

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 2ND OF 8

“In the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”
- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 13

Since participation in political life is a moral obligation, Catholics need to form their conscience with the mind and heart of the Church on issues of consequence. This outline is the second of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This second outline will provide an overview of the issue of abortion.

Abortion

Every single human life is valuable and possesses a dignity beyond our imagination. As 4th century Church Father St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

God did not make the heavens in his image, nor the moon, the sun, the beauty of the stars, nor anything else which you can see... You alone are made in the image and likeness of that nature which surpasses all understanding... Nothing in all creation can equal your grandeur. (Kyriaki FitzGerald, *Persons in Communion*, p. 72)

This is why the Church has unequivocally taught that abortion is an intrinsic evil, which must be opposed. It violates the fifth commandment of ‘thou shalt not kill’ as it destroys an innocent human life. No circumstance warrants any person, let alone a mother of a child, to end the life of another human person. This is why Archbishop Jose Gomez, President of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) once remarked,

Abortion is not a “Catholic” issue. It is a matter of fundamental human rights. In fact, I believe it is the foundational issue of our time. Because it is so important, the church has spoken clearly about it and believes it is an essential aspect of the Catholic faith. (Today's Catholic, Newspaper of the Archdiocese of San Antonio, 10 October 2008)

Because the opposition to abortion is an essential aspect of the Catholic faith, Catholics cannot support politicians who advocate for abortion or ‘abortion rights.’ While this does not mean Catholics should only care about the abortion issue, it does mean Catholics cannot excuse or dismiss this grave error in judgment concerning politicians political positioning on this issue. As the USCCB has written:

*Any politics of human dignity must seriously address issues of racism, poverty, hunger, employment, education, housing, and health care ... **But being ‘right’ in such matters can never excuse a wrong choice regarding direct attacks on innocent human life. Indeed, the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the ‘rightness’ of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful of the human community.** If we understand the human person as the ‘temple of the Holy Spirit’ — the living house of God — then these latter issues fall logically into place as the crossbeams and walls of that house. All direct attacks on innocent human life, such as abortion and euthanasia, strike at the house’s foundation. These directly and immediately violate the human person’s most fundamental right — the right to life. Neglect of these issues is the equivalent of building our house on sand. Such attacks cannot help but lull the social conscience in ways ultimately destructive of other human rights.* (1998 Pastoral Letter of the USCCB, *Living the Gospel of Life*, 22)

In summation, abortion is not just one issue among many. It is the human rights issue of our time and the preeminent issue of life and importance in this election. As Catholics, it is our duty to protect the most fundamental right of the human person: the right to life. The intentional destruction of innocent human life is intrinsically evil. It must always be opposed.

Peter Range, Director, Office for Life and Justice, Catholic Charities, Diocese of Toledo, prange@toledodiocese.org.

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