

COLUMNISTS

Vote your conscience

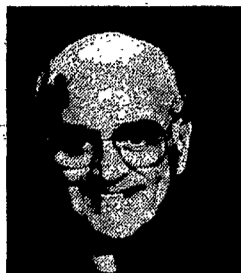
A woman told me recently that she wasn't going to vote in November because she was anti-abortion and at the same time fiercely opposed to the death penalty. Since Gore is pro-choice and Bush is for the death penalty, she was opting out of the process.

I advised her against sitting on the sidelines.

There is never going to be a perfect candidate. Religious people have to make prudential judgments based on the preponderance of evidence available. The United States is the only remaining superpower, and every citizen counts in keeping our leaders on their toes.

If you do not vote your conscience in these matters, you will fail in your patriotic duty.

Way back in 1964, long before I was director of the Christophers, I interviewed Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Her cause for canon-



spirituality
for today

BY FATHER JOHN CATOIR

ization is now pending.

Day often talked about the importance of voting your conscience. She celebrated the tremendous freedom that the laity have in the church. In fact, she said, as a convert to the faith, it was this freedom that attracted her to the church. "I don't think I could stress this enough," she said. "Our freedom comes from the Gospels. Christ never coerced anyone."

I asked her whether her involvement as a social activist ever had gotten her in trouble with the hierarchy. She brushed it off and said: "What if there is a strike for better wages? Do the bishops listen to the people who are on strike or do they listen to the bosses? How are they going to direct the laity?"

She believed that many conflicts have to be hammered out by means of public debate. The bishops are clearly pro-life, which means they are also against the death penalty. How will they vote? Will they differ from one another? Who knows? Probably yes, but I'm sure each one will vote his conscience.

Did you know that diocesan Catholic newspapers risk losing their tax-exempt status if they promote one candidate over another?

Of course, there will be some zealous priests and members of the laity who will insist that a Catholic should vote on the

basis of the abortion issue alone, but even though the anti-abortion agenda is meritorious, I find this view too simplistic. The election should not be subject to a litmus test on one issue.

In the last presidential election, 65 percent of all Catholic women voted for the Democrats. The bishops never dictated how they should cast their vote, nor did they condemn the women after the election for voting as they did.

These women did not think that they were voting for abortion, any more than a vote for Bush in the next election would imply that the person voting was in favor of the death penalty.

Pray for the grace to make the right decision, all things considered, and put your mind at ease.

...
Father Catoir, a canon lawyer, is director of Evangelization/Communications for the Diocese of Paterson, N.J.

Spelling lessons of 'Dominus Iesus'

I suspect many Catholic writers, editors and commentators had similar thoughts in the wake of the recent release of the Vatican Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith's document *Dominus Iesus*. They thought, "Why do they keep spelling Jesus' name wrong?"

Then they found out that "Jesus" is the Latin spelling — and pretended they knew that all along.

And that's not all. They also struggled with other issues, such as the name of the congregation itself. Is it Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, or is it Vatican Congregation for Doctrine FOR the Faith, or could it possibly be Congregation OF Doctrine FOR the Faith?

Phew!

Secular types can get away with writing stuff like "Rome's doctrinal congregation" and we all know what they mean, but Rome does not have a doctrinal congregation any more than New York or Chicago does.

OK, using "CDF" on second reference is



Uncle
Dan

BY DAN MORRIS

defensible, but lots of readers under the age of 40 are thinking tunes, not tomes, when they see "CDF."

The point is that the Catholic press must be precise since the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is in its own back yard. (And it's not just back there relaxing on the patio and enjoying a barbecue and a beer.)

Which brings up another spelling challenge produced in the wake of the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the

Faith's new declaration.

How does one spell the sound that frequently accompanies someone sticking his or her tongue out at you? There is a lot of that going on. As a matter of fact, a dear Congregationalist friend stuck her tongue out at me, whacked me with the daily paper (Headline: "Vatican tells world only Catholic Church provides salvation"), and said, "You guys think you're hot stuff, don't ya?"

I tried to dazzle her with deception. "Now when you say 'you guys,' are you referring to men in general or in this instance are you talking about the members of the Roman Catholic Church? Or might you be taking an ill-informed, anti-clerical posture that would only undermine any attempt at a civil conversation? And are you going to hit me with the newspaper again, because it hurts," I asked.

"Nice try, Mr. Ecumenism 'R' Us," she said. Her eyes narrowed. "Did you read this? It says the Catholic Church pretty much has the Jesus franchise sewed up and

that the rest of us poor folk are kind of paddling around in the backwaters of confusion and mildewed theology."

"You mince a mean metaphor," I replied.

"And I'm just getting warmed up," she growled. "What's this triumphalism all about anyway?"

"I think you've gotten the wrong idea from something you read somewhere that didn't capture this document's subtlety," I said. "Yeah, we Catholics do think our church is special, but we know we're not the only ones who can be saved. And ecumenism will continue. You'll see."

"Hah," she said, clearly preferring to ventilate than commiserate. "And they don't even know how to spell Jesus' name right."

I was sorely tempted to tell her she should be reading the Catholic press, but I don't think the timing was right.

...
Morris, a veteran Catholic journalist, is editor of Catholic San Francisco.

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