

CONSCIENCE AND THE CATHOLIC VOTER – 3RD 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 third of eight, which will examine important moral and political issues. This third outline will provide an overview of the issue of marriage and the family.

Marriage and the Family

The family is the foundational cell of society. That is why the Church teaches what Pope Saint John Paul II wrote in 1981:

The future of humanity passes by way of the family. It is therefore indispensable and urgent that every person of good will should endeavor to save and foster the values and requirements of the family. I feel that I must ask for a particular effort in this field from the sons and daughters of the Church... They must show the family special love. This is an injunction that calls for concrete action. (Saint John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio, On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World*, 86)

If the future of humanity passes by the way of the family, Catholics should pay special attention to the political approaches of candidates to the family. As the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has written, Catholics are called to:

Protect the fundamental understanding of marriage as the life-long and faithful union of one man and one woman as the central institution of society; promote the complementarity of the sexes and reject false “gender” ideologies; provide better support for family life morally, socially, and economically, so that our nation helps parents raise their children with respect for life, sound moral values, and an ethic of stewardship and responsibility. (*The Challenge of Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, Handout Part II*)

Yet today, we find the family in crisis. As Pope Francis has pointed out:

The family is experiencing a profound cultural crisis (which) is particularly serious because the family is the fundamental cell of society, where we learn to live with others despite our differences and to belong to one another, it is also the place where parents pass on the faith to their children. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 66)

This crisis arises from a general lack of openness to life, the use of contraception, absentee fatherhood, and the destruction of what marriage actually is. The Church has always taught that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman that brings them together as husband and wife to be father and mother to any children their union produces.

Marriage is a covenant “by which man and woman establish themselves a partnership of the whole of life that is by its nature ordered toward the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1601)

In summation, marriage is the building block of families, and therefore of all human civilization. Marriage then has public, not just private, purposes. The Church recognizes then that marriage is based on the truth that men and women are distinct and complimentary, that having children requires a man and a woman, and that every child deserves both a mom and a dad. Catholics therefore should pay special attention to where candidates stand on the crucial role of the family, that is founded on God’s design for love, between a man and a woman in marriage.

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