

# Authority...It Really is for Your Own Good

## DOCTRINAL ELEMENT

Life in Christ

## TOPIC

Authority and the Common Good

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## GOAL

The goal for this session is to introduce the teens to two essential elements of the Church's social teaching: authority and the common good. They will learn that authority is good and necessary for true human community, and that all authority is rooted in God's authority. They will also learn that true authority must be ordered to the common good of the community. Finally, the teens will learn that the term "common good" refers to the true fulfillment of a human community, which not only includes material well-being but also spiritual union with God.

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## SECONDARY RELIGION GUIDELINES

II.I.C.7; II.II.C.a,d

## USCCB FRAMEWORK

VI.B.I.b-c

## SCRIPTURE

Authority – Mt 22:15-22; Prov 8: 15-16; Wis 6:1-3; Jn 19:11; Rom 13:1-2; 1 Pet 2:13-17; 1 Tim 2:1-2

Common Good – Rom 13: 3-7; Mk 10: 42-45; Mt 6: 31-33; Acts 4: 32-34; Phil 2:1-4; Jn 17:11-13

## CATECHISM

Necessity of Authority – 1897-1898

Basis of Authority in God – 1899

Authority seeking common good – 1902-1904

Obedience to Authority – 1900, 2240-2242

Definition of Common Good – 19005-1906, 1910-1912

Requirements for Common Good – 1907-1909

## GOLDEN THREADS

The Incarnation – Jesus, the Word Incarnate, came to earth to save mankind from its sins. In order to fulfill this mission, he instituted the authority of the Church (Mt 16:18) and further commanded us to obey legitimate authority (Mt 22:21). When we do this, we obey Jesus who is the source of all authority (Rom 13:1-2), and thus come closer to Jesus himself.

The Dignity of the Human Person – Because man is a social being by nature, in community some must be given authority in order to help each individual reach their fulfillment. Thus, authority must respect the dignity of each human person. It is due to the value of man that authorities have been established to lead him closer to his true fulfillment: union with God.

## PROCLAMATION

### Authority

- The Catechism defines authority as the quality by which some people give orders to others and expect obedience from them (CCC 1897).
- God is the supreme authority over all. His authority is rooted in his nature as the source of all being, as He Who Is (Ex 3:14). Because we have been created by him, we must be obedient to him.
- Human nature demands that a community have people in authority to govern and guide it (CCC 1898). God has created man as a social being, and as such we naturally form communities.

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- There are many legitimate authorities that God has placed over us for our own good, to serve us in coming closer to him including: the Pope and our Bishop, our parents, teachers, and government officials. We ought to obey them (Rom 13:1) and this is a way we can love God. This is why we are commanded to honor our father and mother.
- Authority helps ensure the unity of the community and guide it to its fulfillment, the common good. Those who govern should not use their authority selfishly, but they are called to be servants of the whole human community.
- Authority over the civil community can take many forms. It can be government by a singular person (monarchy), government by a few people (aristocracy or oligarchy) or government by the many (republic or democracy). Though the Church does not endorse one form of government over another, it does say that democracy is the best at allowing citizens to be involved in government and to keep those in authority accountable.
- Authority is only legitimate when it seeks the common good. If rulers make unjust laws, or if they issue orders that are contrary to morality, these laws and orders are not binding and can be disobeyed.

### Common Good

- The Second Vatican Council defined the common good as “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment (*Gaudium et Spes* 26).”
- Because man is both body and soul, the common good involves both providing for man’s material needs and bringing him closer to Christ, his true fulfillment.
- There are three essential elements to the common good:
  1. **Respect for the person as such** – It is impossible to achieve the common good without respecting the inalienable rights of the human person who is made in the image and likeness of God.
  2. **The social well-being and development of the group** – This means that the good of the whole community must be the focus. Each person should have what’s needed to live a truly human life, including food, clothing, work, education, and culture.
  3. **Peace** – Peace is essential to provide for the social well-being and development of a community. This is why we have the right to legitimate personal and collective self-defense.
- In today’s world, many people define the common good in purely materialistic terms. While providing for material needs is important, the Church also teaches that civil authority has a role in promoting virtue. A good ruler is one who promotes man’s true end, union with God in heaven, while providing for the needs of man in this life.

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## MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

### Movies

- *Remember the Titans*, 2000 – The coach uses his authority for the good of the team and community
- *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, 2003 – Examples of good and bad leadership in Denethor and Aragorn
- *Invictus*, 2009 – Authority bringing together the good of the nation and the team
- *The Lion King*, 1994 – Bad authority in the form of Scar
- *Apollo 13*, 1995 – Jim Lovell uses authority to save the astronauts

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- *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 2005 – Peter becomes a leader to save Narnia

### Websites

- Protestantism and Authority – video by Fr. Robert Barron on the necessity of an authority for Christian Unity
  - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWYwBDqFsuE>
- *Rick Santorum and the Kingship of Christ, Part One* by Dr. William Fahey – an article studying the Catholic idea of the relationship between authority, the common good, and Christ
  - <http://www.crisismagazine.com/2012/rick-santorum-and-the-kingship-of-christ-part-one>

### OTHER RESOURCES

- *Caritas in Veritate* (Charity in Truth), 2009 Encyclical by Pope Benedict XVI – Sections 7, 11, and 23 give very good explanations of development demanding care for both the material and spiritual needs of man.
  - *The Rule of St. Benedict* by St. Benedict, Chapters 2 and 5 – Explanation of authority and obedience in the context of the religious life.
  - *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), 1963 Encyclical by Pope John XXIII – Sections 46 and 47 directly deal with authority as established by God.
  - *Gaudium et Spes* (Joy and Hope), 1965 Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World developed by Vatican II – Sections 25 and 26 discuss the the necessity of authority being ordered to true human good.
  - *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* – 2004 document by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, especially paragraphs 377-395.
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### GATHER

**Environment 1:** The environment should be a peaceful and reflective, as the students will be encountering a number of new ideas. The lesson will challenge modern ideas held by many people, so it's important that the students feel as if they're in an environment suited to intellectual discussion. Soft lighting and plants are helpful for this. If possible, it would be helpful to have the students in a circle during the talk, as this will make the group feel more like a community, a key theme of the evening.

**Environment 2:** Create different posters to have on display around the room that have pictures of authority figures that teens would recognize. Some examples are: the Pope, the President of the U.S., Supreme Court Justices, teachers, parents, police officers, etc. This will allow the speaker to refer to these pictures during the discussion and it also provides a good visual for students. Another good prop could be an old-fashioned scale that has two sides to balance. This demonstrates that authority and the common good go hand-in-hand and cannot truly be separate from one another.

### Icebreaker: Hand Slap

All participants should kneel on the floor and put both their hands on the floor in front of them. Everyone should then put their left hand under the arm of the person to their left. In this way,

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everyone should have two other hands between their own two hands. One person starts a pulse by slapping one of his hands on the floor and this is then passed around the circle in one direction with each hand slapping in turn. If someone slaps his or her hand twice in succession then the direction is reversed. A hand is considered “out” if the person hesitates or slaps when it is not their turn. A person is out when both his hands are out. You should try and speed up the game towards the end by considering all hesitations as “outs.”

(Source: [http://www.residentassistant.com/games/games\\_manual.pdf](http://www.residentassistant.com/games/games_manual.pdf) )

### **Opening Prayer**

#### A Prayer for Our President and Public Officials

Lord God, Author of Life and Source of Eternal Life, move the hearts of all our public officials and especially our President, to fulfill their responsibilities worthily and well to all those entrusted to their care. Help them in their special leadership roles, to extend the mantle of protection to the most vulnerable, especially the defenseless unborn, whose lives are threatened with extermination by an indifferent society. Guide all public officials by your wisdom and grace to cease supporting any law that fails to protect the fundamental good that is human life itself, which is a gift from God and parents. You are the Protector and Defender of the lives of the innocent unborn. Change the hearts of those who compromise the call to protect and defend life. Bring our nation to the values that have made us a great nation, a society that upholds the values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all. Mary, the Mother of the living, help us to bear witness to the Gospel of Life with our lives and our laws, through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

(Source:<http://www.ewtn.com/Devotionals/prayers/Prayerforpresidentandpublicofficials.htm#ixzz1q3ePC3Mj>)

### **EXPLANATION**

Have you ever heard someone complain about “the man?” Or have you ever heard someone say, “I just wish I could do whatever I want without anybody telling me what to do?” It is a pretty widespread feeling in today’s world that authority is a bad thing. Many people believe that they know what’s best for them, and that nobody should ever have the right to tell them what to do. But even though this is a common sentiment, is it really true that we would be better off without people in authority above us? Is this what the Catholic Church teaches? Is this what Jesus taught?

In fact, Jesus does often address the issue of authority in the Gospels, and I’m telling you right now, he doesn’t agree with the “no authority” point of view. Looking at his life and what he said, we can see that Jesus does carve out a place in society for legitimate authority. For instance, when it came to passing on his teachings, Jesus specifically instituted an authority to preserve the Truth. He told his twelve apostles, “Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Mt. 16:18).” He gave his apostles the power to “bind” and “loose,” which are terms of authority. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the twelve apostles and their successors, the bishops, have been given authority to pass on the faith to generations of people.

Despite this teaching, many Christians today would still advocate for a religion, and even a society, without authority of any kind. So, what’s our answer to them? Well, in order to understand why authority is not only necessary but good for mankind, it’s first important to

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understand what exactly we mean when we say authority. The Catechism actually gives a simple answer to this question when it says that authority “means the quality by virtue of which persons or institutions make laws and give orders to men and expect obedience from them (CCC 1897).”

In other words, authority is a trait, or a characteristic that someone has. In particular, it’s a trait that allows someone to tell another person what to do and expect that person to follow it. From this definition, then, we run into another aspect of authority: some people have authority, and other people don’t. In order for authority to work, you can’t simply have everybody running around telling everybody else what to do. Nobody would listen, and nothing would get done! Thus, if authority is going to exist, there must be some people that have this quality and some people who don’t.

This quality of authority, though, doesn’t just come out of nowhere. The Church teaches that, spiritually speaking, all authority comes from God. Indeed, in his letter to the Romans, St. Paul says, “There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed (Rom. 13:1-2).” It is God that gives authority to people, and God can do this because he is the supreme authority over all. This authority is rooted in his very nature as the source of all being. Since he gives existence to all of creation, he has the power to guide all creation. It is his right to be able to order creation in this or that way, bringing about his will. And, since he is a loving God, we can be confident that he uses his authority to bring about our own good. He says as much when Jesus states, “What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent?...If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him! (Lk. 11:11, 13).”

God has authority over his creation, then, and he uses this authority to guide that creation toward what’s best. In turn, he then invites some men to participate in his authority. Thus, in the previous example of the apostles, he gave them authority to bind and loose, an authority that grants the Church, among other things, the power to forgive sins. However, this power is one that specifically belongs to God. That is why the Pharisees became so upset with Jesus when he told the paralytic “Your sins are forgiven (Mk 2: 5).” They objected to Jesus doing what only God could do because they did not recognize Jesus as God. But when it came to the apostles, and later their successors the bishops, God gave them the ability to share in his authority over the forgiveness of sins.

The bishops and apostles, though, are not the only people to whom God has given authority. He also gives authority to our civic leaders, our parents, and our teachers, just to mention a few. Each of these people has authority over us, and God expects us to obey their authority. They have each been given authority from God so that they can lead us towards our good, towards our fulfillment. Politicians have authority, then, not just so that they can have power, but so that they can order all of society towards what is called the common good. Similarly, parents and teachers have authority so that they can teach us how to love God, and how to be good men and women.

However, when we say that God is the source of all authority, we do not mean that he endorses any particular authority’s views or actions. Indeed, when commenting on St. Paul’s statement that “there is no authority except from God (Rom 13:1),” St. John Chrysostom says:

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“What are you saying? Is every ruler appointed by God? No, that is not what I mean, he says, for I am not now talking about individual rulers, but about authority as such. My contention is that the existence of a ruling authority—the fact that some should command and others obey, and that all things not come about as the result of blind chance—this is a provision of divine wisdom.” (Homily 23 on Romans, St. John Chrysostom, quoted in *Pacem in Terris*, Pope John XXII, Para. 46)

Thus, if an authority is bad and seeks what is immoral or unjust, it is not God approving of what is evil. Rather, God puts authority in this world, and thus we are to be obedient to authorities as far as they obey the laws of God. However, those authorities can use their position for evil. It’s similar to free will: God gives us the power to choose between good and evil, but just because we choose evil does not mean that God approves, even though he gave us the power to do it! Rather, he gives us the power and we must decide how to use it. In the same way, God gives authority to some people, and they must choose how to use it. If they decide to govern like a tyrant, trying to gain things for themselves at the expense of those governed, they have abused their authority the way we have abused our free will when we sin.

So, while all authority finds its source in God, not all authority necessarily follows God’s law or plan for creation. However, we can say that authority also comes from those who are governed. This might help explain why some authority today is bad. While all authority does come from God, he first gives that authority to the community as a whole. This community has what is called “sovereignty,” or in other words, the community has authority over itself and control over its own actions. In order for a community to work, the sovereignty that is shared by all the people is then given to only some (those in government) for the sake of the whole community. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* says, “In various forms, this people transfers the exercise of sovereignty to those whom it freely elects as its representatives, but it preserves the prerogative to assert this sovereignty in evaluating the work of those charged with governing (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, 395).” If the community is bad, then, like modern America’s culture of death, it will likely elect bad authorities.

Authority, then, is transferred to government because of the **sovereignty**, or self-control, of the people. This holds true for all forms of government. In a monarchy, the king is only able to rule because the people approve his authority. In an aristocracy, the dukes and duchesses only rule because the people give them authority. However, the Church says that nowhere is this principle more clear than in the Democratic form of government. We can see this very plainly in our own government and society. We give our authority to certain people by voting for them. We’re able to do this because God first made us a community and gave us our own sovereignty, our own self-rule. Then, we transfer this authority to those in government so that they can do what is best for us and guide us towards the common good. We don’t give this authority to others so that we can be ruled over cruelly! Rather, we grant this authority to other men so that they can bring about the good of the community. Thus, God is the ultimate source of their authority, but so are we in so far as we choose them to rule over us.

This brings us to another essential aspect of authority, which is that authority is not meant solely for the good of the person in charge, but rather it is meant for the good of the whole community

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the person is in charge of. The politician is supposed to use his authority to make life better for the city, or state, or nation he is in charge of. The parent has authority so that they can bring up their children well. Teachers have authority so as to educate their pupils. None of these people are given authority solely for their own sake, but rather they are called to be like God and use their authority for the good of others.

Authority's main purpose is to bring about what's best for those that are governed, and this is why authority is necessary. Indeed, the Catechism tells us that, "Every human community needs an authority to govern it. The foundation of such authority lies in human nature. It is necessary for the unity of the state (CCC 1898)." Can you imagine what it would be like if you never had any parents, or anybody above you, telling you how to behave? You'd end up almost like a wild animal! We need good examples. Similarly, society needs an authority that can determine what is best for the whole society. Without this authority, even simple things would fall apart. For instance, how would we know to drive on the right side of the road without someone determining that it is the side of the road we should drive on?

Indeed, authority is so needed by human nature that St. Thomas Aquinas actually argues that authority would have been needed in the Garden of Eden before the fall. In other words, since man before the fall would have been social, he would have formed communities. And since communities are made of many people, and many people want to do many different things, there still would have needed to be an authority to organize them and direct them towards one thing, the common good.

In order for authorities to bring about the good of those who are governed, though, the people who they rule over have to obey them. If we don't obey those authorities that God has placed over us, then the common good cannot be accomplished. This is why we must be obedient to authorities. In fact, St. Paul warns us not to be disobedient to rulers saying,

"For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of him who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. ...Therefore one must be subject, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience." (Rom 13: 3-5)

We need to be obedient to authorities over us so that they can bring about our own good.

In fact, in Christian tradition, obedience has been seen as a virtue. Obedience allows us the opportunity to practice humility and give up our own will. It involves trusting that another person knows what is best for us better than we do. By practicing the virtue of obedience, we gain humility, and we do what is for our own good. This is why, in the religious life, priests, monks, and nuns often have to take a vow of obedience. They take this vow as a way of giving up their own will so as to cling ever more dearly to Christ's will for them. Similarly, as lay people, obedience to legitimate authorities can bring us closer to Christ. We don't need to take a religious vow in order to benefit from obedience.

So, just to recap before we move on. Authority is the power to give orders and expect them to be obeyed, and these orders ought to be rightly ordered for the common good of those who are

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under obedience. This authority comes from God, who is the supreme authority because he is the source of all existence. Earthly authority participates in God's authority, ordering things to the common good, and we ought to obey those authorities that are over us. But what about when the authority is bad? What about Hitler? He had authority. Should Catholics have had to obey him?

Fortunately for us, the Catholic Church teaches that authority is illegitimate when used in such a way, since it is not really directing things towards the common good. When authority mandates things that are contrary to the common good, then we are not obligated to obey these orders, since authority is not doing what it's supposed to do. The Catechism explains this beautifully when it says,

Authority is exercised legitimately only when it seeks the common good of the group concerned and if it employs morally licit means to attain it. If rulers were to enact unjust laws or take measures contrary to the moral order, such arrangements would not be binding in conscience. In such a case, "authority breaks down completely and results in shameful abuse." (CCC 1903)

Thus, Catholics in Hitler's Germany would not have been obligated to obey the orders of the government that were immoral, like taking part in the Holocaust of the Jews. Since the order to kill Jews was an order to do something immoral, it was not a binding order.

Now, before you go home and tell your parents that you're not going to ever clean your room again because it doesn't contribute to the common good, it's essential to understand what exactly the common good is. In fact, authority and the common good are so tied together that it's really not possible to understand one without the other.

Just as we began by defining what authority was, we also have to start the discussion of the common good with a definition. Again, the Church is extremely helpful here and provides us with just such a definition. The Second Vatican Council defined the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment (*Gaudium et Spes* 26)." So, the common good is a sort of state of being in society where every man has the ability to reach his fulfillment. Since man is such a rich and beautiful creature, the common good is going to be brought about by the arranging of a broad spectrum of things.

Man's nature, as body and soul, means that his fulfillment is ultimately going to incorporate both material and spiritual goods, and thus the common good is going to have to do with both material and spiritual things. For instance, you cannot have a common good in a society where most of the people are hungry, since man is not going to be able to reach his fulfillment while in a constant state of food deprivation. Indeed, this is why the Church has always sought to establish social service institutions such as food banks, hospitals, and adoption agencies to serve the material needs of man.

However, today's authorities are increasingly becoming concerned with only the material aspect of the common good. At present, the government often provides many means of taking care of the poor, but in order to truly bring about the common good we must also be concerned with the spiritual side of man. This is especially important considering that man's ultimate fulfillment is

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found in union with God here and in the next life. In fact, Pope Benedict directly addressed this in his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* saying, “Without the perspective of eternal life, human progress in this world is denied breathing-space. Enclosed within history, it runs the risk of being reduced to the mere accumulation of wealth (*Caritas in Veritate*, 11).”

The Pope is saying that in order to bring about the common good, the state ought to promote and serve the spiritual realm. Indeed, there are still several ways in which the state already does this. For instance, the state currently does not tax the Catholic Church on donations it receives. By recognizing that the Church is different from a business, the state gives the Church the ability to use all of its funds to serve the spiritual needs of the community. Similarly, the state makes it attractive to give to the Church by making all donations to the Church tax deductible. This means that when you give money to the Church, you don't have to pay taxes on the money.

So, for the common good to come about, man's spiritual needs need to be kept in mind by the state. Particularly, civil authority must recognize that man needs to be taught by the Church about Christ, and must be allowed the opportunity to come closer to Jesus through the Church and through the Gospels. Without God, man cannot be happy. Today, though, many wish to remove any governmental support for the spiritual. Those in authority today are by and large focused solely on making man wealthy and content, allowing him to pursue whatever pleasure he wishes, without being concerned about his spiritual fulfillment. They worry about the price of gas rising, but they do not worry about the spread of pornography throughout the country, even though pornography is much more harmful to the welfare of man than the price of gas. Thus, in order to truly bring about the common good, we must always remember that it has both this material and spiritual element. It is not enough to address one without the other.

Keeping this in mind, the Catechism teaches us that there are three essential elements to bringing about the common good:

**First**, the Church teaches that without respect for man's fundamental right to life, authority loses all respect for humanity in general and thus loses the ability to bring about the common good. Our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI emphasized this when he said, “Openness to life is at the center of true development. When a society moves towards the denial or suppression of life, it ends up no longer finding the necessary motivation and energy to strive for man's true good (*Caritas in Veritate*, 28).” Thus, the first step towards achieving the common good is respect for the person as a person, not a thing.

**Second**, the Catechism says that “the common good requires the **social well-being and development** of the group itself (CCC 1908).” This means that authority must be concerned with actually bringing about a better life for the people it rules. Authorities cannot act like tyrants and only for their own good, trying to make themselves wealthier or more powerful. Rather, authorities must rule in such a way that the people underneath them have better access to all the goods necessary to live a human life. They must work to ensure that the people underneath them have access to “food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, etc. (CCC 1908).”

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**Third**, the Church says that “the common good requires **peace**, that is, the stability and security of a just order (CCC 1909).” Without peace, man cannot live a good life. In war-torn countries, his rights and freedoms are often taken away, and it becomes impossible for him to reach his fulfillment. Thus, authorities have the right, and even the obligation, to ensure the safety of those they govern. This requirement of peace is the basis for legitimate just war in defense of the people ruled. However, authorities must still act within moral boundaries when going to war in defense of the people.

To summarize, then, authority is a gift given by God for the betterment of all peoples, and it is founded upon the words of Christ when he said, “Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s (Mt 22: 15-17).” The power of Caesar is a legitimate power, and we owe obedience to that legitimate authority. This is why we are obligated to pay taxes, defend the country when called upon, and obey the laws. These authorities have power over us from God for our own good and the good of others and we should submit to them. However, their power from God comes through the people granting them authority, thus we must always remain vigilant and hold authorities accountable.

In addition to us rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, authorities must also recognize the things that are God’s, and encourage man to give God those things that are due to him; namely reverence, fidelity, and above all, love. As such, the vocation of those in authority is a great one since they are responsible for aiding souls in the journey towards Christ. If authority mandates things that are immoral, it does not bring about the common good it was meant for, and thus the mandates are not binding. Indeed, Jesus warns such authorities “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea (Mt 18: 6).” Thus, authority ought to aim at the true good of man, both the good of his body and of his soul. If it does, it will follow in the steps of Christ the King, who used his authority to destroy sin and bring man closer to God.

### APPLICATION

#### Activity Option # 1: Discuss specific laws and the common good

Supplies: paper

Divide students into small groups of 4 or 5 students. Give each group of students a piece of paper describing a law that is currently being discussed in the news, or one that is well-known from history. Be sure to describe the law in common sense terms so that the teens understand what exactly the law is accomplishing. You only need one piece of legislation for all the groups to discuss, or you can choose more than one if you think it would be more fruitful. Then, have the groups discuss how the law favors the common good, and also if there are any ways in which the law is contrary to the common good. Then, have the groups pick one person to present their findings to the group as a whole.

Examples of laws that can be discussed:

- Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act
- Food stamps
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> amendment – right to bear arms
- the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment – end of slavery

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- Social Security
- the driving age being 16
- copyright laws regarding sharing of digital music

### Activity Option # 2: The Human Knot

Divide your group into teams. (The average size of a human knot is 10 people. More than this becomes difficult, so divide your group accordingly.) From each team, pick a leader. Each team stands in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, facing inwards, while the leaders stand outside the circles. Then, all the teens in the circles reach out and grab hands with two other people in the circle. They cannot grab hands with the person next to them, and they cannot grab two hands of the same person. Also, they cannot let go until the game is over! Now, the two circles should be in a “knot” with their arms. It is the job of the leaders to direct the group in how to untangle the knot, so that by the end of the game the teens are standing in a circle again. You can even phrase the instructions in the terms of the talk, telling the teens that the leader has been given authority over them in order to bring about their common good, i.e. the untangling of the knot. The teens in the knot can make suggestions as to how to untangle the knot, but they can only do something if the leader tells them. The first team to untangle the knot wins. This is a good way for the teens to learn how to work together and how to follow authority.

If there’s time afterwards, have the teens discuss what lessons they learned from “The Human Knot” relating to the themes of authority and the common good. What was the common good involved in the game? How was it reached? Was it helpful to have someone outside the knot to guide them? Was it helpful to the leader to have feedback from those in the knot?

### Activity Option # 3: Personal Reflection Time on Authority

Divide the students into groups of about four or five. Based on what was said in the presentation, have the small groups discuss the question, “What good authorities are in my life?” Perhaps they can think of a parent or teacher that at one time or another exercised authority over them for their own benefit. Have them discuss these specific examples, and then answer several questions about the examples they have come up with. Some questions that could be asked are:

- In what way did this person use his or her authority? Did he or she directly tell you what to do? Or did they lead more by example?
- How did this good use of authority benefit you? How did it lead you closer to Christ?
- How did this person’s actions teach me the purpose of authority in my own life? Did it make me want to be a better leader at school or in my family?
- Did my being obedient to this person help me in this situation?
- Did I have a prior relationship with this person? If so, was this the only reason I benefited from their help? If not, what about them prompted me to be more obedient to their authority in this instance?
- How does this example of good authority help me recognize bad authority when I see it?
- How does reflecting on this good example of authority lead me to better understand the loving authority God has over me in my life?

# Authority...It Really is for Your Own Good

## SEND

### Summary: What does this have to do with Jesus?

Jesus commanded us to “render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s (Mt 22:21).” It is part of our vocation as Christians to be obedient to legitimate authorities, and by doing so we gain humility and become more like Christ who “humbled himself and became obedient unto death (Phil. 2:8).” Further, some of us may be called to hold authority, and as such we are called to a closer union with Christ as King, who used his authority to free us from sin. By using authority to bring about the common good, we act as a disciple of Christ in aiding others along the road to salvation.

### Closing Prayer

#### Prayer for Political Authorities by St. Clement of Rome

Grant to them, Lord, health, peace, concord, and stability, so that they may exercise without offense the sovereignty that you have given them. Master, heavenly King of the ages, you give glory, honor, and power over the things of earth to the sons of men. Direct, Lord, their counsel, following what is pleasing and acceptable in your sight, so that by exercising with devotion and in peace and gentleness the power that you have given to them, they may find favor with you.

(Source: CCC 1900)

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR HISPANIC YOUTH MINISTRY

Many parents of Hispanic teens face significant time pressures due to circumstances at their job or jobs. These increased pressures can lead to less time and energy for the attention needed to interact with their teens. This can result in a lot of “Because I said so” as a response to disagreements over issues in a teens life. Therefore it’s very important for Hispanic teens to see start to look for the rationale in why a person in authority makes decisions. Also, culturally there is a lot of importance placed on respect for people in authority so it’s important for them to also develop an understanding of pursuing the common good being an important link with authority.

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### Biography

*Matthew Anderson graduated from Christendom College in 2009. He is currently a religion teacher and adult faith formation director for Sacred Heart Parish and School in East Grand Forks, MN. He also writes on religion and politics on his blog "On the Shoulders of Giants." Matthew was married to his beautiful wife Elizabeth in July, 2010, and they are blessed with one son, Alan.*