

# Common good is common ground

***On the 18th of April in '75,***

***Hardly a man is now alive***

***Who remembers that fateful day and year***

**Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* (1860)**

April 19, 2025, marks the 250th anniversary of the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the “fateful day” that set us on the road to independence.

The Old North Bridge in Concord lies only 20 miles from New Hampshire, and organized New Hampshire militia units began marching to Boston almost within hours of the first reports of the fighting.

These citizen-soldiers would play a significant role in the siege of Boston and especially in the Battle of Bunker Hill that would take place that June. “Live free or die,” as New Hampshire’s General John Stark would say many decades later.

We have come to see these words and these revolutionary forebears of ours as paradigms of the individualism that epitomizes our own age. This perception, however, is greatly mistaken.

The Revolution that began with “the shot heard ‘round the world” was not founded on the principle of radical individualism but rather on the principle of the common good.

The very first article of the New Hampshire Constitution, inspired by the words of John Adams himself, declares that government is “instituted for the general good.” The Preamble to the U.S. Constitution likewise proclaims that the Constitution was adopted “to promote the General Welfare.”

As history shows, the Revolution was a highly organized enterprise firmly rooted in civic values and community. The founding generation rebelled to free us from the rule of a king, not to free us from our civic connections and obligations.

As *Parable* readers know, the principle of the common good is also a cornerstone of Catholic Social Teaching. As Catholics and as Americans, the common good is doubly in our wheelhouse. We should feel especially well-equipped to be exemplars of how to live in the light of this principle.

The fact that the common good is a foundational teaching of both the body politic and the mystical body means that the common good is common ground.

This common ground allows us to participate as Catholics in the public square with sure confidence that we are speaking a language that is not unique to us and that others are well able to understand.

Every so often, a legislator will claim that when Catholics advocate in the public square, they are just trying to impose their religious beliefs on the rest of society. This argument, which, of course, never gets made when a legislator *agrees* with a position we are taking, is utterly untrue.

When we advocate on behalf of the common good, we are not seeking to impose Catholic religious beliefs on non-Catholics; we are simply calling the body politic back to its own essential nature.

Let's use as an example HB 254, a bill under consideration to legalize assisted suicide. Just as with last year's bill (HB 1283, recounted in the November/December issue of *Parable*), we are standing alongside veterans, young people, hospitals, nursing homes and people with disabilities. We have all joined together in raising the many dangers that passing a bill like this would pose for the most vulnerable members of our society.

As the diversity of this coalition showed, the ideas that society should defend the vulnerable and that it is wrong to kill someone are hardly esoteric Catholic religious beliefs. Obviously, one doesn't need to be Catholic to recognize that if the state wants to prevent suicide, the last thing the state should do is pass a law that normalizes suicide.

It is, of course, true that our Catholic faith is *why* we participate in the public square. We have experienced the infinite depths of God's love for the world, and we feel compelled to share that love through our service to others.

We take part in politics to promote human dignity and the common good, to stand up for the inestimable value of each human being and to speak up on behalf of those in need.

While the reasons we care about politics might be unique to us, the substantive arguments we make are no different than the ones being advanced by the many non-religious organizations that also take part in legislative work in Concord.

When we engage in advocacy, we explain the *reasons* why the Church believes certain things to be true, in terms that any person might subscribe to. As Pope St. John Paul II succinctly put it, "The Church proposes; she imposes nothing." We aim to persuade through our words and our example.

May this observance of the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution renew our commitment — as Catholics and as Americans — to the foundational principle of the common good. ■

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