

Form Your Conscience, Vote Your Conscience! **By Father John Corapi, SOLT, STD**

Every four years we enjoy a very great privilege, one that carries with it an equally great responsibility: that of voting for the officials who will govern the country and affect the lives of tens of millions of people, for better or for worse. Good government and just laws are not optional if the human family is to survive, much less prosper.

The tired argument that is so often heard these days about the separation of Church and State is a patently specious one, to say the least. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights of the U.S. Constitution states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. The current erroneous interpretation of the separation of church and state is nothing less than an attack on the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America itself.

Every citizen has a right to express their views and to vote in accordance with those views. The legitimate separation of church and state concerns the constitutional prohibition of one state sponsored religion, as well as the Founding Fathers' intent to keep the government out of the affairs of the various religions. The version of separation of church and state that is presently being foisted on an unsuspecting public is tantamount to a suppression of the fundamental constitutional rights of a class of citizens. Since when is Christian thought not permitted to influence a country that was founded on Christian principles? We share in the good and the evil of those we place in office. The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that, although "sin is a personal act, we have a responsibility for the sins committed by others when we cooperate in them" (CCC #1868). We can be accomplices in the sins of others:

By participating directly and voluntarily in them;

By ordering, advising, praising, or approving them;

By not disclosing or not hindering them when we have an obligation to do so; (emphasis author's)

By protecting evil-doers" (CCC #1868). The Catechism is thus consistent with traditional Catholic teaching which held that there are nine ways we can be an accessory to another's sin:

1. By counsel. I.e., "I think you should have an abortion; go ahead and have the abortion. It will help preserve your lifestyle."
2. By command. I.e., Telling your child, your friend, or your co-worker, "Have an abortion, you may lose your job if you don't."
3. By consent. I.e., "If you and your partner feel it's the best thing, go ahead and have a sexual relationship, get married. even if you're both of the same sex, etc. It's nobody's business."
4. By provocation. I.e., "Have the abortion!"

Aren't you in charge of your own life? The Pope is old and sick and who cares what he says anyhow."

5. By praise or flattery. I.e., "Oh, Senator, you are so courageous and kind in defending a woman's 'right' to an abortion."
6. By concealment. I.e., The pastor allows the senator, judge, president, etc. who has voted for, or otherwise promoted, abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, same-sex marriage, etc. to appear to be in good standing, when, in fact, they have caused grave public scandal by their actions. When the sin is public, the redress must be public. Although, I don't disagree with the courageous bishops who would deny such persons Communion, I do believe that the "confrontation" should take place, without question, long before they arrive at the altar rail.
7. By participation. I.e., "I'll drive you to the clinic. You need that abortion to be able to continue your lifestyle."
8. By silence. I.e., You refuse to speak out against what is a clear violation of human rights, an incredible persecution and prejudice against a class of human beings (the unborn). You hide behind the Supreme Court's unjust and inherently illicit decision on abortion, saying it's the law of the land, when in fact it is the subversion and perversion of authentic law. The Nazi SS officers tried for war crimes used a similar defense, saying they were only following orders. They hung them, guilty as charged!
9. By defense of the evil. I.e., "It prevents child abuse by eliminating unwanted children; Women are more in charge of their lives, more liberated; it's so much more sophisticated and educated a thing to do., "etc. etc. This year, more than ever, Catholics, and the entire human family, face a daunting challenge. We have to elect a president and other high ranking officials, and the choice could be a matter of life or death for the nation. For Catholics, it is a matter of a moral mandate: form your conscience so that you can vote your wellformed conscience. It is not morally permissible to merely vote for whomever you like based on superficial or even personal preferences. The candidates have to be evaluated in the sober and pure light of truth. Your conscience must be formed to the objective norm of that truth, which is Church teaching in faith and morals. Since a physician needs to be concerned with what's sick, let's get right to the point. It is not morally possible for any Catholic to support abortion, euthanasia, fetal stem cell research, human cloning, or same-sex marriage. There are no ways around this, no justifications whatever.

Why? For the simple reason that the Church holds these things to be intrinsically evil. They are evil in themselves, and no circumstances or subjective conditions can ever change that. They are not to be confused with such things as the death penalty and legitimate self-defense, which are not intrinsically evil, and which governments can, and often must, make use of. While the conditions for applying such unfortunate measures as the death penalty and waging war may be open to debate, they are not things evil in themselves, always and everywhere. Any appeal to conscience concerning intrinsically evil matters is a specious one. Conscience is not an independent entity; it does not operate in a vacuum.

Conscience must be formed to the objective norm of truth—Church teaching. Church teaching is clear on the issues mentioned (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church #1783). The theological position to the contrary is untenable and has been frequently condemned

by the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council mentioned conscience more than seventy times, never without a modifying term: “well-formed conscience, malformed conscience; you must form your conscience, etc.”

Conscience is not to be construed as one’s mere ideas and opinions, or whatever vagrant and morally vacuous thoughts race through one’s mind. “Conscience is a judgment of reason whereby the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act that he is going to perform, is in the process of performing, or has already completed” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1778). It must be grounded in truth, formed to truth. For Catholics that is Church teaching in faith and morals.

Any candidate for political office, Catholic or otherwise, who is in favor of intrinsically evil things (abortion, euthanasia, same-sex marriage, etc), votes for them, or otherwise funds or furthers their cause, cannot be supported in any way by a Catholic who wishes to remain Catholic in fact, not just in name. Catholic office holders, whether presidents, senators, congress men or women, or judges at any level must adhere to Catholic teaching or run the risk of separating themselves from the Body of Christ. In such egregious and chronic cases of gross moral evil such as instituting and perpetuating abortion and the structures of sin that surround it, it is quite probable that such Catholic officials are excommunicated in virtue of the acts themselves. A *latae sententiae* (automatic) excommunication is likely triggered when they vote for laws, funding, and structures that enable and perpetuate such obvious and egregious evil (Cf. Code of Canon Law, Canons 1364,1398; Canon 1329, par. #2). They are in turn forbidden from approaching the sacraments as the result (Cf. Catechism of Catholic Church #1463).

These persons must undoubtedly think that a fetus is not a human being. If they did, would they authorize and enable the wholesale and on demand execution of tens of millions of the most innocent human beings in their mothers’ wombs?

If they think there is not a human being in the womb, then they do not believe what the Church believes, and that belief is not optional. Such a rejection of so fundamental a truth is tantamount to heresy (Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church #2089), the automatic penalty for which is excommunication (Cf Code of Canon Law #1364). No further act of a bishop is required either, since the act of unbelief in itself is what triggers the severing of the member from the Body. If, on the contrary, they think that indeed there is a human being in the womb, they are in a worse position, having knowingly and willingly fostered, facilitated, and perpetuated a human holocaust of unthinkable proportions. The lame argument that they personally oppose such things as abortion, yet vote for them repeatedly, demonstrates the most virulent form of moral and political schizophrenia yet to afflict mankind. That they succeed in duping millions of otherwise intelligent people with this absurd and twisted logic does not bode well for the future of the nation that votes for them. The further up the hierarchy of authority one goes, the more responsible and the more culpable one becomes. Hence, a supreme court justice, senator, or president who supports abortion through voting or rhetoric is significantly more culpable than a woman who effectively procures an abortion. She is responsible for one abortion; they are accomplices in millions. If she has knowledge of the seriousness of the act and the canonical penalty attached thereto, she can incur an automatic excommunication. What of those who enabled millions of such abortions? Is it to be believed that they are immune from culpability? Infinitely more deserving of the canonical penalty are those Catholic

politicians who foster the laws and structures that enable such outrageous crimes against humanity. A pastor who permits such an elected or appointed official—especially if they purport to be Catholic—to skate along relatively unscathed on such morally thin ice, is perhaps the most negligent and the most culpable of all. To fail to publicly censure such public officials is tantamount to participating in their crimes.

If there is ignorance, instruct the ignorant. If there is obstinacy, exact the canonical penalty. To fail to do so results not only in ignorance and obstinacy, but negligence and permissiveness: the fertile soil in which a degenerating culture can multiply its errors, bear evil fruit, and die. Religious leaders are in a unique position to influence the nation and the world for the better by calling their people to high moral standards. Failure to do so ultimately results in disaster, for the moral demise of a nation always precedes the ultimate demise of a nation.

Among some Church leaders there is an understandable fear of acting decisively, now. This is, obviously, because the pain of the recent sex abuse scandals is so fresh in the mind of a rightfully indignant public. However, if the Church should fail to exercise her solemn pastoral duty at such a critical moment in history, it is likely that this further lack of decisive action will prove fatal for the last vestiges of respect remaining for the leadership of the Church. Because we at times may have failed to act appropriately and decisively in one matter shouldn't consign us to a perpetual paralysis of the will to do good in other matters. Fear of criticism, loss of a tax advantage, or political expediency should never deter us from our sacred duty.

There is no excuse whatever for a Catholic politician who supports such morally outrageous perversions of authentic justice such as abortion, partial-birth abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, and same-sex marriage. The hierarchy of the Church ultimately must severely censure them and make such censure public. The sin is egregious and public. The redress must be commensurately severe and public, precisely because of that. The hour is late indeed. Can it be imagined that the hand of the heavenly Father “who chastises every son He loves” (Cf. Jdt 8:27, Prv 3:12, Sir 30:1) will be held back indefinitely? We are poised on the edge of a precipice; a definitive moment in history has come. If the morally toxic wasteland that used to be the greatest nation on the face of the earth isn't accorded “moral superfund” status soon, then will not the wake-up call that was 911 pale into insignificance at the moral day of reckoning that is inexorably coming? Even if one doesn't care to believe that God punishes, He surely corrects out of love, and often He uses the blunt instrument of our enemies to do so.

Every person of good will, above all Catholics in virtue of what their faith requires of them, must properly form their conscience to the objective norm of the true and the good: to that which is in accord with right reason, justice, and traditional moral values, and then vote in accordance with that well formed conscience.

God bless America!
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