

## **Denying Caesar What Belongs to God**

By Bishop Victor Galeone

When living up to the highest ideals of their faith, Christians have always defended the weak and the vulnerable, and have worked tirelessly to protect the basic institutions of civil society.

Last September 28th, I joined over a hundred others of various faiths for a special conference in New York City to craft a document known as the Manhattan Declaration. The following is a summary.

We are Orthodox, Catholic, and evangelical Christians who have united at this hour to reaffirm fundamental truths about justice and the common good. These truths are (1) the sanctity of human life, (2) the dignity of marriage as the conjugal union of husband and wife, and (3) the rights of conscience and religious liberty.

Inasmuch as these truths are foundational to human dignity, they are non-negotiable. Because they are increasingly under assault from powerful forces in our culture, we commit ourselves to honoring them fully no matter what pressures are brought upon us to abandon or compromise them. We make this commitment not as partisans of any political group, but as followers of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

### **Human Life**

**The lives of the unborn, the disabled, and the elderly are ever more threatened.** While public opinion has moved in a pro-life direction, powerful forces are working to expand abortion, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide and euthanasia. Although the protection of the weak and vulnerable is the first obligation of government, the power of government is today often enlisted in the cause of promoting what Pope John Paul II called "the culture of death." We pledge to work unceasingly for the equal protection of every innocent human being at every stage of development and in every condition. We will refuse to permit ourselves or our institutions to be implicated in the taking of human life and we will support those who, in conscience, take the same stand.

### **Marriage**

**The institution of marriage, already wounded by promiscuity, infidelity and divorce, is at risk of being redefined and thus subverted.** Marriage is the original and most important institution for sustaining the health, education and welfare of all. The impulse to redefine marriage is a symptom, rather than the cause of the erosion of the marriage culture. Yet it is critical that the impulse be resisted, for yielding to it would mean abandoning the possibility of restoring a sound understanding of marriage. It would lock into place the false and destructive belief that marriage is all about romance and other adult satisfactions, and not, in any intrinsic way, about the unique character and value of acts and relationships whose meaning is shaped by their aptness for the generation, promotion and protection of life

### **Religious Liberty**

**Freedom of religion and the rights of conscience are gravely jeopardized.** The threat to these fundamental principles of justice is evident in efforts to weaken or eliminate conscience protections for

healthcare institutions and professionals, and in anti-discrimination statutes that are used as weapons to force religious institutions, charities, businesses and service providers either to accept (and even facilitate) activities and relationships they judge to be immoral, or go out of business. Attacks on religious liberty are dire threats not only to individuals, but also to the institutions of civil society including families, charities and religious communities.

### **Unjust Laws**

**As Christians, we believe in law and we respect the authority of earthly rulers.** We count it as a special privilege to live in a democratic society where the moral claims of the law on us are even stronger in virtue of the rights of all citizens to participate in the political process. Yet even in a democratic regime, laws can be unjust. And from the beginning, our faith has taught that civil disobedience is required in the face of gravely unjust laws.

**Therefore,** let it be known that we will not comply with any edict that compels us to participate in or facilitate abortions, embryo-destructive research, assisted suicide, euthanasia or any other act that violates the principle of the inherent and equal dignity of every member of the human family.

**Further,** let it be known that we will not bend to any rule forcing us to bless immoral sexual partnerships, treat them as marriages or the equivalent, or refrain from proclaiming the truth, as we know it, about morality, marriage and the family.

**Further,** let it be known that we will not be intimidated into silence or acquiescence or the violation of our consciences by any power on earth, be it cultural or political, regardless of the consequences to ourselves.

We will fully and ungrudgingly render to Caesar what is Caesar's. But under no circumstances will we render to Caesar what is God's.

For the full text or to sign it, visit <http://www.manhattandeclaration.org/>