nuance of this space and command the theological argument with engaged dialogue that is cohesive and intellectually sound. As described by Bishop Barron, this dialogue and those engaged in it must embrace the following: "Authentic faith is not opposed to reason; that scientism must be put to rest; that mere toleration must not be tolerated; that voluntarism must be eschewed; and that opponents must seek to really listen to one another."[556] This dialogue offers an opportunity for those outside of the Church to clear the stones of doubt and fear that surround them in the secular space. Openness, honesty and a willingness to embrace this dialogue is a true expression of love. "The role of believers in dialogue with non-believers is, above all, credible testimony of God who, in his Son, loved mankind to the end and desires to give them a full life of love forever. In this you may find it a helpful witness of Christian charity."[557]

The Church, and more directly parishes, also needs to focus on opportunities for that *essential encounter* within their walls. The reality is most Catholic communities do not have outreach events. Although RCIA [Rite of Catholic Initiation for Adult] exists for those interested in exploring Catholicism, RCIA is a months' long program that only those with a high level of interest or who have already been within a parish for an extended period will attend. True outreach mandates creating that space and time where an initial encounter can occur. What is needed are "some monthly or quarterly programs that parishioners can invite their family, friends, and neighbors to attend—programs that inspire, that ignite a little passion in people for right living, that speak to the very real human needs and struggles people are facing. We need outreach programs, and they need to be relevant and innovative."[558] These programs do not need to be

[556] Robert Barron. 2018. *Arguing Religion: A Bishop Speaks at Facebook and Google*, 2.
[557] Wiesław Przygoda. 2015. "Pre-evangelization – extravagance or pastoral necessity?" In: *Peripheries of faith as a challenge for the Church*, ed. W. Przygoda, M. Fiałkowski OFMConv, Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL 2015, pp. 17-40 [excerpt from the book in pdf].
[558] Matthew Kelly. 2010. *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*, 296.

overtly religious, this will come through the *invitation, welcome and witness* of the pastoral staff and parishioners involved in these programs. Rather, they can deal with the seemingly secular, but very real struggles of everyday life, such as "how to deal with credit card debt, or a seminar for the unemployed, or a gathering for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one. This was Jesus' model. He never preached to anybody before he met their temporal needs. He healed them, comforted them, fed them, and then he shared the message with them. He met them where they were and led them to where God was calling them to be."[559]

2. Ways to Counteract Disintegration, Poverty and Social Exclusion

Globalization is an economic, political, cultural, and social process, which means that the consequences of changes in one sphere influence all other spheres of human activity. Among the negative consequences of globalization are social exclusion and disintegration of society. Although people have the opportunity to cross borders without restrictions, to change their place of life and work, to buy accessible goods that international corporations produce, globalization is a biased phenomenon. International corporations suppress local businesses, and many people lose their jobs because of globalization. Moreover, globalization leads to the aggravation of poverty and the increasing gap between rich and poor people with subsequent social exclusion of the poor from the "normal" society. These aspects lead to the polarization of American society in the economic sense and divide it into groups who regard each other as enemies. The Catholic Church does not support hatred and oppression that are connected with social exclusion and disintegration.

The impacts of globalism and the technological revolution coalesce intensely around the topic of climate change. The relationship of humanity to the earth that sustains it is often perceived as a parasitic relationship rather than symbiotic. The rhetoric and actions surrounding the topic of climate change, and the calls to urgently respond to risks posed by climate change, further personifies the extreme dichotomy of this argument—that *life is a battle between good and evil people*, and failure to act will unquestionably an end to all life on earth. Pope Francis addressed the perceived urgency of climate change, ongoing challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, and ongoing economic difficulties. In an interview with BBC, leading up to the UN Climate

[559] Ibidem.

conference, he urged response by the world leaders with vision and radical decisions, evoking the need for "a renewed sense of shared responsibility for our world…Each of us—whoever and wherever we may be—can play our own part in changing our collective response to the unprecedented threat of climate change and the degradation of our common home."[560]

Though it is not the Church's responsibility to propose specific scientific solutions to climate change, it is within Her purview to advocate for our "common home". The Laudato Si' Movement (LSM): Catholics for Our Common Home's mission is to "inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice."[561] LSM is a Catholic Organization, who's eponym is the papal encyclical of the same name. To accomplish this mission, LSM brings "together a broad range of Catholic organizations and grassroots members from all over the world…to collaborate and mobilize in response to the 'cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.'"[562] To do so, LSM lists three specific goals "1. Ecological Conversion: To encourage a change of heart of the Catholic faithful and motivate a more passionate concern for our common home, enshrining creation care as a Catholic priority, 2. Full Sustainability: To help the Catholic community lead by example by embodying the 'Less is More' motto and shrinking its footprint to zero, in line with the urgency of the climate and ecological crises, 3. Prophetic Advocacy: To mobilize the Church to raise a prophetic voice for climate and ecological justice, calling for bold policies to accomplish the Paris Agreement's goal of 1.5C and halt biodiversity collapse."[563] While it is important to acknowledge the reality of climate change and the real impact of humanity, the Catholic Church and its leadership must also evaluate the morality related to climate stewardship and the potential anti-human, and therefore anti-life, reality that may occur from an imbalanced reaction.

> Nature is not a Garden of Eden in which all the food we need is available to be effortlessly plucked. While certain environments, left to their own devices, might grow some useful trees, no environment, let alone the average environment around the world, left to its own devices, produces abundant, healthy food for millions of people or more… By contrast, in today's empowered world [by fuel and machines] we can spend a small percentage of our time acquiring food and water with

[560] Mark Lowen. 2022. "Pope Urges 'radical' climate response in exclusive BBC message." BBC News. bbc.com. October 29, 2021. Retrieved October 22, 2022.
[561] Laudato Si Movement: Catholics for Our Common Home. In www.Laudatosimovement.org. Retrieved November 8, 2022.
[562] Ibidem.
[563] Ibidem.

unprecedented levels of quality.[564]

Philosopher and energy expert Alex Epstein advocates for a pro-human, and therefore pro-life, approach to climate change. He notes a rapid and radical approach to climate change, eliminating use of fossil fuels and technology they drive, without regard to the consequence for fear of human impact on the environment might, inadvertently have significantly deleterious impacts on human life. Rather he notes, "If we pursue the environmental goal not of 'protecting the environment' or 'saving the planet' *from* human beings but of 'improving our environment' or 'improving our world' *for* humans' beings, we can have it all—the best of what exists naturally and the best of what we can create—including the time and ability to enjoy what exists naturally. And we can think clearly about all the effects of fossil fuels in our world—Both beneficial effects and negative side effects—from a human flourishing perspective."[565]

Systematic theologian, Father Paul Haffner, similarly warns against the pitfalls of accepting climate changes as dogma, rather he encourages a Christological approach to the environment and warns against the pitfalls of aligning too stringently with socio-political solutions to the environment, rather the Church should remain focused on Her key principles and values that anchor the Church's prophetic witness. The Christian point of view on ecology "starts with creation, the fall, redemption, and the new Creation. Creation you need because the cosmos didn't come into being by itself. God created it. You need the Incarnation and redemption because Christ assumed human nature and redeemed us. A new creation will be given to us because this one is passing and temporary. Therefore, you can't give the universe a God-like quality and then something goes a bit pear-shaped, like climate change, you can't get so upset…for the Church to buy into a particular vision of climate change, embraced by the UN and several world governments worldwide, is a bit dangerous. Like the Galileo affair—you buy into one position and then science can wrong-foot you. So, we should steer very, very attentively in such troubled waters."[566] Father Haffner further warns that Climate Change is, "a new age religion, basically cosmo-centricism whereby the cosmos is placed at the center, the human being is a nuisance, and you want to push him or her aside. Therefore abortion, euthanasia, and depopulation of course, are all part of this

[564] Alex Epstein. 2022. *Fossil Future: Why Global Human Flourishing Requires More Oil, Coal and Natural Gas—Not Less*. (New York, Penguin Random House): 136-137.
[565] Ibidem, 99.
[566] Paul Haffner. (2021 Nov 2). "The Catholic Church's View of Ecology Starts and Ends with Creation." Interviewed by Edward Pentin. *National Catholic Register.* Ncregister.com. Retrieved December 4, 2022.

wicked agenda, which obviously wants the person put in second and third place and the exaltation of animals…Hierarchy in creation exists and this is forgotten because what is being promoted is basically ecologism, as we call it—a socialistic or communistic ideology which wants to level everything out and forget there is a hierarchy in which the human person is the apex, under God, under Christ, with dominion over creation."[567]

Though the mission of caring for our 'common home' by Catholic organizations like LSM is laudable, the Church must remain steadfast in Her commitment to life. Radical adoption of climate change policies, without regard to their human impact, risks abandoning the central tenant of pro-life. Rather than aligning with socio-political edicts and policies, as advocated by the LSM and outlined in the Paris Agreement's specific goals for carbon reduction, Catholic World Report contributor and Catholic Ecology Blogger, William Patenaude, rightly advocates for a different approach. He notes "The challenge of living with the environment in mind is not something that Catholics must superimpose on our lives…It is contained within the very challenge of what we should be doing anyway: living a sober, temperate, virtuous, sacramental, incarnational, God- and neighbor-centered holy life."[568] In other words, the pastoral approach to the global impact of climate change should not be climate-centric, but Christocentric. As Patenaude further notes, "When one first seeks one's own sanctification—when one struggles to live a virtuous life—one is less inclined to behaviors that diminish human dignity and damage ecosystems…Excessive consumption by individuals is most often a symptom of a soul not at rest—of seeking fulfillment from worldly things. Our attempts to live the virtue of temperance help orient the soul towards holiness and at the same time reduce our burden on the world's resources and waste-disposal systems."[569]

The Catholic Church considers poverty and problems connected with the well-being of people the priority in a contemporary global society. As a result, the Catholic Church regards globalization in general and social disintegration and exclusion as challenges for pastoral care in the 21st century United States. Poverty is not the only reason that makes the Catholic Church oppose these changes. Globalization leads indirectly to uncontrolled immigration, the absence of

[567] Ibidem.
[568] J.J. Ziegler. 2013. "Catholics, the Environment, and a 'Culture of Waste'" *The Catholic World Report.* Catholic worldreport.com. Retrieved December 8, 2022.
[569] Ibidem.

opportunities to find work, and violation of human dignity among the most vulnerable categories of American society.

It is possible to propose several ways of addressing these challenges connected with the pastoral care of the Catholic Church. The strong and supportive religious community is the means of overcoming social disintegration and exclusion because it demonstrates to people that they are not segregated from others. Working with the parish is essential in this case because it allows people who belong to the Catholic Church to experience a sense of stability in this aspect of their life, regardless of economic challenges. Individuals, who do not belong to the Catholic Church but who need its help should also see that the Church is the active force in the social life of the community. Therefore, the Catholic Church should provide people in communities with social protection that is manifested regularly and clearly.

Charity is an integral part of the Christian mission. It is possible to find many verses in the Holy Scripture that emphasize the importance of charity. It is written in Matthew 6:2: "Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward." Charity allows Christians to form an appropriate attitude toward money and to avoid situations when money substitutes morality. It is said in Matthew 6:24: "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." This part of the Christian doctrine allows people to find balance in the modern society where material profits and economic status determine the self-esteem of many people and the attitude of others toward the individual.

The critical detail is that one individual's charity does not help Catholics to improve the lives of the poor significantly. It is necessary to implement the systematic enduring approach to charity so that vulnerable populations would receive maximal support and, subsequently, feel that they have the chance for stable improvement in their lives. Charity begins at home, but to be sustainable and enduring, charities need to be efficient, effective, and thoughtfully implemented and produce measurable results. Therefore, the Catholic Church, on the level of the local parish, should elaborate programs aimed at providing systematic help for people who are in need. This program should include a detailed plan of rehabilitation for people who lost their jobs, cannot overcome hurdles such as poverty or substance abuse, and who cannot integrate into the local

society.

Collectively, care for the vulnerable in society is the responsibility of all members of the Church community; knowing of this collective responsibility is critically important messaging on the parish level to its congregation. This type of charity work, at home, engages believers through tangible results. Congregations can see that their collective charity truly helps other people, which strengthens their faith. The opportunity to witness the results of this Christian missionary work allows the faithful to experience the fruits of their labor, resulting in enhancement of the faith experience among the members of the Catholic community. Moreover, charitable acts improve the public image of the Catholic Church among non-believers, which is essential in enhancing the popularization of faith in American society. When considering opportunities for charitable works and how to engage Americans, it's imperative to recognize that this society is blessed with abundant resources, but also with a tremendous aptitude for generosity. America has consistently been the most generous over the past decade. According to the Charities Aid Foundation World giving Index, 72% of Americans help strangers and 42% volunteer regularly.[570] Furthermore, this generosity increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, both in 2020 and 2021, American donations topped 2019. This generosity was not limited by religious affiliation, region, or age—nearly 60% of Americans donated in 2021.[571] Understanding the collective societal generosity is essential to the Catholic Church's pastoral plan in the United States.

Yes, America is blessed with abundant resources, but it is the inclination of these people to bless others. Americans also yearn for reassurance that they can trust that their generosity will get to those who need it most. Catholic Relief Services is regarded as one of the most efficient organizations in the world, with 92% of the money spent going directly to programs that benefit the poor.[572] Furthermore, Catholic Charities, founded in San Francisco after their largest, most devastating earthquake more than 150 years ago, initially founded to help orphans following this tragedy, remains one of the largest, most comprehensive human services agencies in Northern California, boasts a 93% accountability and finance rating by Charity Navigator with a 4 out of 4

[570] Charities Aid Foundation. 2019. "CAF World Giving Index 10th Edition: Ten Years of Giving Trends, October 2019." *Charities Aid Foundation.* In www.cafonline.org. Retrieved December 8, 2022.
[571] Erica Pandey. (2022 Mar 12). "America the Generous: U.S. leads globe in giving." *Axios.* In Axios.com. Retrieved December 8, 2022.
[572] Catholic Relief Services. (n.d.). "Accountability." *Catholic Relief Services.* www.crs.org. Retrieved December 8, 2022.

star rating.[573] These Catholic based charities represent only a small fraction of Catholic charitable organizations, across the United States. These Catholic organizations demonstrate to believers and non-believers alike that they should be trusted, and that they are desirable to partner with for charitable works. Witnessing this generosity in action, by trustworthy organizations, builds faith and saves lives.

Individuals within a congregation are not homogeneous. Therefore, introducing different opportunities to engage in a variety of charity programs and allow believers to select participation with charities which they prefer. It is critical to ensure that Catholics have the opportunity to form the conscious desire to help others. In this case, the results might be better both for the vulnerable populations and for Christians who deepen their faith through their altruistic behavior. Charity programs can feature a variety of financial, emotional, and physical help for different categories of vulnerable people.

There are specific examples of charitable programs that are reasonable to implement at the parish and diocese level, that are sustainable, enduring, efficient, effective, thoughtfully implemented and produce measurable results. One such opportunity involves the aging population. Sometimes elderly people who live alone feel that they are alienated from others, they yearn for regular companionship. The global economic and social model supposes that only active, young, and healthy people are worthy of focus and attention because they are productive and can compete in the marketplace and the workforce. Elderly people are excluded from this day-to-day interaction. Simply knowing that they are cared for, alleviates isolation and loneliness. This type of charity program that focuses on the emotional supervision of the elderly members of the community can be a good option for adolescents and families with children. First, elderly people enjoy communication with children because it gives them pure joy and sometimes it can substitute their own lack of communication with their grandchildren. Second, children and adolescents will have an opportunity to develop a respectful attitude toward elderly people through practice, which is crucial in the Christian faith. It is written in 1 Timothy 5:1: “Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers.” Therefore, this type of charity program features altruistic intent and the added benefit of moral development of young believers

[573] Charity Navigator. (n.d.). “Ratings for Catholic Charities, Inc—Charity Navigator.” *Charity Navigator.* In www.charitynavigator.org. Retrieved December 8, 2022.

simultaneously. Furthermore, a program such as this is an effective means of opposing the negative consequences of globalization, including social disintegration and exclusion.

Another example of a charitable program involves immigration and the effects of globalization. Globalization leads to negative changes in the labor market, and non-qualified workers suffer from this situation the most. Among these vulnerable populations include immigrants who came to the United States from their countries in search of opportunities but may not have been able to capitalize on these opportunities financially or socially in their new home in America. Moreover, their position in American society is biased because of the social exclusion and lack of mastery of the language. The Catholic Church can become the organization that supports non-qualified and immigrant workers not only spiritually, but also practically, which is also part of pastoral care.

It is possible to conduct language and adaptation courses for immigrants that are guided by the Catholic Church. These language courses should be available for all people regardless of their confession, both for Catholics and non-Catholics. Though, the courses should feature some relevant information that is connected with the Catholic faith. From one point of view, the Catholic Church helps immigrants to better adapt to American reality. From another point of view, the missionary work of the Catholic Church allows it to create and promote its positive image among the American population.

The Catholic Church emphasizes the importance of social justice in the formation of an equal society where all people feel that they belong to the community. It is vital to show in practice that the Catholic Church takes the necessary steps towards gradual improvement of the situation regarding the public attitude to immigrants and the poor. It is written in Matthew 25:35: “For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.” Christians should be open to both those within their community and especially those who are segregated from society. In the majority of cases, this exclusion is not voluntary, and these people are ready to integrate into society, provided they feel that there is no hostility towards them.

Media coverage of the charity programs of the Catholic Church allows people in the communities to learn about this missionary work. At the same time, it is the means of spreading Biblical wisdom. For example, the use of social media in the promotion of the Catholic mission

can become an effective tool of pastoral care. Providing people with information regarding the essential connection of human dignity to work from the Christian perspective is valuable. The majority of non-qualified workers who are exploited by the global capitalist economy do not recognize that they are exploited, nor do they recognize the ill intent of their employers toward them. The dramatic situation connected with the human rights and dignity of these people is evident for those who analyze the existing social context. Therefore, Catholic pastoral care is obliged to inform people about existing injustices that are dominant in different spheres of life, to social exclusion and disintegration.

The Catholic Church should develop the idea that people should help each other in difficult situations. Mutual help, and the possibility to receive it in the Catholic Church, should be central attributes to the ministry program. It is possible to support this thought with the lines from Romans 12:4-8:

> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ, we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Globalization has changed the way people live significantly; not all changes were positive. The Catholic Church needs to adapt to these changes, paying more attention to the most vulnerable groups of people who cannot help themselves. It is part of the altruism of the Christian mission. As the passage from Galatians 6:2 says: “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Practical ways, including language and adaptation courses for immigrants supported by the Church, programs involving companionship, long-term supervision and care for elderly and care for the poor people in the community, are some specific examples of programs that are sustainable, enduring, efficient, effective, thoughtfully implemented and produce measurable results. These programs would provide varying opportunities for the heterogeneous congregations of parishes and dioceses and are in keeping with the tenets of Catholic Social Justice. By promoting the charitable activities of the Church on social media and engaging congregations in the direct work of helping others, faith through deeds will deepen the Catholic faith among believers and improve the image of the Church in society. This outreach should make the consequences of

globalization less negative and spread the wisdom of God among those who do not belong to the Catholic Church.

3. Directions for the Renewal of the Moral Formation of the Faithful

Moral relativism is among the major concerns of the Catholic Church because it influences the moral choices that believers make. Moreover, the ideas of moral relativism have influenced the development of the secular society that the Catholic Church cannot ignore. This explains the interest of the Church in the formation of adequate ethical views. The destruction of absolute moral truths endangers the stability of society and the existence of such social institutions like the family. The understanding of good and evil changes with moral relativism, which means that moral relativism leads modern society toward gradual moral decay. Without a firm, unwavering morality, individuals lack a consistent compass to judge their life choices. This ambiguity leads to bias in their decisions, and exacerbates emotional instability, leading to depression and anxiety related to indecision and confusion.

The Catholic Church should provide modern Americans with a clear description of moral truths that are the reflections of divine laws. Spreading information about the danger of moral relativism and its negative consequences is the key step in confronting the destruction of morality. It is incorrect to state that the Catholic Church does not lead informational campaigns concerning these questions. The folly of the Church's informational campaign is that, until recently, it has been limited to religious forums; many people who do not belong to the Catholic Church cannot perceive the message adequately. In other words, exclusively presenting moral truths, through preaching in the narrative style, limits the size of the audience to only those present in the pews, which decreases the effectiveness and bandwidth of the message.

Therefore, the choice of how the Catholic Church addresses people is critical especially regarding the pitfalls of moral relativity. The use of more secular and understandable examples and language might additionally increase the effectiveness of pastoral care and the appeal of the message to a broader audience. Moreover, the concerns that the Church presents in Her pastoral activities should be connected with the real lives of people in the community. In this situation, believers and non-believers who have the chance to read or to listen to the appeal of the Catholic message might apply this information to their daily concerns. In other words, the message

proclaimed must be clear, concise, attainable, and theologically sound. Equally important, the intelligence of the audience should never be underestimated.

The above principles should be used to practically disseminate the Christian view on morality. Family is the primary nest in which a person is formed; for this reason, the family has the primary responsibility of human formation—ethically, spiritually, and morally. Children have an innate sense of right and wrong. Educational resources must capitalize on this innate sense by acknowledging what is good, right and just, while illustrating that which is not morally right. Moral values are not merely precepts, but a way of life. The parents are the primary witness to these morals; the Church too must be an unwavering witness. Children learn through these examples; they mirror this witness. Children often judge that their parents do not support their point of view and lack understanding of their feelings. Sincere faith and the absence of moralizing allows parents to create a connection with their children, which is the important aspect of moral upbringing. The resources and efforts of the Church, therefore, must focus on assisting parents in this primary formation. It is crucial to find the appropriate tone, vocabulary, and age-appropriate format for such discussions and materials, expressly designed to welcome young Catholics to this way of love and respect of God, others, and ourselves. It is imperative, then, that through the presentation of moral views, that the Church and families move away from the dogmatic, legalistic, harsh, often exclusive language to that which allows for a dialogue that respects the intelligence of the audience, which is welcoming, relatable, and inclusive.

The foundation of the Trinitarian aspect of the family is the decision to love. Marriage is a communion of love between co-equal persons—the husband, wife, and then by extension, to their family. This communion is life-giving. The family unit draws from the larger communion that is the Mystical Body of Christ—the Church. The Trinitarian cornerstones of morality are beauty, goodness, and truth. Such cornerstones should be the basis of any presentation on morality—recognizing, celebrating and forming youth and families with these three cornerstones as the foundation. Marriage is indeed the foundation of family, and the family is the foundation of community and society at large. Although these families may be increasingly complex and diverse, the decision to love remains; that decision to love is the connection with the Creator, who is Love. Presentation of the moral cornerstones of beauty, goodness and truth demonstrates this love, and instructs on how families can approach this decision. Such a decision to love will lead to a personal encounter with Christ.

No right or just decision to love can be made without knowing; by extension, we cannot decide to love someone we don't know. The point is that the educational aspect of the mission of the Catholic Church is essential and should emphasize the importance of preserving absolute moral truths as paramount to Her mission. Although some might perceive this point of view as excessively traditional, what is truly communicated is that there is a choice in moral decision-making. Just as in the family where the parents are the primary witness to these morals, educators must also be an unwavering witness, as the students under their purview learn through these examples and mirror this witness. By sincerely adhering to the precepts of faith and the absence of moralizing, educators authentically demonstrate these same cornerstones of morality--beauty, goodness, and truth. The resources and efforts of the Church, therefore, must focus on assisting educators in this ongoing formation. These educators, too, must have ongoing formation to uphold this moral credibility in their witness. Educators may also face ethical dilemmas. The Church must be a reliable resource for their formation as well, especially when faced with such ethical dilemmas. As a result, those members of the Church entrusted with educational faculties are obligated to stand by their moral beliefs, living by Christian morals truths and living their Catholicism boldly. As author Matthew Kelly notes in *Rediscover Catholicism*:

> If we live and love the way the Gospel invites us to, we will intrigue people. Respect and cherish your spouse and children, and people will be intrigued. Work hard and pay attention to the details of your work, and you will intrigue people. Go out of your way to help those in need, people will be intrigued. When we do what is right even if it comes at a great cost to ourselves, people are intrigued. Patience, kindness, humility, gratitude, thoughtfulness, generosity, courage and forgiveness are all intriguing.[574]

It is imperative that Catholic educators, including laity, religious and clergy, maintain the Catholic Church's strong and conservative Doctrine and traditions regardless of how society views them. The Catholic education system must position itself to be a trustworthy source of truth. By being an unwavering source of truth, the Catholic educational system positions itself to ignite within the hearts and minds of Catholics passion, awe, and hunger for truth. The decision to teach, to spread the Good News, is indeed a decision to Love. It is, therefore, critical that the Catholic Church rededicates itself to this mission of formation through Catholic Schools, and those who attend these schools at every level. A Catholic education is not for the elite or for a privileged few.

[574] Matthew Kelly. 2010. *Rediscover Catholicism: A Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*, 21.

If it remains so, then the Church is in direct conflict with the Gospel. By choosing to bestow upon future generations of Catholics, through education, the values and beliefs that emanate from the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, then we, as a Church, chose to love through deed.

America as a pluralistic society isn't uniform in belief or action. The Catholic Church in America resides within this plurality and plurality resides within it. Although these differing beliefs may present themselves as a deterrent to Catholics for interacting with society at large, Catholics have both a right and an obligation to participate and impact society. In Her outreach to society, the Church must be open to dialogue, using common vernacular. This dialogue should focus on non-believers or those whose religious views are not completely formed, using common vernacular in a way to make the discussions of complex moral truths and realities interesting. Moral relativism emphasizes the idea that everything is permissible and there are no constraints because every person has one's own motives that determine their actions. From one point of view, it tempts non-believers and those who hesitate in their faith because having no moral restrictions is easy. Moral relativism can justify all weaknesses, which might soothe the person's psyche in the beginning. Though, from another point of view, the majority of people understand with time, that moral relativism has negative consequences. Sometimes, they acknowledge it after other people who share moral relativist views betrayed them. Others understand that they are frustrated and depressed because they cannot find the truth in the modern secular ideology that helps them to make the right decisions. The American poet and philosopher, Henry David Thoreau, penned more that 150 years ago in his work, *Walden Pond*, "Most men lead lives of quiet desperation."[575] Without purpose and direction, life transitions from thriving to merely surviving. The promotion of the Catholic perspective on morality, using the most widespread examples of moral relativism that make people suffer, like adultery and lies, can become the effective means of deepening and popularization of the Catholic faith—as an alternative to transition from merely surviving to truly thriving, through purpose and direction.

The idea that morality should be centered around particular acts is not new in Catholic doctrine. The orientation of the target audience should be the basis in the attempts to overcome the existing challenges concerning morality in secular society. The pastoral care for atheists, for those people who are not sure about their faith, and the Catholics who regularly attend the Church should

[575] Ibidem, 67.

be different because all of them have various levels of understanding of morality and different spiritual goals. To enhance the dialogue with non-believers or those whose religious views are not completely formed, the Church first and foremost must understand that every person, regardless of profession, is created in God's image, has inherent dignity and was created to worship. Therefore, in any effective outreach to non-believers and those whose religious views are not completely formed, the Church should approach with the following manner:

- Value their dignity and humanity: As a Church we must see those with whom we disagree as children of God;
- Listen attentively: Doing so affirms the dignity of the other, even when agreement seems difficult or unlikely;
- Acknowledge our common humanity as a point of connection. These points of connection allow for deepening of relationships and for movement toward other topics, including faith;
- Openly value their perspective with respect, and understand the perspective of others, without judgement;
- Avoid overtly Christian vernacular, bringing clarity but not more confusion;
- Welcome questions: Questions mean that the other person is listening and engaged in the dialogue;
- Pray: Unquestionably, prayer should be in every step of outreach toward others.[576]

The use of the Holy Scripture is the base of the moral formation of believers. Some see the Bible as the inspired word of God, others as the inspired creation of the human spirit. Some interpret it literally, others figuratively. Some view it as a positive force for the good in the world, others see in its pages only ignorance and bigotry, and still others have no opinion about it at all. Catholics versed in their faith understand that the Bible contains divine wisdom and absolute truths about morality. It makes the mission of pastoral care less complicated compared to the spread of traditional views on morality among secularists and non-believers. At the same time, many Catholics lack profound and detailed knowledge about the Christian doctrine and its attitude toward various moral questions. Believers assert that they know the Christian position concerning disputable moral or ethical issues and do not hesitate to judge others. Sometimes their perspective is erroneous, and it leads to confusion and disinformation. Therefore, detailed study of the Biblical views on morality is an essential part of the pastoral care in the Catholic Church because it allows

[576] Aaron Earls. 2019. "8 Steps to Deeper Conversations with Non-Christians." *Lifeway Research.* www.research.lifeway.com/2019/9/27/8-steps-to-deeper-conversations-with-non-christians/. Retrieved December 8, 2022.

believers to avoid mistakes in their own life and judgment. The approach to the study of the Bible, especially when guiding those who are relative novices, or for those preparing to catechize others, must be methodical. Therefore, the following permits for a consistent and methodological approach:

- To avoid confusion and the unintentional omission of Sacred Scripture, the version of the Bible used in such study must be approved either by the Apostolic See or the Conference of Bishops. For the publication of the Bible into the common vernacular, it is also required that it be approved by the same authority and provided with necessary and sufficient annotations;
- When approaching relative novices, it is imperative that the educational approach for the studies of the Bible presents the grand narrative of the Bible—chronologically from Genesis through Revelation;
- It is also imperative to not assume any previous biblical knowledge, regardless of the students' background;
- Study leaders must assure skeptical recipients that their questions and concerns will be addressed once they have had the opportunity to see the whole narrative, from beginning to the end;
- The study leader must learn to discern the difference between a question that contributes to the study in a positive way, rather than sidetrack or derail the study from helping other recipients understand God's redemptive plan;
- The study leaders must engage recipients in the study, keeping it interactive without excessive preaching. Sincere dialogue and questions should be encouraged;
- Those presenting the study should avoid trying to create answers for questions that they themselves do not firmly grasp, rather they must acknowledge if they are unsure of an answer to a question, and assure those questioning that they will find the appropriate answer to their question;
- For any Bible study group containing a mixed audience, that being those who are already members of the Church and those who are relative novices, it is essential that both groups respect each other. One uniformed, church member who dominates conversation may sabotage the whole study. Therefore, when the intent of outreach is to relative novices, the number of church members should be limited, and respectful ground rules for dialogue should be followed by all participants.[577]

The Church must remain steadfast in her communication about the dangers of moral relativism. Therefore, it is crucial that the Church addresses the pitfalls of moral relativity and

[577] Wayne Haston. (2019 Mar 25). "How to Teach the Bible to the Unsaved." *Good Soil.* In https://www.goodsoil.com/blog/how-to-teach-the-bible-to-the-unsaved/. Retrieved December 8, 2022.

provide the faithful with clear, concise, attainable and theologically sound direction on moral truths and divine laws. In doing so the Church will increase her effectiveness in pastoral care and appeal to a broader audience. The dangers of moral relativism and its negative consequences cannot be understated. Limiting this message to purely religious forums, limits the evangelical mission of the Church. In her pastoral care and evangelical mission, the Church must increase her bandwidth beyond her walls.

4. The Value of Christian Media and Digital Education in Religious Life

The emphasis on the media presence of the Catholic Church is another effective way of developing and deepening the Catholic faith. Digital presence is an integral part of communication in modern society, and online presence increases the accessibility of the Church. In modern society, traditional media lacks the bandwidth and reach of digital media, such as social media platforms, YouTube channels, and blogs. Consistent utilization by the Church of these popular channels of communication, will result in improved evangelization through casting a much wider digital shadow. It is especially vital in the communication with young adults and adolescents who regard the digital format of interaction as their primary source for information in their lives. In other words, the creation of engaging Catholic content, and its active promotion in social media as the primary communication tools they are intended to be, might help the Church to overcome the existing challenge in pastoral care in the United States, especially regarding outreach to the younger generations.

Believers and those people who hesitate in their religious choice, search for content in social media regularly. The information they find on Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube, influences the formation of their worldview. It is easy to find many secular bloggers who promote the ideas of moral relativism, claiming that these ideologies are progressive and innovative. The major concern is that the number of Catholic bloggers or social media influencers is significantly lower. Even with the intention of finding this content on social media, Catholic based content that promotes the Church and Her teaching are often difficult to find. Lack of representation of the Catholic lifestyle and worldview in social media is a challenge that the Church must overcome if it intends to improve the quality of pastoral care in American society.

Examples of successful ventures of Catholic content into modern American media in the

digital age include 'The Catholic Guy Show' on the Catholic Channel airing on Sirius XM radio and the 'Jesuitical' podcast produced by America Media. 'The Catholic Guy Show' has been on satellite radio since December 2006. The format is an afternoon commute drivetime Catholic themed show, geared toward engaging listeners with exciting, comedic content and quirky game show antics. The host, Lino Rulli's, a 3-time Emmy winning broadcaster, self-deprecating style portrays an average Catholic man in the secular world. He is paired with his producer, Tyler, who describes himself as an atheist and their co-host, Mark Hart, known as the 'Bible geek.' The goal was to present a 'normal' show that made people want to listen. Lino Rulli further noted "I think people need a respite from the bad news. So, without saying it explicitly, every day I go on the air and say—in as entertaining a way as possible— 'Here's why I'm Catholic. Here's why I love it. In spite of it all, here's what's beautiful and true about the faith."[578] Not only is this content available on satellite radio, the team engages also with Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and podcast formats.

The 'Jesuitical' podcast similarly provides content aimed at Gen Z and millennials primarily. They describe the content as a "young, hip and lay" podcast focused on "three main segments—Catholic news, an interview with a guest and faith-sharing, 'often over drinks' as the podcast tagline puts it, and through the lens of Ignatian Spirituality." This podcast has been operational since 2017, with over 1 million total downloads and is gaining 40,000 to 50,000 downloads per month. The content is geared toward Catholics and non-Catholics alike and embraces secular topics, those struggling with their faith and questions related to Catholic teachings. Beyond this, it shows content and interviews involving individuals from all walks of faith, including Muslims, Jewish, atheist and non-committed 'spiritual seekers.'[579]

Active representation of Catholic life in social media can become part of an individual mission. The Church should promote positive stories regarding the Catholic way of life, such as the stories of Catholic individual's willing to talk about one's own life, experience, and the search for truth. This can be done through social media, using both video and textual format. Individual activity of ordinary Catholics can offer people who hesitate about their opinions and views, ways

[578] Jonathan Liedl. 2018. "Lucky there's a 'Catholic Guy': Radio host taps into male zeitgeist." *Catholic News Service.* Sept 5, 2018. In www.catholicnews.com. Retrieved Mar 23, 2022.
[579] Anna Capizzi. 2022. "How Jesuitical is filling a gap in the podcasting (and parish) world for young Catholics." *America: The Jesuit Review.* Mar 23, 2022. In https://www.americamagazine.org/faith. Retrieved Mar 23, 2022.

to solve inner conflicts and how to restructure their lives. The Church needs to support this type of initiative of believers because it contributes to the better representation of the Catholic community online. As a result, it makes predominantly secular media more Catholic and provides choice because many individuals do not consider Christianity as the possible solution to their existential and spiritual crises.

The online presence of the Church in social media is also an integral part of the effective digital strategy. For example, a pastoral care initiative by the Church on the diocesan or parish level, could include the development of a YouTube channel. Believers could then view sermons online, post questions and review others' posts in the comments. Engaging with these formats became especially urgent during the pandemic when people could not always be physically present. Moreover, providing Catholic content on platforms like the YouTube channel can further the popularization of the Catholic faith among people who do not belong to these congregations, or are not religious, which fulfills the call for evangelization.

Digital education is especially important in modern reality. The Church should react promptly to changes in society, and globalization influences in this sphere. For example, many students did not have the opportunity to visit the Catholic Sunday school during the COVID lockdowns because of the restrictions connected with the pandemic. The restrictions should not preclude youth from learning about their faith. Digital media permitted the opportunity to conduct these instructions online. The formation of spirituality among young Catholics is an essential part of Christian education. Proverbs 22:6 described this topic in the following way: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." In other words, young people have a flexible worldview due to their age and lack of experience, and technologies permitted the Catholic Church to continue this necessary education regarding their faith, morally appropriate attitudes and ideas during their formative years despite the restrictions.

Digital education for adult believers is also a viable option for improving the quality of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church. Although there is no substitution for attending church regularly, there are situations which might prohibit attendance. Some congregants may be required to travel to another city or abroad for work or family and spend many months away from their parish. Although this person could go to a regional church if available during this period, they are still part of their own parish and religious community in their hometown. It is difficult to create a

spiritual and emotional connection with a community in a new place, especially if there is a language barrier. Therefore, online communication with their home parish, and the support of the community of believers from their native city, become vital for the faithful person in this situation.

It is possible to state that increasing the online presence of Catholic doctrine on the Internet is part of the Christian mission because believers should inform other people about the faith. It is written in Romans 10:13-14:

> For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

In other words, the creation and the promotion of Christian media and increasing digital presence are part of missionary work and pastoral care.

The Catholic Church can think about convenient ways to promote the knowledge about faith and God's wisdom by choosing the optimal format. This format may differ based on the intended audience and intended use of the content. For example, YouTube is a convenient platform for presenting videos of sermons or informative talks on topics related to faith and morality. Instagram is an effective format for showing the daily life of the religious community and Catholic bloggers. Facebook would be appropriate for the organization of meetings, events, and communication among the members of a particular group, such as the parish or a group of students. The most suitable format for online video conferences and digital education would be platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meet. It is imperative that the Church's leadership improves its knowledge about the ways of digital communication and education to enhance the level of interaction online. The passage from 2 Peter 1:5-10 says:

> For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

Differentiation of the Catholic perspective from the secular perspective, through sermons is also effective in deepening the Catholic faith. Presenting the Catholic perspective to large swaths

of the population is especially easy to achieve using online methods of preaching and pastoral care. Given the prevalence of moral relativism in secular society, connecting and combating ethical fallacies is constrained by the walls of the sanctuary. It is possible to overcome these limitations with the promotion of the Catholic perspective on moral relativism through digital media. The use of appropriate discourse and examples to address the secular audience, or those who hesitate concerning their religious affiliation, can effectively be distributed through these outlets. This media is an effective means of popularization of the Catholic faith among laypeople whose religious perspective is not completely formed.

The desire to spread God's wisdom is supported by the Holy Scripture, which makes the online presence of the Catholic Church an enlightened way to use modern technologies. It is written in Matthew 24:10-20:

> And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

These lines illustrate that there is a vital need for the active promotion of the Catholic faith. Believers should do it not because the Catholic Church is weak and needs promotion. This intentional promotion is necessary because there are many "false prophets" in modern society that millions of people view daily on the Internet. Just as the Church intends to spread her message with technology, technology can also facilitate the promotion of destructive ideas. The Church must respond to the challenges of the contemporary secular and moral relativist ideology. Failing to use this technology to promote God's word simply because it is perceived to originate from the secular world is contrary to the teaching of the Church. Failing to utilize these tools denies that human inspiration has its origin in the Creator. This is excessive pride, which would be sinful from the Catholic point of view. Therefore, it is necessary that the Church appeals to existing biases connected with morality and life in modern society using digital technologies. These technologies are ubiquitous in American society. It is written in Proverbs 4:6-7: "Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, though it costs all you have, get understanding." God's wisdom is the basis of the Catholic faith and Christian doctrine, and believers must maximize access to this information.

In examples connected with family evangelization and pastoral care, the emphasis should be on addressing adolescents and young adults who constitute the most active part of society. It is easy to persuade young people in the ideas of secularism and moral relativism, imposing non-Christian views on morality and behavior. The Church, in her turn, focuses on adult and elderly believers whose religious worldview is stable. The Church emphasizes the importance of tradition, which is a necessary thing in contemporary society, but it does not usually speak in the vernacular of young people. The de facto 'language barrier' results in the gradual decrease of young Catholic believers in the United States and changes in American culture and society. In her pastoral care of young Catholic believers, it is imperative that the Church be in their space and speak their language—the digital space is this common ground and straight forward, honest dialogue is their language.

Parish and education are equally important in deepening the Catholic faith among believers. A parish is the religious community that shows the person that they are not alone in their views and that many people share a similar perspective on life. It provides believers with the support that many need—a sense of community. For example, many Catholics are tempted by the secular society that actively promotes the ideas of moral relativism, and they cannot find an adequate solution in biased situations. Parish and educational programs allow Catholics to elaborate effective ways of addressing morally biased issues connected with the contemporary secular agenda in the United States. It is through digital technology, which became that communal reality for many, especially the young, that the Church must connect the youth with God. God desires to be with His creation. The Church's presence in this digital space is imperative. By being in this space, the Church fulfills Her salvific mission—God is connected with His creation here.

Therefore, Christian media and digital education are effective means of improving the quality of the pastoral care of the Catholic Church in the United States. The majority of believers can use technologies for communication and acquisition of new information, which makes the activity of the Catholic Church necessary. The Church cannot ignore the opportunities that online presence gives to people when the opportunities for live contact are limited. The COVID pandemic advanced the Church's adoption of these technologies and demonstrated the urgent need to significantly increase its digital footprint. Moreover, technology is increasingly becoming the best and most practical tool to reach youth, Gen Z, millennials, younger Gen Xers and to enhance the formation of their spirituality and to support adult believers and non-believers who hesitate

concerning questions of faith when in-person communication is not feasible.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the existence of the opposition between the Catholic worldview and secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and technological change that are dominant in American society in the 21st century. The See-Judge-Act theory emphasizes the importance of understanding the main aspects that constitute the atheistic perspective on modernity, evaluating the reality facing the Catholic Church in the United States, and finding optimal pastoral solutions to these issues. Without a thorough understanding of these dynamics, the Catholic Church cannot adequately address, confront, and conform, when reasonably not in violation of moral truths, to the biased issues connected with the development of contemporary society.

The crisis of faith in modern American society is the consequence of changes that the Catholic Church cannot restrain. The reasons that lead to the decreasing popularity of the Catholic Church among Americans are secularization of the society, globalization of economy and culture, moral relativism that is the dominant ideology in the contemporary context, and technological progress that is biased at its essence. Most young Americans regard religious worldview as radical traditionalism that does not fit into the modern culture and cannot integrate into the lives of modern people. Moreover, religious affiliation is connected with restrictions, while secularism and moral relativism promote the perception of freedom and tolerance for weaknesses. Naturally, young people choose those options that give them more pleasures and that are easier to achieve relative to the personal introspection and work required for gradual moral and spiritual formation of an individual.

The theological research discussed in this narrative illustrated that secularization, globalization, moral relativism, and technological advancements create the context in which the faithful are compelled to fight for their right to maintain their religious views. The general cultural and social discourse and the popular mass culture are opposite to religious perspectives and the outward expression of faith. Enjoyment, and an egocentric worldview are opposed to self-discipline and altruism. It is not difficult for the Catholic Church to understand which side is more attractive to young people whose spirituality is not formed and who are driven to attain personal success above the need of the common good.

Therefore, description and analysis of social and cultural tendencies that are dominant in modern American culture constitute the basis for this work. Secularism is the core of contemporary

society in the United States. It supposes that there is no official religion in the country, and the state is governed by civil, not divine, laws. Religion is separated from the government in all spheres of life, including policymaking, education, healthcare, media, culture, etc. In theory, secular culture aims at creating a free state where people of all backgrounds can express their views without restrictions. Secularism supposes equality of all members of the society because they live according to the country's laws. The free expression of religion is also protected within the founding documents of the United States and explicitly understood as a right of all citizens. This paradoxical relationship of religion in the secular United States both presents an existential threat to believers and affords guarantees of their right to believe.

Religious states, in their turn, suppose that the divine laws of the official religion determine the boundaries of acceptable actions. As a result, only those people who belong to the official religious congregation are in the dominant position in this society, while the rights of other groups of people are restricted. It is possible to state that secularism aims at eliminating inequalities and differences between various religious and non-religious social groups, making all citizens equal in the face of the law.

Globalism is another trend that determines the development of modern society. The United States is among the leaders in globalization, and the American popular culture is the one that is "exported" to other countries. Tendencies towards globalization suppose that people in all corners of the world develop a common culture, which becomes possible due to the development of technologies, easy access to all information, communication regardless of boundaries, and mass migration.

Moreover, globalization influences economic and political relations, and these interactions change the way people live. For example, globalization in the economy leads to the domination of international corporations that change the image of the business. Mass production improves the level of life of many people because they have easier access to cheap goods. At the same time, local businesses cannot compete with international corporations, which leads to immigration and economic inequality. Globalization illustrates that all countries are interconnected in the modern world, and the events and domestic policy in one state influence the development of another state.

Moral relativism foregrounds the ethical basis of secularism. This ethical theory supposes that there is no objective morality and absolute truth, which means that the evaluation of the same

action is different for every individual. In general, this perspective on morality is self-centered, which leads to the aggravation of egoistic tendencies in contemporary society. Therefore, according to the moral relativist theory, it is impossible to state that adultery in marriage is unacceptable. This approach regards polygamy and open marriage as permissible because individuals in this union are satisfied with the situation. In other words, if the action does not violate the law and does not infringe the rights of other people, it is acceptable from the moral relativist point of view. It is possible to conclude that moral relativism promotes tolerance in the secular society.

Technological innovations facilitate the lives of all people in the modern world, and it is difficult to imagine life without the use of these innovations. Technology has enhanced production, human interaction, and communication. For example, the modes of transportation are more efficient, safer, and more sustainable from one country to another, which changed the lifestyle of many individuals. Moreover, digital technology, including the Internet, has changed the communication between people. It is challenging to find a person who does not communicate online nowadays and who does not use the Internet or the smartphone for daily tasks. Access to information has become easier because multiple sources of knowledge are available online, which facilitates human lives.

Technology has made many processes automatic, which is evident even in Church life that uses programs to trace believers' participation, to ensure their safety while attending religious events, to make charitable work and accounting more structured and detailed. In other words, technological advancements influence the daily lives of all people, and it is impossible to live without technology in the modern United States because these innovations are in all spheres of human activity.

The critical issue is that not all tendencies that dominate the modern cultural and social discourse are positive from the Catholic point of view that promotes traditional views on morality and ethics. Secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and technological advancements have ethically biased sides. For example, from the perspective of the Catholic Church, the loss of balance in society and the ultimate destruction of morality might be among the negative consequences of these trends. As a result, the Catholic Church should intervene in social and cultural life in the United States, even though it might be complicated due to the secular dominance

in all spheres. Otherwise, the American society might face the crisis of morality within several decades, and the process of moral degradation will be irreversible if the Church does not stem the tide of current trends.

Several changes in pastoral care can help the Catholic Church change the situation connected with Her decreasing authority and the overall moral destruction of American society. Clergy and believers need to promote their views on biased questions and ethics in public. They should not hesitate to oppose secular culture because some tendencies lead contemporary society to gradual decay, and the Church should intervene in this process. Theological research shows that the Church should focus intently on the negative consequences of secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and technological advancement if she wants to improve the quality of pastoral care in the United States. These measures should be focused on the preservation of morality, human dignity, and human life because these aspects are often challenged by modern social and cultural discourse.

At the same time, the Church should be flexible in her mission. She should preserve the balance between traditionalism and innovations, which makes the individual approach to every situation and question necessary. The Church is not the enemy of progress, and this position requires a moderate perspective from the members of the Church. Therefore, the Church should adapt to the modern context without losing her spiritual essence and faith in God.

Secularism is the dominant ideology in modern society, and the Catholic Church should address this ideology in her pastoral care. Secularism presupposes that the state and the Church are separated from each other. The main concern of the Church is to ensure that religion does influence the development of society and cultural trends. Promoting religious views among children and adolescents in public spaces is regarded as unacceptable because faith is the personal choice of the individual. As a result, young people usually become Catholics only when their family members belong to the Catholic Church. Others do not have the opportunity to choose a religion because secularism as an ideology dominates and distracts from religious views in the United States. Moreover, the secular perspective presupposes tolerance to all religious choices, but many people do not have access to these opposing religious viewpoints to make this choice. Popular culture in the modern United States is secular, which determines all cultural trends and endangers traditional views on life and morality promoted by Catholic doctrine.

Globalization causes such problems as aggravation of poverty, destruction of the environment, and issues connected with migration. Despite the improvement of the overall level of life in modern society due to the development of the industry and mass production of goods, it has also led to negative consequences in all spheres of life. The Catholic Church opposes unregulated capitalism that concentrates on the increase of production without addressing the social and environmental consequences.

From the religious perspective, the problem of the gradual decrease of available natural resources, and the slow destruction of the planet is a vital concern because humanity cannot preserve God's gift and entrust it to the next generation. Moreover, the Church regards poverty as one of the most serious social problems in the contemporary world. Although the global economic model leads to overproduction, the goods that are not consumed are considered as waste, polluting the environment. As a result, globalization makes people in developed countries more affluent, while people in developing countries suffer from the ill effects of pollution, malnutrition or even famine. The Church asserts that globalization lacks a social and environmental focus, and emphasis on these topics that might improve the existing situation.

Unquestionably, the events related to both the global COVID 19 pandemic and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war have illustrated the depths to which the global economy is integrated and the risks this integration poses to both individual states and to the world. Though the ultimate outcomes of both of these world events are not known at the time of this thesis, the long-term consequences and potential magnitude of human suffering cannot be underestimated. The Church is neither insulated nor isolated from these human calamities—she must respond.

Moral relativism is contrary to the religious perspective because it supposes that there is no absolute truth in ethics and morality. As a result, there are no moral laws that evaluate human actions. Actions or behaviors that were regarded as sinful and immoral for centuries have become acceptable by today's standards. The Catholic doctrine states that all people should live according to divine laws that are described in the Holy Scripture. These laws constitute absolute moral truth that people cannot dispute independent of the context, which means that sin is always a sin regardless of the reasons that make the person commit it. Many secularists who live according to the ideas of moral relativism regard this perspective as radical and not tolerant, which is inappropriate in modern American society.

From the religious point of view, the existence of absolute moral truth is significant for the formation of a healthy society. This assumes that individuals in society have a firm and clear understanding of morality. Absolute moral truth offers objective perceptions of good and evil that are stable and definite, while moral relativism relegates good and evil to subjective whims, propagating evil in the religious world view. It is unacceptable to be tolerant of sins and manifestations of evil simply because the perception of morality changes gradually. As a result of the ambiguity of moral truth, individuals might not distinguish sinful actions from acceptable options, further adulterating social norms. In this case, the duty of the Catholic Church is to clearly state moral truth and provide guidance.

Technological progress is also connected with concerns of the Catholic Church. Although the Church does not oppose technological changes, noting that it is an integral part of the progress and development of human potential, there are certain spheres where innovations are immoral. Among these spheres are some biotechnologies or the construction of weapons of mass destruction.

From the religious point of view, the assassination of thousands of people and experiments with the human genome and health are ethically unacceptable because they oppose divine laws. Abortion, some reproduction technologies, selective manipulations of human genes for non-medical reasons, cloning, and assisted suicide is sinful from the Christian perspective. The fact that secular culture regards these experiments as morally acceptable technological innovations questions the essence of morality that is basic in human culture and demeans human dignity. The main concern is that the position of the Catholic Church on these questions is often disregarded by the secular society as radically traditional, outdated, and anti-science—insinuations with which the Church is impugned by society.

Secular ideas influence different spheres of life negatively, and families suffer from this intrusion. Feminist ideas and overall movement for the liberalization of American society lead to the gradual destruction of the traditional family and traditional gender roles that are regarded as negative and outdated nowadays. The necessary role of the father in the traditional family is often doubted by secularists, who associate this traditional role of the man with misogyny and toxic masculinity leading to authoritative oppression.

This perspective is far from reality. The secular culture emphasizes the negative sides of a

patriarchal society, negating any positive qualities that it provides. The Church does not pay sufficient attention to the promotion of positive images of the traditional family and the positive image of fathers. The Church does not doubt the importance of fathers in a child's upbringing and marriage, but the secular society debases this traditional role, relegating it to archaism. Catholic families, in turn, are not forthright about their positive experiences with others.

Therefore, the Catholic Church should promote the positive image of fathers in families and traditional gender roles actively on all levels, starting from the parish and including the vast platforms of media including social media. The Church must capitalize and promote existing peer ministries that advocate, educate and tend to marriages and families. Furthermore, the existence of popular bloggers, influencers, radio personalities and podcasters who are Catholic, improves the attitude of modern Americans to traditional perspectives on family and gender. The messaging must be presented in a way that resonates with the younger generations and be in a tone, tempo and vernacular that is interesting and engaging. Many talented people belong to the Catholic Church, and the pastoral responsibility is to support their desire to share their positive family experience with others as part of their Christian mission. Moreover, it is necessary to focus on family relationships in the context of the secular culture while addressing believers because secularism challenges Catholic views and tempts people. This pastoral plan must also concentrate on the existing infrastructure of the Church in the United States including its elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities, hospitals and charities.

Globalization aggravates social disintegration and exclusion because economic changes influence all spheres of life in the modern world. The gap between rich and poor becomes increasingly evident in the context of the contemporary industrial society that lives according to the laws of consumerism. Among the problems that the Church tries to solve are the exclusion of elderly people from social and economic life, attitude to immigrants and their integration into American society, issues connected with human dignity at work among non-qualified employees, and poverty. Unquestionably, ongoing conflicts and climate induced migration will exacerbate the impact of globalization through forced immigration. The Church must remain steadfast in her mission of caring for these vulnerable populations and being their voice. The mass migration at the US southern border and the rapidly developing crisis induced by the Russian war on Ukraine demonstrate that the pastoral plan regarding these ongoing crises must prioritize human safety and human dignity.

It is possible to propose several ways that allow the Catholic Church to overcome existing challenges in pastoral care. Among these practical steps are implementing the long-term program for care and supervision for poor and elderly members of a particular community, introducing courses of cultural adaptation, and language courses that are conducted also by the Church. Moreover, it is vital to disclose these aspects of the missionary work in the media. This promotion both apprises people about the existing situation in society and the role of the Catholic Church in overcoming these problems. In addition, it informs people about the ways the Church can help them and how they can participate in the community projects that she regulates.

Moral relativism endangers traditional morality and divine laws that the Catholic Church regards as absolute truth, which foregrounds the need for the renewal of the moral formation of the faithful. The main innovation in pastoral care is the division of messages that the Catholic Church wants to spread among people and orientation on the needs of the target audience. For example, it is vital to address believers using the words from the Holy Scripture as the basis of divine laws and views on morality. It is also necessary to appeal to the tradition and experience connected with biased moral questions when Catholic clergy appeals to the audience of believers.

At the same time, the Church should remember her mission of outreach to non-believers and those people who hesitate in their faith. As previously noted, the Church and her agents should appeal to this audience in social media, at schools, and families using common vernacular and tone and finding appropriate examples to support their ideas. The agents of the Church, those engaging the secular world through media and other outlets, must demonstrate in their argument that faith is not opposed to reason, put scientism to rest, must not accept that 'mere toleration' is tolerable, must eschew voluntarism, and must seek to really listen to even those with whom they disagree. Importantly, though the message must be accessible, it must also remain authentic to the teaching of the Church and be respectful of the intelligence of those whom the Church desires to reach. Therefore, the choice of the language and communication strategies are the necessary detail in opposing moral relativism and promoting traditional views on ethically biased questions.

The Catholic media presence and digital education allow the Church to use technological innovations for the improvement of the Church's ability to propagate the faith. An online presence is one way of fulfilling the missionary work that is related to the formation of spirituality among people, their support, and informing them about God's wisdom. Using social media as the platform

for uploading videos of sermons, creating religious communities, and showing the life of Catholic believers is the modern way to overcome existing challenges in pastoral care. Digital education, in its turn, provides people with the opportunity to deepen their knowledge on the topics connected with the Catholic faith using a convenient format of communication and learning.

Technological progress is an arduous topic for the Catholic Church. It has permitted actions that are vehemently against the Catholic doctrine, including homicide in the form of abortion and euthanasia, the development of weapons of mass destruction, and experiments with the human genome. In addition, the advancements in medical technology, while filled with great promise, also presents moral dilemmas, such as those tied to fertility and the use of human stem cells obtained from aborted tissues for the production of medical therapies. At the same time, the Catholic Church cannot oppose all technological changes radically because excessive traditionalism might be harmful to the Church and for believers and relegates the Church, an institution steeped in education and human development to the very false illusion that it is anti-science. Digital media, communication, and education are among the positive aspects of technological progress that can help the Catholic Church in the fulfillment of her mission and overcome these misconceptions.

Therefore, this Ph.D. thesis answers three research questions. 1) What are the most important manifestations of social and cultural changes in American society at the beginning of the twenty-first century? 2) How are these changes interpreted and evaluated in the official documents of the Church in the United States? 3) What changes should be made in the pastoral ministry so that the Church in the United States can fulfill her saving mission in the current social and cultural conditions? Such phenomena as secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and technological progress are integral parts of modern American culture. The United States sets trends in these spheres, which means that the manifestation of positive and negative sides of these tendencies are especially evident in American society. They become the reasons that lead to the alienation of people from the Church and religion because the modern ideology is opposite to the believer's worldview.

The official position of the Catholic Church is based on the principles of the divine law and the Holy Scripture. The Christian doctrine does not oppose progress and does not promote excessive traditionalism. It welcomes changes that improve the quality of life of ordinary people,

facilitate communication and help. As a result, the Catholic Church does not oppose the positive consequences of globalization, including the increase of accessibility of goods and mobility of people. It does not also oppose technological changes in the spheres of online education and digital communication. The Church uses these innovations and tendencies for the promotion of the Catholic faith, for alleviating the sufferings of people, both spiritual and physical. In other words, when modern trends and innovations coincide with the divine law and religious doctrine, the Catholic Church does not oppose them.

At the same time, the Catholic Church does not regard moral relativism, negative effects of globalization, including poverty and social disintegration, technological advancements in weapons constructions, and some biotechnologies as acceptable trends. The position of the Church concerning these moral questions is immutable; contrarily secular society is increasingly at odds with several positions which the Church regards as absolute truth. The examples of abortion and homosexuality illustrate this idea. Secular culture regards both things as acceptable manifestations of human freedom and tolerance, which is contrary to the Catholic Church's stance. The changing attitude toward morality endangers human existence, and this example shows that secular morality can change when relativist ideas are promoted actively in the secular society.

The Catholic Church should not be afraid of judging the trends that are against the divine law. Moreover, the mission of the Church is in her pastoral work and actions that lead to positive social changes. It is written in Luke 10:1-3:

> Now after this, the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves".

Therefore, the Catholic Church must react in a balanced and prompt way to the cultural and social revolution of the 21st century in the United States. Secularism, globalization, moral relativism, and technological changes are the most significant trends in contemporary society. It is the Church's duty and her responsibility to see both the positive and negative manifestations of these tendencies and judge them accordingly. The main challenge for the pastoral care of the Church is to elaborate the strategy that preserves tradition and welcomes positive innovations simultaneously, which is a complicated task in the context of the constantly changing world.

‘E Pluribus Unum’ and ‘In God We Trust’ are more than just mottos to the American psyche. For almost 250 years these mottos both inspire and convict Americans. Out of many cultures, religions, beliefs, and individuals the United States has formed one nation. The Catholic Church has established her place amid this social experiment turned country. Unquestionably, secularism, globalism, moral relativism, and the digital revolution continue to impact this pluralistic society by driving societal changes. Antecedent to her history in the United States, the Catholic Church had left an indelible mark on the world. Her history is rich. Her mission is sound. In this country of immigrants, the Catholic Church is an immigrant too. Though this history in the US is comparatively short to that of the Old World, her impact is no less valuable. The Church’s modern story has been marred by scandals, the sins of her leaders and congregations—this story is known. It is time that the Church uses her vast resources to share this history and restore her focus on her mission. The dogma must live loudly within her people—through millions of Catholics and their families, thousands of schools and churches, hundreds of hospitals, and charities and one mission—to live the Gospel.

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