

Votes

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Father Michael Bausch, who headed the Public Policy Committee from 1992 to 1996, prior to Father Cool, agreed with his successor's comments.

"I'll help develop people's personal consciences," he said of his work with Catholic voters, "but ultimately it's between them and their God." Father Cool added that the real sin a voter can commit is the sin of omission.

"The sin may happen by *not* voting, by abdicating one's civic responsibility," Father Cool concluded.

God and country

Fathers Habiger and Cool may disagree on what constitutes a sinful vote, but their bosses in the church's hierarchy clearly agree that voting is a Catholic's duty.

"We urge all citizens to use their franchise by registering to vote and going to the polls," the U.S. bishops stated in their 1996 document titled "Political Responsibility."

But does a Catholic's faith play a large part in how they choose their candidates? Quite possibly, yes, if a poll taken two years ago is any indication.

In 1996, the most recent year of a national election, *USA Today* reported in a post-election poll that 38 percent of all voters said religion played a major role in their choice of whom they supported. Thirty-three percent said their religious beliefs played a minor role, and 25 percent said they had no effect on their vote.

Not every poll, however, points to good news for Catholic leaders hoping their flocks consider church teaching a vital part of their voting choices.

For example, while 45 percent of Catholic voters responding to a 1996 poll by the Catholic Campaign for America said they would support a pro-life candidate for

office, 31 percent actually said they would vote for a candidate because he or she supported legalized abortion.

Joseph Kenney, director of the Office of Social Policy and Research for the Catholic Family Center in Rochester, does presentations on Catholic social teaching and the political process at various parishes. Kenney said he's found many Catholics are interested in where the church stands on the issues, and they try to vote accordingly.

"(Religion) is one of the variables that is considered by most people," he said of the voters he's met. "There is a big section in the Catholic Church that truly uses their faith and spirituality in fundamental guidance (when voting)."

Yet, he, like other Catholics concerned about how their fellow Catholics vote, said the church needs to continually educate its members on what the church teaches in terms of social justice. Kenney suggested the church's pastoral leadership promote those teachings through bulletin inserts, pulpit pronouncements, and public forums featuring people whose lives are directly affected by politician's choices, such as the poor.

Consistently wishy-washy?

Most Catholic political observers point to the church's consistent life ethic — which opposes abortion, economic injustice, war, euthanasia and the death penalty — as the ground upon which Catholic voters should stand and view candidates.

But some proponents of the church teaching against abortion have begun to question whether the consistent life ethic is letting Catholic voters and politicians off the hook when it comes to standing with the church.

For example, David Carlin, a former Rhode Island legislator, has written that it's time to stop treating abortion as just one of many life issues covered by the consistent life ethic. Carlin outlined his case in an

opinion piece for the national Catholic newspaper *Our Sunday Visitor* Aug. 2. Millions of children have died from abortion, which has claimed far more victims than other threats to life, he maintained. Hence, abortion should be the number one priority of Catholic voters and politicians, he has argued.

"Unless Catholics and others can create a third political party, a new party that combines opposition to abortion with a concern for social justice, the consistent life ethic will remain a mere abstraction with no roots in the soil of politics," Carlin said. He added that the consistent life ethic was an "alibi" for pro-choice liberals whose positions lined up with the church's on every other issue.

"To rank the problems of abortion and illegal aliens on the same plane is to reduce the consistent ethic to absurdity," Carlin wrote.

But what's absurd is Carlin's argument, according to Kathy Gallagher, associate director of the New York State Catholic Conference. If the pro-life movement wants to die an isolated political death, it should discard the consistent life ethic, she noted. What better way to play into the hands of abortion supporters than by de-emphasizing the church's concern for both women and the unborn, she noted.

"If a public policy supports human life, enhances human life, we're called to support these policies," she said.

Suzanne Schnittman, the Diocese of Rochester's consistent life ethic coordinator, added that Carlin's argument ignores history. Such causes as abolitionism and the civil rights movement were not part of the platforms of the main political parties until they had almost succeeded, she noted. Both the pro-life and consistent life ethic movements are still considered somewhat outside mainstream politics, she noted.

She also said that she has seen the consistent life ethic increasingly unite voters who were heretofore concerned with only one life issue.

"I think the consistent life ethic gives room to a candidate willing to go out on a limb and say, 'Maybe I can be both anti-abortion and anti-death penalty,'" she commented.

As a voter, Kenney said he could not prioritize life issues in the way Carlin does.

"It's not an either/or for me, it's a both/and," he said. "To me, it's incredibly contradictory to be pro-life at the abortion discussion and to be pro-death-penalty."

No Catholic bloc

One thing that is not consistent anymore is the U.S. Catholic voting bloc, according to political watchers, who note both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton sailed into presidential power, in part, on large waves of Catholic support. Yet, time was, U.S. Catholics could be counted on to vote pretty much as a bloc for the Democratic Party, according to Father Thomas Reese, SJ, editor of the national Jesuit magazine *America*. But that time has passed, he added.

Father Reese has done extensive research into the Catholic vote, compiled in a 1996 article for *America*. In a recent phone interview with the *Courier* from his New York City office, Reese pointed out that Catholic voters — currently one quarter of the electorate — have both changed considerably from their early days in the country, but have also remained the same in some ways.

"Catholics originally came to this country as poor immigrants," Father Reese said. "They very easily identified with the Democratic Party, the party that was against the establishment, against the (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants)."

Indeed, Father Reese said, most polls show white Catholics, in particular, are more liberal and Democratic than their white Protestant counterparts. Non-Hispanic white Catholics, today, however, are now among the nation's most affluent citizens, Father Reese said. The higher a white Catholic's tax bracket, the more likely he or she is to identify with the Republican Party, he said. Meanwhile, the Republicans have generally stood against abortion, as well as for federal aid to Catholic schools, he added, both positions squaring with the U.S. bishops.

Yet, "on practically everything else, the bishops are to the left of the Democratic Party," he said, noting the bishops' support for the poor, immigrants and other marginalized groups. Nonetheless, the differences between *lay* Catholics and their Protestant counterparts in the electorate are lessening, Father Reese said.

"The whole country today is more conservative than it was in the past," he said.

Wherever the country is going, Catholic political observers seem to hope the church's values will continue to influence the choices voters make each November.

"I think your faith is like your skin," Gallagher said. "You take it everywhere you go, including the ballot box."

The Monthly Prayer Request For Priests

A PRAYER TO SAINT JOHN MARY VIANNEY, CURE OF ARS

Saint John Mary Vianney, Cure of Ars, I honor you for having so followed the Divine High Priest as to become the model and heavenly patron of all Parish Priests.

With confidence in your intercession before the Blessed Trinity:

I seek our assistance in helping every priest to become the kind of priest God wills him to be from all eternity.

Pray for all priests that they, too, may have a profound reverence in offering the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; zeal in preaching the word of God; and tireless loyalty and patient sympathy in hearing the confessions of sinners.

From God the Father, please obtain strength of mind and body for them to carry out the duties of the priesthood; from God the Son, special grace for them to be, like Him, both priest and — if need be for the salvation of souls — victim;

and from God the Holy Spirit, His guiding light and good counsel to direct those entrusted to their care and those who come across their path.

November, 1998

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Revs. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Pope John Paul II Ordained	All deceased priests	Robert L. Belligotti	Joseph T. Gaynor	Albert Gaelens CSB	Dr. Joseph A. Hart	Bishop Matthew H. Clark
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
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15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Paul Geraghty, OSB	William C. McCusker, SJ	John P. Norris	John V. Rosse	William V. Spilly	Michael J. Bausch	Lcdr. Lewis E. Brown, USNR
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Dr. Austin J. Budnick, OFM	Joseph DeMaio, O. Carm.	Mihai Dubovici	Sebastian A. Falcone	Michael Hayden	William B. Leone	Dominic F. Mockevicius
29	30	Look for the December MPRP Calendar in the November 26th Courier.				
Vocations	Seminarians					

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