

CATHOLIC  
PRINCIPLES  
*for*  
VOTING



# IS IT MORALLY OBLIGATORY TO VOTE?

Originally published in the February 2007 issue of *The Angelus*

It is certainly true that the modernists consider democracy, and the right to vote, as sacrosanct, an immediate consequence of human dignity, directly connected with their humanistic religion.

Reacting against this, knowing as we do how much the electoral system is unjust, realizing how much modern democracy is based upon the false liberal principle of human freedom, escaping from all objective divine and moral law as it does, aware of how little real choice there is between the candidates, as also of how false is the impression that one man's vote is really going to make a difference to such a secular, ungodly system — we might easily conclude that there is no obligation to vote at all.

Yet the Church's teaching on the subject is not anything new. Without approving the modern system of democracy and its false principle of the sovereignty of the people, the Church nevertheless binds us to contribute towards the common good of society, by an obligation of legal justice. This principle is expressed well by Pope Pius XII in his April 20, 1946, discourse to Italian Catholic Action:

The people is called on to take an always larger part in the public life of the nation. This participation brings with it grave responsibilities. Hence the necessity for the faithful to have clear, solid, precise knowledge of their duties in the moral and religious domain with respect to their exercise of their civil rights, and in particular of the right to vote.

In fact, Pope Pius XII had clearly explained that it is precisely on account of the anti-Catholic and secular spirit that surrounds Catholics that they have the duty to defend the Church by the correct exercise of their right to vote. It is to prevent a greater evil. He had stated on March 16, 1946, to the parish priests of Rome:

The exercise of the right to vote is an act of grave moral responsibility, at least with respect to the electing of those who are called to give to a country its constitution and its laws, and in particular those that affect the sanctification of holy days of obligation, marriage, the family, schools and the just and equitable regulation of many social questions. It is the Church's duty to explain to the faithful the moral duties that flow from this electoral right.

Pope Pius XII was even more explicit two years later, again when speaking to the parish priests of Rome. He explained that in the precise circumstances of the time it was an obligation under pain of mortal sin for all the faithful to use their vote, and this even for women. Although it is certainly true that in the traditional conception of democracy it is only the heads of families who vote, it is perfectly permissible for women to use the right of vote when it is granted, and in fact it becomes an obligation to do so when the common good depends upon all Catholics using their vote correctly.

Here is the text of March 10, 1948:

In the present circumstances, it is a strict obligation for all those who have the right to vote, men and women, to take part in the elections. Whoever abstains from doing so, in particular by indolence or weakness, commits a sin grave in itself, a mortal fault. Each one must follow the dictate of his own conscience. However, it is obvious that the voice of conscience imposes on every Catholic to give his vote to the candidates who offer truly sufficient guarantees for the protection of the rights of God and of souls, for the true good of individuals, families and of society, according to the love of God and Catholic moral teaching.

This application of the Church's social teaching to the particular situation of the time is in accord with the teaching of the moral theologians, who speak of the grave sin of omission for those who simply neglect to elect good, Catholic representatives, and of the duty of doing all in our power of encouraging suitable laymen to work towards using the electoral system to obtain worthy lawmakers.

However, how far removed we are from this situation! Clearly, we are no longer in the circumstance of having to choose between Catholic and non-Catholic, morally upright and liberal representatives. All the alternatives are liberal, the deception and the manipulation of the public by the media is rampant. In practice, it generally comes down to the question of whether or not it is permissible to vote for an unworthy candidate (*e.g.*, a candidate who only approves abortion in cases of rape or incest), for he would at least (we suppose) be the lesser evil. In such a case, there can be no obligation to vote, for all the reasons that could oblige, mentioned by Pope Pius XII, no longer apply. Nevertheless, it is still permissible to vote in such a case, provided that one can be sure that there truly is a lesser evil, and that there is a grave reason to do so (*e.g.*,

to avoid abortion on demand, or promotion of unnatural methods of birth control), and one has the good intention of providing for the good of society as best one can. This is called material cooperation. However, it can never be obligatory.

Consequently, in the rare case that there is a clearly, publicly Catholic candidate who supports the teaching of the Church, there is a strict moral obligation to vote, under pain of mortal sin. Where there is a clear gain possible from the correct use of a vote for some other candidate, it can be recommended or counseled. However, when there is no clear advantage it would be better to abstain, so as not to contribute even to a material participation.

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## **CAN A CATHOLIC VOTE FOR A CANDIDATE WHO CONDONES INITIATIVES NOT IN ACCORD WITH THE MORAL LAW?**

Originally published in August 2007 issue of *The Angelus*

The Catholic Church does not tell Catholics to avoid all involvement in politics simply because there is injustice, greed, ambition, just to mention some of the evils involved. The Church teaches us that all our involvement in politics ought to be motivated, inspired, and directed by the Church's social teachings, and in particular by the Social Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Voting, as well as involvement in political campaigns, must have as its ultimate motive these higher, supernatural principles, that the law of God, the Ten Commandments, and the rights of the one true Church be acknowledged publicly in society.

Manifestly, we are presently very far removed from achieving these aims. It does not mean that we should do nothing. It does mean, however, that whatever we do will necessarily involve the toleration of many evils, which we in no way desire or will. However, it can be permissible to tolerate the lesser of two evils for a proportionate reason, and such toleration can be for the common good, precisely because it is

the lesser of two evils. Thus it is possible to vote or even campaign for a candidate whose platform contains evils with which we do not agree. Everything depends upon a hierarchy of the most important values and issues taking priority over lesser ones.

For a Catholic, there can be no doubt that the issues that take the highest priority must be the moral issues, and not personal or economic issues. The whole continuation of society as we know it depends upon this, and those who deny the most basic principles of the natural order are bringing about an unheard of perversion. Consequently, it is permissible and prudent to vote on the one single issue of proscribing abortion, or forbidding same-sex marriages, or putting an end to euthanasia, or freedom of the Catholic Church to run educational institutions. All of these issues are of the utmost importance. Consequently, it would be permissible and prudent to vote for a candidate who promotes an unjust war, on the basis of one or other of these issues. Consequently, it is likewise permissible to vote for a candidate who is known to be a Freemason, although Freemasonry is an evil society condemned by the Church and opposed to the Catholic Church, if he maintains an important principle of the natural law such as the evil of abortion.

Lesser issues are also of moral importance, such as the justice or injustice of a particular war, or the paying of a just wage to employees, maintaining the right to private property by limiting government intervention, and so on. All other things being equal, one could vote on the basis of such issues. However, it would be wrong to vote for a candidate who has a correct position on one of these issues, but a perverse and wrong position on a more important issue.

Consequently, it would be manifestly immoral and sinful to vote for a candidate who pretends to be Catholic, but who in fact is pro-abortion, pro-gay, or pro-euthanasia.

Voting in local and national elections can only be considered a moral obligation when the candidates propose a solidly Catholic, non-liberal platform that truly promotes the Social Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not obligatory to vote for a lesser evil, but simply prudent and permissible. However, it would certainly be obligatory to use the democratic process in place in the unlikely event that it could be used to introduce Catholic candidates who do not accept the propaganda of modern liberal democracy.





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