NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Editorial: Congress needs eucharistic consistency in its new budget

NCR Editorial Staff | Apr. 19, 2012

The line ?The budget is a moral document? has become somewhat of an old saw, but cliché or not, that idea has never been more true than this year as Congress takes up the annual budget process.

As a nation, we face some tough choices, there is no doubt about that. Among the areas of concern is the federal deficit, which needs urgent but prudent long-term solutions. But how should we get there? And how should Catholic, elected members of Congress approach the 2013 federal budget negotiations?

The U.S. bishops? teaching document, ?Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship,? points out that ?no party and too few candidates fully share the Church?s comprehensive commitment to the life and dignity of every human being from conception to natural death.? We agree. Nonetheless, ?Faithful Citizenship? does offer a fundamental orientation that all Catholics, including elected officials, must take toward legislation, including federal spending.

?Faithful Citizenship,? quoting Pope Benedict XVI, calls the Eucharist the ?sacrament of charity? and urges us to adopt a ?Eucharistic form of life? with ?Eucharistic consistency.? It is the Eucharist that is at the center of Catholic social teaching. It is precisely the Eucharist that impels Catholics to go out and serve the poor, the needy, the vulnerable and the elderly.

Eucharistic consistency can be found in the three criteria included in the balanced, civil and respectful letters sent by the U.S. bishops to members of Congress April 17. Writing for the conference, Bishop Stephen E. Blaire of Stockton, Calif., chairman of the bishops? Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, and Bishop Richard E. Pates of Des Moines, Iowa, chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace, advised the elected officials:

- Every budget decision should be assessed by whether it protects or threatens human life and dignity.
- A central moral measure of any budget proposal is how it affects ?the least of these? (Matthew 25). The needs of those who are hungry and homeless, without work or in poverty should come first.
- Government and other institutions have a shared responsibility to promote the common good of all, especially ordinary workers and families who struggle to live in dignity in difficult economic times.

These same criteria were included in similar letters the bishops sent to congressional leaders in March, weeks before Republican Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., unveiled his budget proposal. Ryan, despite his rhetoric that Catholic social teaching informs his budget decisions, clearly ignored the bishops? advice.

The budget Ryan proposed and the House passed is a radical document, punitive toward the middle class and the poor, and is morally reprehensible. An analysis of the Ryan budget released April 13 by 60 prominent theologians, priests, nuns and national Catholic social justice leaders says it ?makes dangerous cuts to food stamps and other vital protections for the most vulnerable. ? Simply put, this budget is morally indefensible and betrays Catholic principles of solidarity, just taxation and a commitment to the common good. A budget that turns its back on the hungry, the elderly and the sick while giving more tax breaks to the wealthiest few can?t be

justified in Christian terms.?

The bishops? April 17 letter called the Ryan budget a moral failure.

The presumptive Republican presidential nominee, Gov. Mitt Romney, said this about the Ryan budget: ?I applaud it,? he said. ?It?s an excellent piece of work, and very much needed.?

Catholic criticism of budget priorities is not reserved for Republican proposals.

Writing for their fellow bishops in March, Pates and Blaire also critiqued President Barack Obama?s budget proposal. Obama?s budget would support some programs the bishops have long supported ? programs for jobs, nutrition and education ? but the president?s budget does not do enough for affordable housing, the bishops noted. Most alarming, the bishops wrote, were ?proposals to eliminate the ?firewall? that currently exists between defense and nondefense spending. Elimination of this firewall would mean that poverty-related domestic and international programs would compete with other more powerful interests and less essential priorities.?

We join with the U.S. bishops and 50 other lay and ordained religious leaders in their call to build a ?Circle of Protection? around government programs that ?meet the essential needs of hungry and poor people at home and abroad.?

Congress has a difficult task ahead. Balancing needs and resources and fairly sharing burdens and sacrifices is a lot to ask of a political body in an election season, but we urge Congress and the president to rise to the occasion.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/16/2014 - 08:34*): http://ncronline.org/news/politics/editorial-congress-needs-eucharistic-consistency-its-new-budget