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Can the Seamless Garment Be Sewn?  
The Future of Pro-Life Progressivism

American Catholics and the  
Structure of Life Attitudes

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*Fides et Iustitia*

ARTICLE

AMERICAN CATHOLICS AND THE  
STRUCTURE OF LIFE ATTITUDES

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In his defense of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago sought to expand the scope of the letter's moral arguments by suggesting that Catholic positions on a number of issues be integrated to embrace a "consistent ethic of life."<sup>1</sup> This general pro-life *gestalt*, according to Bernardin, would cut across a number of issues, including abortion, capital punishment, the conduct of warfare, and "the care of the terminally ill."<sup>2</sup> Bernardin suggested that these issue positions, and others, are part of a single, life-affirming dimension, which he likened to a "seamless garment."<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this study is to provide an empirical investigation of the extent to which lay Catholics and Catholic priests understand and apply the consistent ethic of life to a variety of issues to which the seamless garment is clearly relevant. Do American Catholics embody the life ethic in their thinking about political issues? In this article, I will show that relatively few lay Catholics take "pro-life" positions on most of these issues. While priests are more likely to take life-affirming positions on specific issues, neither priests nor laity exhibit structures of attitude organization corresponding to the consistent life ethic.

Early research<sup>4</sup> has shown that adherence to the seamless garment among lay Catholics in the United States has been quite limited. For a number of reasons, it seems unlikely that American Catholics will exhibit

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1. See generally Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *Consistent Ethic of Life* (Sheed & Ward 1988).  
2. Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *Call for a Consistent Ethic of Life*, 13 *Origins* 491, 493 (Dec. 29, 1983).  
3. Bernardin, *supra* n. 1.  
4. J. Stephen Cleghorn, *Respect for Life: Research Notes on Cardinal Bernardin's "Seamless Garment"*, 28 *Rev. Relig. Research* 129, 139 (1986); Ted G. Jelen, *Religious Belief and Attitude Constraint*, 29 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 118, 124 (1990).

attitudes consistent with the seamless garment. First, American Catholics occupy dual roles as religious believers and citizens of the United States. In the latter capacity, most Americans have come to value individual autonomy, and many have applied this value to their spiritual lives as well. For many American Catholics, Church teachings are considered advisory, and many members of the laity in the United States do not regard adherence to the positions of the Church as essential components of their Catholic identity,<sup>5</sup> although it has been shown that, under some circumstances, the pronouncements of the United Conference of Catholic Bishops can have strong (if perhaps temporary) effects on Catholic opinion.<sup>6</sup> Thus, even if one assumes that the consistent ethic of life is being communicated from the clergy to the laity, it is not clear that Catholic laypeople would experience any pressure to conform to this standard.

Second, the consistent ethic of life is abstract and cognitively demanding. Adherence to consistent life-affirming positions requires the ability to discern the common moral dimension among a number of apparently disparate issues. Citizens (and, presumably, Church members) are more likely to learn and to act on issue positions that are “easy.”<sup>7</sup> Understanding that issues such as abortion and capital punishment (for example) embody a common moral principle may be beyond the grasp of unsophisticated or inattentive members of the mass public. Moreover, the cognitive basis of the seamless garment may be further complicated by the fact that the issue positions subsumed under the consistent life ethic cut across ideological (and partisan) lines in the United States. Thus, pro-life positions on abortion or euthanasia are typically associated with “conservatism” in American political discourse, while opposition to defense spending or the death penalty are typically regarded as “liberal” positions. The cues provided by the Church—if indeed such cues are being provided—are often incompatible with those offered by political or journalistic elites.

Third, the specific issues associated with the consistent ethic of life are multidimensional, and involve other considerations than just matters of life and death. Attitudes about abortion are intertwined with beliefs about appropriate sexual mores and differing conceptions of the social roles of women. The “life” which is arguably being taken during an abortion is presumably innocent, in the sense of being morally undeserving of death; the same may not be said of enemy soldiers in wartime or of convicted

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5. William V. D'Antonio et al., *American Catholics: Gender, Generation, and Commitment* (AltaMira Press 2001); Patrick H. McNamara, *Conscience First, Tradition Second: A Study of Young American Catholics* (S.U.N.Y. Press 1992).

6. See e.g. Kenneth D. Wald, *Religious Elites and Public Opinion: The Impact of the Bishops' Peace Pastoral*, 61 Rev. Pol. 744 (1999) (reviewing the influence of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops' 1983 pastoral letter, *The Challenge of Peace*, on American attitudes about war and peace).

7. Cf. Edward G. Carmines & James A. Stimson, *The Two Faces of Issue Voting*, 74 Am. Political Sci. Rev. 78 (Mar. 1980).

murderers sentenced to death. Issues such as welfare and health care have elements of taxation and spending that may detract attention from their life-affirming principles. Applying a consistent life ethic to these diverse issues may not only involve the discernment of a common moral principle, but may also involve selective inattention to other aspects of particular questions of public policies.

Finally, the issue positions that compose the seamless garment often vary in salience across time periods, and across individuals. It is perhaps no accident that Bernardin's public advocacy of the consistent life ethic occurred during the early years of the Reagan administration, during which the President of the United States was actively engaged in reducing the role of government in assisting disadvantaged citizens, and actively contemplating aggressive changes in the nuclear strategy of the United States. Indeed, Cleghorn has suggested that Bernardin's advocacy of the consistent ethic of life was occasioned by the writing of *The Challenge of Peace* in 1983.<sup>8</sup> More generally, Timothy Byrnes has shown that the political activity of American Catholic bishops has been largely responsive to the contemporary context of electoral politics<sup>9</sup>—that is, the context and timing of the bishops' pronouncements has typically reflected the existing political agenda of U.S. politics. Further, the public salience of the abortion issue has waxed and waned since the U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*,<sup>10</sup> in part in response to changing government policies and Court decisions.<sup>11</sup> Further, aside from changes in political contexts, it is possible (indeed likely) that individual Catholic priests and bishops may attach greater or lesser importance to various "life issues." For these reasons, it is entirely possible that the pro-life *gestalt* that underlies the seamless garment may not be communicated clearly to the laity.

In this study, the extent and organization of pro-life attitudes are examined in samples of lay Catholics and Roman Catholic priests. The data presented here will show that American Catholics do not view "life issues" through a prism of a consistent life ethic. I will also suggest that it is perhaps unreasonable to expect them to do so, given the attitudes of Catholic priests who (presumably) provide religious and moral cues to the laity.

#### *The Consistent Ethic of Life: Operational Considerations*

To the extent that Catholics adhere to a consistent-life ethic as described by Cardinal Bernardin, one might anticipate that Catholic attitudes on issues related to the seamless garment would have two characteristics. First, one would expect that Catholics would take pro-life positions on any

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8. Cleghorn, *supra* n. 7.

9. Timothy A. Byrnes, *Catholic Bishops in American Politics* (Princeton U. Press 1991).

10. 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

11. Ted G. Jelen & Clyde Wilcox, *Causes and Consequences of Public Attitudes toward Abortion: A Review and Research Agenda*, 56 *Political Research Q.* 489 (2003).

particular issues for which the life ethic seemed relevant—that is, pro-life Catholics would be likely to oppose legal abortion and the death penalty, and to favor government spending on health care and welfare. Further, pro-life Catholics would be expected to oppose military spending and to favor gun control.

Second, one would expect genuinely pro-life Catholics to evince rather simple (even unidimensional) attitude *structures*. The idea of an attitude structure refers to the number of underlying dimensions that a given person can bring to bear on a set of issue attitudes, or, alternatively, the number of distinctions such a person wishes to make. To illustrate, a respondent who took consistently pro-life positions on issues such as abortion, capital punishment, euthanasia, and the use of military force would exhibit a one-dimensional attitude structure. By contrast, a person who distinguished between the taking of “innocent” life (abortion, euthanasia) and the taking of lives because of the negative characteristics of the persons whose lives were taken (death penalty, military force) would be characterized as having an attitude structure with two dimensions. Clearly, the thrust of the consistent-life ethic suggests that all these issues, and others, are cut from the same cloth, and, therefore, that a unidimensional attitude structure is to be preferred.

In other words, adherence to a consistent ethic of life would require that Catholic attitudes on life issues exhibit a particular *direction*, and that the relationships between such attitudes exhibit a particular (simple) *structure*. In this study, the direction and structure of life attitudes is investigated in samples of Catholic laity and Catholic priests. The results from the survey of priests may provide evidence concerning the religiously based cues received by Catholic laypersons.

#### *Data and Method*

Data for this study were taken from two sources. Data for the Catholic laity were taken from the 1972-2002 General Social Surveys (GSS). The analyses presented here are confined to self-identified Roman Catholics. In order to ensure an adequate number of cases for analysis, the data were pooled for all years. Inspection of the marginal distributions for the seven survey items that composed the dependent variables for this study shows that the attitudes in question do not vary substantially across the time span of the GSS.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, lay Catholics do not appear more likely to take pro-life positions or to exhibit greater attitude consistency after Bernardin’s articulation of the consistent ethic of life than before. Moreover, inclusion of dummy variables corresponding to the presidential terms covered during the GSS in the multivariate analyses presented here<sup>13</sup> does not substantially

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12. See *infra* app. C.

13. See *infra* tbls. 4 & 6.

affect the results presented here.

The analyses of the attitudes of Catholic priests are based on a national mail survey of Roman Catholic pastors in the United States. This survey was part of the Cooperative Clergy Study Project.<sup>14</sup> The mailing list came from two simple random samples of one thousand Roman Catholic parishes drawn from the National Parish Inventory (NPI). The NPI is a database of all Catholic parishes in the United States that is maintained by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) located at Georgetown University. Two waves of the survey were sent to the first sample in January and March of 2001, and a second sample received one mailing in February 2002. These mailings yielded 454 usable questionnaires for a somewhat disappointing response rate of 22.7 percent. Although this is not unusual for a mail survey, the relatively small *N* suggests that the results presented here should be interpreted with caution.<sup>15</sup> However, several of the bivariate relationships discerned in analyses of these data are consistent with other national surveys of Catholic priests.<sup>16</sup>

For each survey, attitudes toward seven "life issues" are considered: abortion, euthanasia, capital punishment, defense spending, gun control, welfare spending, and government spending on health care. Although there are important differences in question wording between the two surveys,<sup>17</sup> both samples provided responses to the same range of public policy questions.

This study includes analyses of the distribution of attitudes on life issues among Catholic clergy and lay Catholics, as well as consideration of the cognitive structure underlying those attitudes. Further, multivariate models will be estimated, in which the sources of attitude direction and consistency are investigated.

### *The Distribution of Life Attitudes*

To what extent do American Catholics take pro-life positions on a range of issues on which the consistent ethic of life might seem relevant? This question is addressed in Table 1, which simply contains the marginal

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14. See Corwin Smidt, *Clergy in American Politics: An Introduction*, 42 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 495 (2003) [hereinafter *Cooperative Clergy Study Project*].

15. See Mary E. Bendyna & Ted G. Jelen, Paper Presentation, *The Political Activities of Roman Catholic Priests in the Election of 2000* (Annual Meeting of the Am. Political Sci. Assn., San Francisco, Cal., Aug. 30, 2001); Ted G. Jelen, *Catholic Priests and the Political Order: The Political Behavior of Catholic Pastors*, 42 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 591 (2003).

16. See e.g. Dean R. Hoge & Jacqueline E. Wenger, *Evolving Visions of the Priesthood: Changes from Vatican II to the Turn of the New Century* (Liturgical Press 2003); Dean R. Hoge et al., *Changes in Satisfaction and Institutional Attitudes of Catholic Priests, 1970-1993*, 56 *Sociology of Religion* 195 (1995); Larry B. Stammer, *Conservative Trend Found in Younger Priests*, *L.A. Times A1* (Feb. 21, 1994); Teresa Watanabe, *Young Priests Hold Old Values*, *L.A. Times A1* (Oct. 21, 2002).

17. See *infra* app. A.

distributions of members of both samples taking life-affirming positions across the seven issues considered in this study.

Table 1:		
Percentage Taking Pro-Life Positions		
	<i>Laity</i>	<i>Priests</i>
Abortion	17.1*	37.9**
Euthanasia	32.2	75.9
Death Penalty	21.0	90.4
Defense Spending	33.7	31.7
Gun Control	83.1	69.9
Healthcare Spending	67.2	72.8
Welfare Spending	17.8	31.1
* Percent willing to allow legal abortion in one or zero circumstances.		
** Priest question asks about constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion.		
Sources: <i>General Social Surveys, infra</i> app. A; <i>Cooperative Clergy Study Project, supra</i> n. 14.		

As the data in Table 1 indicate, pro-life attitudes are far from universal among Catholic clergy or laity. Among the Catholic members of the GSS sample, pro-life positions only attract majority support with respect to the issues of gun control and healthcare spending. About a third of Catholic laypeople oppose euthanasia or favor reduced defense spending, while a fifth or fewer take life-affirming positions on the death penalty, abortion, or welfare spending.

Proponents of the seamless garment can take somewhat greater comfort from the distribution of pro-life attitudes among Catholic priests, but such a reaction must be qualified carefully. On four of the seven issues considered, large majorities of clergy take positions consistent with the life ethic. Indeed, priestly opposition to euthanasia and support for gun control and healthcare spending is very high, and clerical opposition to the death penalty is overwhelming. Further, the limited number of priests taking a pro-life position on abortion is undoubtedly attributable to the wording of the abortion question on the clergy survey, which asks respondents about the necessity of a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion (with exceptions). It seems quite likely that some members of the priest sample disagreed with the statement because of exceptions for rape, incest, or maternal health, while others who might well oppose abortion disagree that an amendment to the United States Constitution is appropriate. Only on the

issues of defense spending<sup>18</sup> and welfare spending do a majority of priests take a position inconsistent with Bernardin's life ethic.

With the exception of the death penalty item, substantial numbers of priests do not take positions that might be subsumed under the life ethic. Support for the consistent ethic of life, as measured by attitudes on particular issues, is not universal even among the Catholic clergy.

### *The Structure of Life Attitudes*

If American Catholics organize their attitudes on life issues in a manner consistent with the seamless garment, one would expect a unidimensional or a very simple cognitive structure. That is, if respondents who take pro-life positions on one issue are more likely to take pro-life positions on other issues, life-issue attitudes should be organized around one, or a very few, more general *gestalts*. In other words: the simpler the attitude structure, the more internally consistent the attitudes of the population.

The statistical technique used to describe the attitude structures of the priest and lay samples is termed *factor analysis*. Factor analysis is a method that allows a researcher to determine the structure or number of underlying dimensions that best describe a given set of data—that is, across a set of respondents, the results of factor analysis describe how respondents organize different variables in the aggregate. Further, factor analysis provides a *factor loading* for each variable. Factor loading allows the researcher to determine the extent to which a given dimension (or factor) is defined by a particular variable. The factor loadings enable us to describe the substantive meaning of a given attitude dimension. For example, a factor on which attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia are exhibiting strong loadings, and on which the other variables in the analysis are loading weakly, might be considered a factor that taps attitudes toward the protection of “innocent” life.<sup>19</sup>

The question of attitude organization is addressed in Tables 2 and 3, which contain factor analyses of the seven life issues for lay Catholics and clergy, respectively. As Table 2 indicates, attitudes of the laity are organized around three underlying dimensions. The first of these is an attitude dimension defined by attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia. Substantively, the fact that these issue attitudes load on the same factor means that laypeople who take pro-life positions on abortion are also likely to take pro-life positions on the question of euthanasia (and vice versa). However, the relationships between abortion and euthanasia attitudes and the other five

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18. Interestingly, responses to this question do not seem affected by the timing of the survey. Two of the three waves were conducted before the 9/11 tragedy, and one was completed six months after the event.

19. For a more complete discussion of factor analysis, see Jae-On Kim & Charles W. Mueller, *Factor Analysis: Statistical Methods and Practical Issues* (Sage U. Series: Quantitative Applications in the Soc. Sci. No. 07-014, 1978).

life issues are considerably weaker. A second factor, termed “domestic issues,” shows that attitudes toward welfare spending, gun control, and healthcare spending are also highly related to one another. A third factor is defined by strong relationships between lay attitudes on defense spending and capital punishment. Thus, far from being subsumed under a single, pro-life *gestalt*, life attitudes among the laity are highly differentiated and therefore (from the standpoint of the life ethic) rather inconsistent.

Table 2:			
Factor Analysis of Attitudes on Life Issues: Laity			
Abortion	.792		
Euthanasia	.828		
Welfare Spending		.638	
Gun Control		.688	
Healthcare Spending		.560	
Defense Spending			.808
Death Penalty			.536
Eigenvalues	1.56	1.28	1.01
Source: <i>General Social Survey, infra</i> app. A.			
Note: Eigenvalues are estimates of the percentage of total response variation among respondents that is accounted for by a particular factor. Kim & Mueller, <i>supra</i> n. 19.			

Perhaps surprisingly, factor analysis of clerical attitudes on life issues yields a similarly complex, three-factor solution. The substantive content of the underlying dimensions of priestly attitudes is similar to that of the laity, with some subtle differences. A domestic-issues factor shows close relationships among attitudes toward healthcare spending, gun control, and the death penalty, while a second factor is defined by strong loadings from welfare spending and defense spending. It is somewhat difficult to attach a plausible substantive meaning to this factor, but the statistical explanatory power of this dimension is substantial. A final factor is identical to one of the dimensions of lay attitudes, and is defined by clerical attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia.

As was the case with the laity, the results of the analysis of clerical attitudes evince substantial differentiation, and, therefore, inconsistency with the notion that Catholic social teaching is actually motivated by adherence to a single life-affirming ethic. Without seeing a more parsimonious

Table 3:			
Factor Analysis of Attitudes on Life Issues: Priests			
Healthcare Spending	.737		
Gun Control	.780		
Death Penalty	.532		
Welfare Spending		.819	
Defense Spending		.797	
Abortion			.752
Euthanasia			.698
Eigenvalues	1.64	1.36	1.04
Source: <i>Cooperative Clergy Study Project, supra</i> n. 14.			

structure of clerical attitudes, we should not be surprised that lay attitudes about life issues are as inconsistent as these results would suggest.

#### *Sources of Life Attitudes*

The factor analyses presented in Tables 2 and 3 provide a sense of the structure of life attitudes in the aggregate. However, it seems obvious that such descriptions of entire populations conceal substantial individual variation. Clearly, some Catholic laypeople and some priests are more likely to take pro-life positions than others, as some respondents are more internally consistent (or “constrained”) than others. In this section and the next, I seek to identify characteristics that render some Catholics more pro-life, and more consistently pro-life, than their counterparts. In this section, the focus is on the direction of Catholic attitudes toward life issues, while the following section deals with sources of attitude consistency.

This section contains a number of multivariate models, which have been estimated to determine the sources of pro-life attitudes. The dependent variables are indices of pro-life attitudes for each attitude dimension defined by the factor analyses described above, as well as a composite index that summarizes the pro-life positions across all seven issues under consideration.

The statistical technique used to determine the effect of each independent variable on each dependent variable is called *multiple regression*, or, more formally, *ordinary least squares (OLS) regression*. Regression allows a researcher to compute an equation that estimates the unique effects of each independent variable on the dependent variable, while holding con-

stant the effects of the other variables in the equation. For example, in Table 4, the effects of subjective religiosity on attitudes toward abortion and euthanasia are statistically significant, even when the effects of church attendance and Bible authority are taken into account. This finding is a powerful testament to the importance of subjective religiosity, because it shows that people who describe themselves as religious are more likely than others to report frequent church attendance and to regard the Bible as an authoritative source. Thus, the effect of subjective religiosity on attitudes toward abortion/euthanasia remains important, even when the effects of church attendance and views of the Bible are taken into account.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the dependent variables for the analysis of lay attitudes are indices summarizing each respondent's attitudes on abortion and euthanasia; on the "domestic issues" of healthcare spending, welfare spending, and gun control; and on the questions of defense spending and the death penalty. An index of "all life issues" is defined by the number of pro-life positions taken on all seven life issues. Each index was computed by taking the individual mean of attitudes across the range of issues defined by each respective index.

The analysis of lay attitudes consists of three sets of independent variables. The first set consists primarily of religious variables, which include church attendance, subjective religiosity (does the respondent identify as a "strong Catholic?"), and respect for the authority of the Bible. Although a high view of scripture is not necessarily a tenet of Roman Catholicism, some research has suggested that Catholics who hold the Bible to be an authoritative source are more likely to accept Church teachings.<sup>21</sup> Further, dummy variables, which define respondents as either "pre-Vatican II Catholics" (born before 1941) or "post-Vatican II Catholics" (born after 1960), were also computed. "Vatican II Catholics" (born between 1941 and 1960) constituted the comparison category. This variable was included with the expectation that reaction to Church teaching might well be a function of early socialization, which might well vary according to one's chronological proximity to the Second Vatican Council.<sup>22</sup>

A second set of independent variables consists of standard demographic variables. These include respondent sex, race, education, marital status, and residence in the South. Finally, a third set of predictors of life

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20. For an overview of multiple regression, see Christopher H. Achen, *Interpreting and Using Regression* (Sage U. Series: Quantitative Applications in the Soc. Sci. No. 07-029, 1982). In this paper, the regression models are reported in terms of unstandardized regression coefficients. While this makes the coefficients substantively difficult to interpret, the use of unstandardized coefficients allows the magnitude of these statistics to be compared across equations (or columns) within the same table.

21. Ted Jelen, *Religion and Foreign Policy Attitudes: Exploring the Effects of Denomination and Doctrine*, 22 *Am. Pol. Q.* 382 (1994).

22. D'Antonio, *supra* n. 5.

attitudes is more political in nature, and includes respondents' partisanship and ideological self-identification.

Religious variables dominate the equation that explains attitudes toward the abortion/euthanasia issue cluster. Frequent church attendees, self-identified "strong" Catholics, and respondents who regard the Bible as an authoritative source are all more likely than other Catholics to oppose legal abortion and euthanasia. Self-identified conservatives are also more likely to report pro-life attitudes toward these issues. By contrast, pro-life attitudes on the issues that comprise the "domestic issues" cluster (gun control and government spending on health care and welfare) are best explained by political attitudes: Democrats and self-identified liberals are more likely to take pro-life positions on these issues. A mixture of religious, demographic, and political variables accounts for attitudes in the defense/death penalty issue grouping, with frequent church attendees, respondents who hold a high view of biblical authority, unmarried people, African-Americans, women, Democrats and liberals most likely to oppose capital punishment and increased defense spending. Interestingly, this set of issues is the one dimension in which the respondent's generation matters: younger Catholics are more likely to embrace life-affirming positions on the death penalty and defense spending than are other Catholics.

When the composite life index is considered, variation in the overall willingness to take pro-life positions is more difficult to explain. Although the explanatory power ( $R^2$ ) of the model is stronger than for the equations for two of the three narrow issue domains, only frequent church attendees, women, and Democrats seem distinctive in their willingness to take multiple pro-life positions across all seven issues considered here. It is also worth noting that, with the possible exception of the abortion/euthanasia issue cluster, the explanatory power of each of the equations in Table 4 is very weak.

Our analysis strategy is somewhat different when determining explanations for the variation in pro-life attitudes among Catholic priests. The survey associated with the Cooperative Clergy Study Project contains a much richer range of attitudinal variables than does the General Social Survey. In addition, there is far less variation in a number of demographic variables among members of a sample of Catholic priests. Obviously, gender and marital status do not vary at all, and there is only slight variation in race and educational attainment.<sup>23</sup> Rather, the models that are estimated to explain variation in clerical attitudes on life issues are primarily attitudinal, and, indeed, theological.

The independent variables in Table 5 include an index of the importance each respondent attached to issues of social justice (such as poverty

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23. Ted G. Jelen, *Catholic Priests and the Political Order: The Political Behavior of Catholic Pastors*, 42 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 591, 594 (2003).

Table 4:				
Multivariate Models of Mean Life Attitude Dimensions: Laity				
(OLS Regression)				
	<i>Abortion/ Euthanasia</i>	<i>Domestic Issues<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Defense/Death Penalty</i>	<i>All Life Issues</i>
Pre-Vatican II	-.030	.004	.016	.008
Post-Vatican II	.027	-.004	.038*	.024
Church Attendance	.032***	-.001	.014**	.012**
Subjective Religiosity	.066***	-.011	-.009	-.008
Bible Authority	.058***	.010	.041**	-.008
Married	.015	.004	0.33*	.011
Black	.054	.051	.151***	.042
Sex	.005	.041**	.047**	.027*
Education	-.003	.000	.001	.002
South	.025	.003	-.008	-.017
Party ID	.005	-.016***	-.024***	.017***
Liberal/Conservative	.045***	-.019**	-.025***	.006
Constant	1.28	1.62	1.07	1.37
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.200	.039	.073	.093
N	1642	1281	1974	783
* Significant at .05.				
** Significant at .01.				
*** Significant at .001.				
<sup>1</sup> Includes welfare spending, healthcare spending, and gun control.				
Source: <i>General Social Survey, infra app. A.</i>				

and racial discrimination) as well as an index of the priority given to issues relating to the agenda of the Christian Right (e.g., abortion, school prayer). Three other measures tap different aspects of clerical theology: “public religion,” or attitudes about the role of religion in American public life; doctrinal orthodoxy; and ecumenism (see Appendix B for details of index construction).

The regression equations in this table also include measures of respondent belief in the authority of the Bible (an item not included in the orthodoxy index), clerical attitudes about whether the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) should take positions on political issues, and

an item which taps the attitudes of priests on a dimension of "individualism/communalism."<sup>24</sup>

Table 5 also includes a variable that distinguishes priests under the age of forty from the rest of the sample. Previous analyses of these data have shown that younger priests are considerably more theologically and politically conservative than their elders.<sup>25</sup> This result is consistent with other recent analyses of clerical attitudes among Catholic priests.<sup>26</sup> Finally, the models estimated in Table 5 include measures of partisan identification, ideological self-placement, and residence in the South.

The results presented in Table 5 suggest that the sources of clerical attitudes within different issue domains vary considerably. When attitudes toward the abortion/euthanasia cluster are considered, only the effects of Southern residence approach statistical significance (at .10). Further, the explanatory power of this model is quite weak.

The equations associated with priests' attitudes on domestic issues (including attitudes toward healthcare spending, gun control, and the death penalty) and the defense spending/welfare spending dimensions are considerably more robust. For both sets of issue attitudes, Democrats and respondents who regard religion as a public matter are more likely to take pro-life positions on these issues than other respondents. With respect to the domestic issues dimension, self-identified liberals and respondents who attach high priority to issues of social justice are more likely to take pro-life positions, while biblical literalists and priests who attach importance to issues associated with the agenda of the Christian Right are less likely to apply the consistent ethic of life to domestic issues. Priests who take pro-life positions on the defense/welfare dimension are less likely to assign importance to issues of social justice, and more likely hold communalist, rather than individualist, theological attitudes.

Finally, the explanatory model depicted in Table 5 shows that there are few variables which predict clerical propensity to take life-affirming positions across all seven issue attitudes considered here. Adherence to the consistent-life ethic is strongest among younger priests, priests who place a high priority on issues of social justice, and those who favor a strong public role for religion. Again, the explanatory power of the model in which all life attitudes comprise the dependent variable is quite modest.

This moderately complex set of results can be summarized rather easily. While clearly there are priests and lay Catholics who take pro-life positions across a portion of the "life agenda," or across all seven issues considered in this analysis, there is no set of variables or attitudes that con-

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24. David C. Leege, *Catholics and the Civic Order*, 50 Rev. Pol. 704 (1988); see Appendix A for wording questions.

25. Bendyna & Jelen, *supra* n. 15.

26. See Leege, *supra* n. 24.

Table 5:				
Multivariate Models of Mean Life Attitude Dimensions: Priests				
(OLS Regression)				
	<i>Abortion/ Euthanasia</i>	<i>Domestic Issues<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Defense/Welfare</i>	<i>All Life Issues</i>
40 and Under	-.130	.230	.239	.148****
Party ID	.037	.079**	.146***	.002
Liberal/Conservative	.030	.089****	-.065	.021
South	-.281****	-.210	-.148	-.021
Importance: Social Issues	.124	.281**	-.192*	.112*
Importance: Christian Social Right Agenda	-.075	-.179*	.133	-.055
Public Religion	.055	.196**	.18*	.140**
Catholic Orthodoxy	-.098	-.40	-.015	-.043
Ecumenism	-.134	.000	-.029	-.049
Bible Authority	.008	-.136**	.047	-.044
USCCB Take Position	-.039	.027	.062	.019
Communal Religion	.011	-.036	.076*	.011
Constant	3.42	1.14	3.09	2.33
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.009	.296	.328	.079
N	227	217	224	214
* Significant at .05.				
** Significant at .01.				
*** Significant at .001.				
**** Significant at .10.				
<sup>1</sup> Includes healthcare spending, death penalty, and gun control.				
Source: <i>Cooperative Clergy Study Project</i> , <i>supra</i> n. 14.				

sistently distinguishes pro-life Catholics from their coreligionists. Substantively, this finding suggests that even Catholics who take apparently pro-life positions on particular issues (whether in the pulpit or in the pew) tend to be issue specialists, and do not connect these attitudes to a more general theological attitude structure.

*Sources of Attitude Constraint*

The preceding section was focused on the *direction* of clerical and lay attitudes toward sets of "life issues." In this section, attention is shifted to the *consistency* of attitudes on these issues. The analyses presented in Tables 2 and 3 above showed that, in the aggregate, neither laypersons nor priests exhibited anything approaching a unidimensional attitude structure across the seven life issues under investigation. In this section, an attempt is made to determine whether individual Catholics who hold consistent life attitudes can be identified.

For the following analyses, the independent variables are identical to those used in the equations that are comprised in Tables 4 and 5. However, the dependent variables in the following tables are estimates of individual attitude consistency. These are computed by recoding all issue positions to a common range and direction, and computing individual standard deviations across all seven issue attitudes. Thus, a respondent who takes consistently pro-life (or anti-life) positions across all issues within an attitudinal dimension would have a standard deviation of 0, which would indicate very high internal consistency. Higher scores indicate lower levels of attitudinal constraint.<sup>27</sup> Individual constraint scores are computed for each issue dimension identified by the factor analyses for members of both samples, and for the entire range of life issues.

As the multivariate models presented in Table 6 show, there is no consistent pattern to support consistently pro-life attitudes within or among issue domains. The explanatory power of the equations is minuscule, and no variable is consistently related to attitude constraint across issue areas. Church attendance is related to attitude consistency only with respect to the abortion/euthanasia and defense/death penalty dimensions, and respondent belief in the authority of the Bible is only related to the former. Younger Catholics are more consistent with respect to the defense/death penalty issue cluster, but are not distinctive across other issue areas. The pattern of demographic and political issues is similarly inconsistent, and the only variable that is significantly related to constraint across all issue areas is the respondent's sex. The data in Table 6 show that there is no religiously- or politically-defined constituency for consistent-life attitudes among the Catholic laity.

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27. For applications of this technique, see James Campbell, *Ambiguity in the Issue Positions of Presidential Candidates: A Causal Analysis*, 27 *Am. J. Political Sci.* 284 (1983); Ted G. Jelen, *Religious Belief and Attitude Constraint*, 29 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 118 (1990); Jill K. Kiecolt & Hart M. Nelsen, *The Structuring of Political Attitudes among Liberal and Conservative Protestants*, 27 *J. Sci. Study Religion* 48 (1988); Robert C. Luskin, *Measuring Political Sophistication*, 31 *Am. J. Political Sci.* 856 (1987); Clyde Wilcox, *America's Radical Right Revisited: A Comparison of Activists in Christian Right Organizations from the 1960s to the 1980s*, 48 *Sociological Analysis* 46 (1987).

Table 6:				
Multivariate Models of Constraint on Life Issues: Laity				
(OLS Regression)				
	<i>Abortion/ Euthanasia</i>	<i>Domestic Issues<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Defense/Death Penalty</i>	<i>All Life Issues</i>
Pre-Vatican II	.010	0.14	-.020	.002
Post-Vatican II	.021	.005	.058**	.006
Church Attendance	.006*	.001	.005*	.001
Subjective Religiosity	.001	-.003	-.005	.002
Bible Authority	.030**	.008	.020	.002
Married	.024*	.029*	.014	-.007
Black	.061*	-.045	.059*	-.001
Sex	-.007	0.12	.026	.023***
Education	.006**	.000	-.001	.002
South	.003	.00	-.027	-.001
Party ID	.005	.004	.014**	-.004
Liberal/Conservative	-.001	-.004	.002	-.001
Constant	.354	.472	.182	.437
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.022	.000	.017	.022
N	1642	1281	1974	783
* Significant at .05.				
** Significant at .01.				
*** Significant at .001.				
<sup>1</sup> Includes welfare spending, healthcare spending, and gun control.				
Source: <i>General Social Survey, infra app. A.</i>				

In Table 7, the analysis of attitude consistency is extended to the sample of Catholic priests. While there are more coefficients that attain statistical significance, it remains the case that no clear pattern of attitudinal constraint emerges. On two of the three issue dimensions, and on the composite life consistency measure, younger priests are more consistent than their elders. Democrats and biblical literalists are more consistent on the overall life index only, while theologically orthodox priests are more constrained than others on the abortion/euthanasia dimension, and on the overall life index. Priests who attach greater importance to issues of social justice are more constrained on the domestic issues cluster, and are also

Table 7:				
Multivariate Models of Constraint on Life Issues: Priests				
(OLS Regression)				
	<i>Abortion/ Euthanasia</i>	<i>Domestic Issues<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Defense/Welfare</i>	<i>All Life Issues</i>
40 and Under	-.438****	-.442**	.131	-.233**
Party ID	-.066	.047	-.001	-.038**
Liberal/Conservative	.137	.091****	-.057	-.010
South	-.078	-.138	-.300****	-.104
Importance: Social Issues	-.120	-.139****	.012	-.120**
Importance: Christian Right Agenda	-.248****	.000	-.020	-.027
Public Religion	-.139***	.151*	-.087	-.031
Catholic Orthodoxy	-.284****	.047	-.011	-.112**
Ecumenism	-.062	-.022	-.026	-.059
Bible Authority	.112	-.012	.087	.067**
USCCB Take Position	.089	.008	.010	.020
Communal Religion	-.063	-.001	-.010	-.010
Constant	3.57	.234	.963	2.17
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.172	.095	.063	.219
N	227	217	224	214
* Significant at .05.				
** Significant at .01.				
*** Significant at .001.				
**** Significant at .010.				
<sup>1</sup> Includes healthcare spending, death penalty, and gun control.				
Source: <i>Cooperative Clergy Study Project, supra n. 14.</i>				

more consistent with respect to the overall life index. Public religionists are more consistent on the issues that comprise the abortion/euthanasia and domestic issues dimensions, while Southern priests are slightly more consistent on issues that define the defense/welfare spending dimension.

Some of these particular results are intriguing, and cry out for further investigation. However, what is of greatest interest for present purposes is the overall pattern of coefficients. No religious, demographic, or political

variable predicts attitude consistency across the issue domains defined by the factor analysis presented in Table 3. The independent variables that predict clerical attitude consistency with each issue domain are largely idiosyncratic, and suggest again that Catholic priests tend to be issue specialists when attitudes toward life issues are considered. To a large extent, the data presented in Tables 5 and 7 support the conclusion that Catholic priests, like their counterparts in the laity, tend to compartmentalize their attitudes about issues which Bernardin's consistent ethic of life suggests should be conceptually connected.

Of course, the models in these tables may be flawed because their dependent variables do not take into account the direction of Catholic attitudes. That is, the constraint scores, measured by individual standard deviations, do not distinguish between respondents who consistently take pro-life positions from those who consistently take positions not compatible with the seamless garment. Since it seems unlikely that many lay Catholics consistently oppose the application of the life ethic, and it is virtually inconceivable that appreciable numbers of Catholic priests do so, the equations in Tables 6 and 7 may underestimate the extent of life-affirming consistency among Catholic priests and laity.

In order to test for this possibility, Table 8 presents the results of regression equations for both samples, in which the dependent variable represents the extent of pro-life attitude constraint. The dependent variable is an interaction term that combines the direction of pro-life attitudes with the consistency that such attitudes are reported. This analysis is confined to the entire range of life issues. The directional component (overall individual mean) is recoded so that lower scores represent attitudes more consistent with the life ethic. Thus, higher scores are changed to reflect lower scores and vice versa for this analysis, so that lower scores on each component of the interaction term are associated with greater adherence to pro-life positions on individual variables, and with greater attitude consistency across variables. This recoded mean is multiplied by the constraint score (individual standard deviation across all seven life issues) so that lower scores designate respondents who exhibit both high levels of support for the life agenda and high attitude consistency.

Between both samples, Democrats are slightly, but significantly, more likely to exhibit consistent-life attitudes than Republicans or independents. For the laity, church attendance has a slight positive effect on the development of consistent-life attitudes, and women are significantly more likely to take consistently pro-life attitudes on the issues considered here. Among priests, younger priests seem more likely to embrace the life ethic than their elders, and less theologically orthodox priests are more consistently pro-life than their more traditionalist counterparts. This latter finding is of considerable interest, since it suggests that clerical support for the consistent ethic of life comes from sources that operate at cross-purposes. When orthodoxy

is held constant, younger priests are more likely to take positions consistent with the concept of the seamless garment. However, younger priests are slightly more orthodox than their elders. Thus, clerical support for the consistent life ethic appears to come from two independent sources: younger priests, who are more orthodox, and less traditionalist priests, who are slightly overrepresented among older Catholic clergy. Again, the explanatory power of both equations is quite modest.

### *Conclusion*

The results of this study can be summarized rather simply. Neither lay Catholics nor Roman Catholic priests exhibit attitudes consistent with Cardinal Bernardin's "seamless garment." Lay Catholics do not appear to take life-affirming positions on several of the issues that presumably would be subsumed within a consistent ethic of life. Neither priests nor laity appear to organize their attitudes around a pro-life *gestalt*, nor do there exist religious, demographic, or attitudinal variables that distinguish pro-life Catholics from other members of the faith. Among both clergy and laity, Catholics appear to resemble "issue specialists" who approach specific questions of public policy individually, without regard for an underlying theological rationale. To the (limited) extent that consistently pro-life attitudes exist among the clergy, they are held by priests apparently cross-pressured by the effects of generation and doctrinal orthodoxy.

To the extent that adherence to the consistent ethic of life constitutes a priority for Catholic leaders, it is clear that much work remains to be done. While U.S. Catholics often regard Church teachings as advisory, the results of this study suggest that the life ethic is probably not being communicated from the pulpit to the pew. On life issues, American lay Catholics appear to be working with the inconsistent materials being made available by their spiritual leaders.

Table 8:		
Multivariate Models of Constrained Pro-life Attitudes: Laity and Priests		
(OLS Regression)		
	<i>Laity</i>	<i>Priests</i>
South	.004	.287
Party ID	.011**	.016*
Liberal/Conservative	-.011	.017
40 and Under	—	.844**
Pre-Vatican II	-.007	—
Post-Vatican II	-.017	—
Church Attendance	.006*	—
Subjective Religiosity	.015	—
Bible Authority	.007	-.116
Married	.004	—
Black	.000	—
Sex	-.047***	—
Education	-.003	—
Importance: Social Issues	—	.179
Importance: Christian Right Agenda	—	.114
Public Religion	—	-.109
Catholic Orthodoxy	—	-.362**
Ecumenism	—	.199
USCCB Take Position	—	.082
Communal Religion	—	.030
Constant	.598	4.29
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.064	.134
<i>N</i>	783	214
* Significant at .05.		
** Significant at .01.		
*** Significant at .001.		

APPENDIX A:  
QUESTION WORDING

*General Social Survey:*

Please tell me whether or not *you* think it should be possible for a pregnant woman to obtain a *legal* abortion if . . . READ EACH STATEMENT, AND CIRCLE ONE CODE FOR EACH.

- If there is a strong chance of serious defect in the baby?
- If she is married and does not want any more children?
- If the woman's own health is seriously endangered by the pregnancy?
- If the family has a very low income and cannot afford any more children?
- If she became pregnant as a result of rape?
- If she is not married and does not want to marry the man?

Abortion index individual mean value across all six items (alpha=.855).

We are faced with many problems in this country, none of which can be solved easily or inexpensively. I'm going to name some of these problems, and for each one I'd like you to tell me whether you think we're spending too much money on it, too little money, or about the right amount. First (READ ITEM A) . . . are we spending too much, too little, or about the right amount on (ITEM)?

- The military, armaments, and defense
- Welfare
- Improving and protecting the nation's health

When a person has a disease that cannot be cured, do you think doctors should be allowed by law to end the patient's life by some painless means if the patient and his family request it?

Would you favor or oppose a law which would require a person to obtain a police permit before he or she could buy a gun?

Do you favor or oppose the death penalty for persons convicted of murder?

*Clergy Cooperative Study Project:*

Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about social and political policies and problems.

- Current welfare reforms are too harsh and hurt children.

- We need a constitutional amendment prohibiting all abortions unless to save the mother's life, or in case of rape or incest.
- The U.S. should spend more on military and defense.
- Public policy should discourage ownership and use of handguns.
- We need government-sponsored national health insurance so that everyone can get adequate medical care.
- I oppose capital punishment.

Please place yourself on the following scales:

- God interacts with humanity primarily on an individual basis
- God interacts with humanity primarily through communities  
(Rated on a one to seven scale)
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops should refrain from making statements on political issues
- The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops should articulate Catholic positions on political issues  
(Rated on a one to seven scale)
- In some situations, physicians should help terminally ill patients end their lives painlessly
- Physicians are morally obligated to preserve life at all times  
(Rated on a one to seven scale)

All items recoded to common range and direction.

## APPENDIX B:

## CONSTRUCTION OF INDICES

*Importance: Social Justice* = mean (frequency with which respondent reports addressing hunger/poverty, gender equality, race relations, death penalty, gun laws, gay rights, and domestic violence). alpha = 0.84.

*Importance: Christian Right Agenda* = mean (frequency with which respondent reports addressing abortion, school prayer, education and school choice, and scandals in government). alpha = 0.79.

*Public Religion* = mean (agree America Christian nation, exists one correct Christian position on most issues, Christianity uniquely compatible with free enterprise, need to protect U.S. religious heritage, and there exists a threat to religious freedom in the United States by those who oppose religion). alpha = 0.69.

*Doctrinal Orthodoxy* = mean (agree Jesus born of a virgin, literal Second Coming of Christ, devil actually exists). alpha = 0.69.

*Ecumenism* = mean (accept moral equivalence of great religions, de-emphasis on individual sanctification, agree social justice at heart of Gospel, approval of liberation theology, approval of feminist theology). alpha = 0.66.

Source: *Cooperative Clergy Study Project*, *supra* n. 14.

*Note:* Alpha is an estimate of the extent to which different variables form a common dimension. The higher the value of alpha, the more likely it is that all included variables are part of the same underlying factor. See Edward G. Carmines & Richard A. Zeller, *Reliability and Validity Assessment* (Sage Publications 1977).

## APPENDIX C:

## MEAN ISSUE ATTITUDES BY PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATION

	<i>Abortion</i>	<i>Defense Spending</i>	<i>Healthcare Spending</i>	<i>Welfare Spending</i>
Nixon/Ford	1.3298	1.3401	1.6423	1.2059
Carter	1.3362	1.2032	1.5778	1.1349
Reagan 1	1.3597	1.3515	1.6090	1.2530
Reagan 2	1.3833	1.4234	1.6487	1.2317
Bush 1	1.3423	1.3755	1.7184	1.2367
Clinton 1	1.3366	1.3562	1.6899	1.1490
Clinton 2	1.3814	1.2920	1.7093	1.1900
Bush 2	1.3646	1.2228	1.7485	1.2123
Total Mean	1.3505	1.3222	1.6526	1.1968

	<i>Euthanasia</i>	<i>Death Penalty</i>	<i>Gun Control</i>
Nixon/Ford		1.3344	1.7427
Carter	1.3875	1.2874	1.7189
Reagan 1	1.3821	1.2535	1.7340
Reagan 2	1.3253	1.2522	1.7376
Bush 1	1.2841	1.2206	1.8041
Clinton 1	1.2954	1.2209	1.8102
Clinton 2	1.3016	1.2893	1.8262
Bush 2	1.3247	1.3127	1.8046
Total Mean	1.3265	1.2638	1.7675