

Good News

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"Furthermore, society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount for savings."
(par. 15)

Centesimus Annus, Pope John Paul II

The Obama Administration Refuses to Defend Marriage

The Obama Administration's recent decision not to defend the federal Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) may turn out to be a turning point in this presidency. With this decision, the president has proven to be completely out of touch with the view of most Americans that marriage is and should always be a union between one man and one woman.

It is the job of the U.S. Attorney General to defend laws passed by Congress when they are challenged in court. But U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and the Obama Administration have sided with a federal court judge who ruled that DOMA is unconstitutional. The U.S. Justice Department will not continue to defend this lower court decision, so DOMA is effectively dead as federal law, at least for now.

Even former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer, in his new CNN show, took the Obama Administration to task for refusing to defend the law. Spitzer supports what he calls "gay marriage," but noted that as New York's attorney general he defended a lot of laws he did not agree with. With this decision, the Obama Administration is abdicating its constitutional responsibility to defend federal law. Even Spitzer gets this.

In a recent statement, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops characterized the decision as "a grave affront to the millions of Americans who both reject unjust discrimination and affirm the unique and inestimable value of marriage as between one man and one woman." On this issue at least, the bishops will have plenty of allies.

The legal battle over DOMA is an opening skirmish in a bigger battle over whether states can define marriage as a union solely between one man and one woman. California's Proposition 8 makes this declaration, but this is being challenged in federal court. This case is expected to wind up before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Should the U.S. Supreme Court recognize marriage between homosexuals, the public outcry might rival the turmoil following the court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. The court's credibility is already compromised by its decision in *Roe*. Recognizing marriage between homosexuals could remove the last remnant of respect the public has for its highest judicial body.

A Measure of Dignity: The Debate Over Missouri's Minimum Wage

The Missouri General Assembly is considering legislation that would repeal key aspects of Missouri's minimum wage law. Missouri voters adopted a new state minimum wage in 2006 by a 76 percent majority. The measure passed by 16 percentage points or more in every Missouri county.

Under the law, the state minimum wage must be at least at the rate of the federal minimum wage. The law also allows the minimum wage to keep pace with inflation based on the preceding year's Consumer Price Index. HB 61 and SB 110 would prohibit the minimum wage from exceeding the federal minimum wage, thereby, in effect, repealing the inflation index in the current law.

Some argue Missouri will lose jobs to other states if the inflation index is

not repealed. Missouri's current state minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour, the same as the federal minimum wage. Missouri's minimum wage is in line with the minimum wages provided in neighboring states. Kansas, Iowa and Nebraska also have a minimum wage of \$7.25. Illinois' minimum wage is \$8.25.

In a seminal work on the minimum wage (*Myth and Measurement: The New Economics of the Minimum Wage*), economists David Card and Alan B. Krueger conclude that a state can raise its minimum wage modestly above neighboring states and not suffer negative economic consequences. In other words, business don't move to other states or discharge employees because of modest differences in the minimum wages between states.

The Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) has concluded that the facts fail to support the argument that Missouri should repeal its minimum wage inflation index. If, at some future date, Missouri's minimum wage rises significantly above the minimum wage of neighboring states, then the matter can be addressed. The bills propose a solution to a problem that does not exist at this time.

Proponents of repealing the minimum wage sometimes argue that most minimum wage workers are teenagers who can afford to work for less. In fact, according to the Economic Policy Institute, 72 percent of Missouri minimum wage workers are adults 20 or older. The minimum wage is not a living wage but at least it offers a bare minimum for the working poor who often must work two jobs to make ends meet.

Catholic Teaching on Just Wages

The opposition of the MCC to repealing the state's minimum wage is based not on politics but on Catholic teaching and the facts surrounding this issue. Catholic moral teaching has long upheld the right of workers to receive a just wage. The Catechism of the Catholic Church states: "A just wage is the legitimate fruit of work. To refuse or withhold it can be a grave injustice." In order to be just, a wage must guarantee the worker "the opportunity to provide a dignified livelihood for himself and his family ... taking into account the role and productivity of each, the state of the business, and the common good." (Catechism, par 2434).

Some suggest a just wage is best obtained through the free market. However, there are times when

employers refuse to provide a just wage. Just because the parties agree to a certain wage does not mean that wage is just. (Catechism, 2434). Pope John Paul II realized that markets alone would not in all cases be just. In the 1991 encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, he stated: "Furthermore, society and the State must ensure wage levels adequate for the maintenance of the worker and his family, including a certain amount of savings." (par. 15).

Catholic moral teaching affirms the right to private property and private initiative, but it also recognizes a role for public authorities in ensuring just working conditions and just wages. Pope Benedict XVI observes: "The economic sphere is neither ethically neutral, nor inherently inhuman and opposed to so-

ciety. It is part and parcel of human activity and precisely because it is human, it must be structured and governed in an ethical manner." (*On Integral Human Development*, par. 36, 2009). The minimum wage is one way to ethically govern economic activity and ensure wages are just.

In his 1981 encyclical, *On Human Work*, Pope John Paul II said that "a just wage is the concrete means of verifying the justice of the whole socioeconomic system and, in any case, of checking that it is functioning justly." (par. 19). John Paul saw a just wage as essential for the raising of a family and the means by which a worker could access the things necessary for a life of dignity, such as food, clothing, health care and education.

PPC Lobby Day 2011

Members of the Missouri Catholic Conference's Public Policy Committee came to the Capitol on Wednesday, Feb. 23 to talk with Missouri senators and representatives about current legislation.

The senators and representatives fielded questions about the state budget, the "fair tax," abortion, immigration and parental choices in education.

Senators and representatives visited included: Rep. Anne Zerr (R-St. Charles), Rep. Tim Jones (R-Eureka), Rep. Jay Barnes (R-Jefferson City), Rep. Chris Kelly (D-Columbia), Sen. Rob Mayer (R-Dexter), Sen. John Lamping (R-Ladue) and Rep. Jerry Nolte (R-Gladstone).



Rep. Anne Zerr (R-St. Charles) talks with Marty Denzer of the Catholic Key, Diane Daly (far left) and other MCC Public Policy Committee members.



Rep. Chris Kelly (D-Columbia) discusses legislation with MCC Executive Director Mike Hoey and Public Policy Committee members Karen Wallensack and Javier Orozco.



Rep. Tim Jones (R-Eureka) talks with Michael Van Gundy and other MCC Public Policy Committee members about his abortion bill at the Missouri Capitol.

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Neither Left Nor Right, But Seeking to be Faithful

Recently, the MCC issued action alerts on the minimum wage and marriage. The first alert urged opposition to repealing Missouri's minimum wage. The next day's alert called for the Obama Administration to reverse itself and defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

To some of our network members and *Good News* readers we may seem inconsistent. It is true the MCC does not follow any party line, or any preferred storyline of Fox News or MSNBC. The MCC's mission is to seek enactment of public policies that will best reflect the

values and concerns so often expressed by our Catholic bishops and popes.

It is not always easy to translate sweeping church principles into practical public policies. On some issues, especially in areas of economics and taxation, some Catholics might differ with the conclusions reached by the MCC. We respect this. But to stand on the sidelines when the facts and Catholic teaching strongly suggest a particular position or course of action would be cowardly. The MCC will continue to listen, to learn and then to act faithfully.