

Cardinal Burke on push for U.S. bishops to shift priorities: Life always come before immigration, poverty

By Pete Baklinski, Sep 1, 2016

September 1, 2016 ([LifeSiteNews](#)) — Cardinal Raymond Burke called it an “absolute contradiction” for poverty, immigration, and the environment to be placed by leading U.S. prelates on the same priority level as protecting and defending life and the family.

“All of these questions have moral importance, but there can be no question — also in the long tradition of not only the Church’s thinking but also of philosophical reason — that the fundamental question has to be the question of human life itself, the respect for the inviolable dignity of human life, and of its cradle, its source, in the union of a man and woman in marriage, which according to God’s plan, is the place where new human life is welcomed and nurtured,” he said during a teleconference on August 29 hosted by Carmel Communications to discuss his new book, *Hope for the World*.

Burke, responding to a question on the topic posed by LifeSiteNews, stated that he would be “very concerned” to see priorities shift.

“I would be very concerned that in any way the questions about the protection of human life, either at its beginning — here questions regarding abortion and other questions regarding the artificial creation of human life, etc. — or at its conclusion — questions regarding euthanasia — be in some way seen to be at the same level as questions regarding immigration and poverty,” he said.

Last year, a group of Pope Francis’ episcopal appointees and other like-minded prelates [provoked an open clash](#) at the U.S. Catholic bishops’ fall meeting when they pressed the conference to rewrite its election guide for 2016 to downplay the importance of the battle for life and family.

Bishop Robert McElroy, appointed as head of the Diocese of San Diego by Pope Francis, went as far as to argue that the proposed guide, with its emphasis on the evils of abortion and euthanasia, was out of step with Pope Francis’ priorities of combating poverty and protecting the environment.

“Pope Francis has, in certain aspects of the social doctrine of the Church, radically transformed the prioritization of Catholic social teaching and its elements,” McElroy urged the assembly at that time. “Not the truth of them, not the substance of them, but the prioritization of them, has radically transformed that, in articulating the claims that fall upon the citizen as believer and disciple of Jesus Christ.”

Burke, however, stated during the teleconference that the priority of life must not change if Catholics are to get the other issues such as poverty and immigration right.

“We have to give the first priority to the respect for human life and for the family in order to have the right orientation in addressing all of the other questions which are involved with poverty and immigration, the many challenges that any human being faces in life,” he said.

“But it doesn’t make any sense at all to be concerned about immigration or poverty if human life itself is not protected in society. It’s an absolute contradiction. The first justice accorded to any human being is to respect the gift of life itself, which is received from God. And so, that the unborn should be protected and at the same time those whose lives are burdened either by advanced years or special needs or some grave illness, their lives also are to be equally protected.”

When LifeSiteNews pressed the cardinal about how Catholics might go wrong on the fronts of poverty and immigration if they did not prioritize respect for life, he responded:

Well, for instance, it is not uncommon that some people’s idea of how to address the question of poverty is to eliminate a certain part of the population, so that there is less draw on the natural goods available, or to propagate a contraceptive mentality.

In the same way too, in the question of immigration, one has to respect the family, both the family of the country which is receiving the immigrants but also the families from which these immigrants are coming. If we don’t have this fundamental direction in our lives, it all can become a kind of social engineering and so forth, which can be, in the end, very harmful to society and therefore to the individuals.

Cardinal Burke is backed by St. Pope John Paul II in asserting the priority of life over other concerns. In his 1988 apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, John Paul II called the right to health, home, work, family, and culture “false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition of all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination.”

John Paul II said on another occasion that the promotion of the culture of life should be the “highest priority in our societies,” stating that if the “right to life is not defended decisively as a condition for all other rights of the person, all other references to human rights remain deceitful and illusory.”

Later during the call, John Allen from Crux asked Cardinal Burke to comment on Mother Teresa’s “obvious concern for the poor and an obvious concern for the unborn.”

Unsatisfied by Burke’s initial answer, Allen pressed: “Can I just pressure you, that was a beautiful answer, but I was hoping what you would also say is something about how for Mother Teresa and for Catholics who think with the mind of the Church that concern for the poor and concern for the unborn are two sides of the same coin.”

While Burke replied that the “matters are absolutely related one to the other,” he did so in a way that gives priority to respect for life.

He explained: “As I mentioned in response to one of the earlier questions, when someone asked, ‘Why is this teaching about abortion or about euthanasia, what importance does it have for addressing poverty?’ she [Mother Teresa] said frequently that the greatest poverty in the world is the fear of life, are those nations which seemingly are very rich which practice freely, for instance, the killing of unborn children in the womb and so forth as a response to social needs.”

“And so she is a brilliant teacher to us in addressing, whether it be questions of a difficult pregnancy, or questions of a difficult illness, whatever it may be, she teaches us that the way to address these issues is with respect for the individual human life and in that way no matter what the suffering is of the person, or no matter what great sacrifices have to be made, the person will find that happiness and fulfillment for which he or she is seeking,” Burke said.

