

Guidance for Catholic Voters

by Fr. Ray Ryland

When the Catholic Church gives us guidance in matters political, she never tells us *whom* to vote for, but she does tell us *what* to vote for and what to vote against.

In their statement, *Catholics in Political Life* (June 18, 2004), the American bishops explained, “As bishops we do not endorse or oppose candidates. Rather, we seek to form the consciences of our people so that they can examine the positions of candidates and make choices based on Catholic moral and social teaching.”

Two years ago this fall the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) issued its *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life*. The Note stated, “John Paul II, continuing the constant teaching of the Church, has reiterated many times that those who are directly involved in lawmaking bodies have a ‘grave and clear obligation to oppose’ any law that attacks human life” (no. 4). One could add that a person who ignores or defies “a grave and clear obligation” would be guilty of grave (serious) sin.

The CDF uses strong language: “For them [that is, for politicians], as for every Catholic, it is impossible to promote such laws or to vote for them” (no. 4). To say it is “impossible” for any Catholic to promote laws which attack human life means that Catholics, politicians and otherwise, are *forbidden* to promote or vote for laws allowing abortion. Take it one step further. If I vote for a politician who supports laws making abortion legal, who resists all efforts to curb the harmful effects of those laws, am I not “promoting” those laws?

Last year the CDF promulgated a document entitled *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons*. The Church regards these proposals as a direct attack on marriage and on the foundations of society.

All Catholics must oppose these attempts, but Catholic politicians have a particular obligation. When such laws are proposed, “the Catholic lawmaker has a moral duty to express his opposition clearly and publicly and to vote against it. To vote in favor of a law so harmful to the common good is gravely immoral. . . . When legislation in favor of the recognition of homosexual unions is already in force, the Catholic politician must oppose it in the ways that are possible for him and make his opposition known . . .” (no. 10).

In their recent statement the American bishops declared that not only are Catholic politicians forbidden to support laws allowing abortion; they “have an obligation in conscience to work toward correcting morally defective laws . . . If they do not make that effort, they would be “guilty of cooperating in evil and in sinning against the common good.”

We must reject the rationalization many politicians offer: “I’m personally opposed to abortion, but I can’t force my views on other people.” This is an absurd statement. Each time a legislator votes, he is forcing his views on other people. That’s the very nature of the legislative process.

Do we really believe that Jesus Christ speaks to us through His Church? He is telling us that the right-to-life issue is by far the most important, the most urgent, of all political issues. He is commanding us *not* to give our vote and our support to politicians who go against the Church’s moral and social teaching. If we American Catholics were obedient, and carried out His command, we could help bring about a transformation of this culture of death into a culture of life.

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