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Caveat: *While I am a United Methodist, and (more specifically) I am ordained as an Elder, (United Methodist Clergy), I do not speak on behalf of the United Methodist Church. Only the General Conference of the United Methodist Church may do so. Take this letter then simply as a real pastoral response to a real question, offered by a real person, during a time that is especially difficult for our nation. While you may download and read this at your leisure, please do not re-publish or post it elsewhere.*

A letter to a Roman Catholic, on the heels of the 2020 USA presidential election

My friend, you sent a question, asking...

Maybe you can help me with something. I have really been struggling with this, but there are several places in the Bible that reference God knowing us before we were formed in the womb. Our commandments are very clear about killing. I can't seem to understand how anyone who is a Christian can put an "X" on a document to say "I support this person and believe they are a leader and support what they want to do and the laws they try to enact" knowing that the person they are electing supports killing babies and will force that same belief down churches, colleges, religious sects (nuns) to provide financial support to people who want to kill babies, when it is against God and breaking His laws.

Thank you for the confidence implied in your taking the risk to ask me such a serious question.

I would also note, given the timing of the question, that it suggests your own grief over the incumbent's loss. I am sorry that this is a difficult time for you. It remains a difficult time for many.

The concerns you raise are serious matters. It is the question of one important aspect of being "pro-life". As you know, this big picture involves (in Roman Catholic conversations) "cradle to grave" concerns.

I think the Roman Catholic Church has done commendably, trying to offer guidance on what citizenship means in these fraught times, in particular in the document entitled

"Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship."

<https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/faithful-citizenship/upload/forming-consciences-for-faithful-citizenship.pdf>

One important sentence contained is ...

A Catholic cannot vote for a candidate who favors a policy promoting an intrinsically evil act, ... if the voter's intent is to support that position. (par 34)

I find another sentence to be equally important. If this first thought is one wing of the bird, then this next thought is the second wing, allowing it to fly...

There may be times when a Catholic who rejects a candidate's unacceptable position even on policies promoting an intrinsically evil act may reasonably decide to vote for that candidate for other morally grave reasons. Voting in this way would be permissible only for truly grave moral reasons, not to advance narrow interests or partisan preferences or to ignore a fundamental moral evil. (par 35)

You may be aware of the public side of the debate within the Roman Catholic Church on the significance and personal implementation of this counsel for the average lay Catholic. In particular I speak of the endorsement of Joe Biden by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Sept. 17, which (if I understand correctly) was a very rare, if not unprecedented, position for them to take.

John Carr, long time advisor to this conference, and present director of the *Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life*, at Georgetown University, who helped to shape the above mentioned document, has offered this...

"I will not vote for him (Biden) to support his position on abortion, but in spite of it, ... I believe Mr. Trump's character, lack of integrity and record on racism and Covid-19, among other matters, constitute 'morally grave reasons' to oppose his reelection and that Mr. Biden has the 'character and integrity' to lead our nation and is 'more likely to pursue other authentic human goods. I will vote for Mr. Biden for what he can do to help us recover and heal, lift up those left behind, ensure healthcare for all and treat immigrants and refugees with respect. ... "Character, competence, honesty, and integrity are crucial" (in this election). "In the end, we vote for candidates, not issues. Who they are and how they lead is critical."

*As reported by Thomas Reese, Sept 17, 2020, on religionnews.com
"Catholics should vote for Biden, says former bishops' conference official"*

In my opinion, most succinct on this matter are the words of Sister Joan D. Chittister from 2004 (Benedictine nun, who was not taking an overt stance on whom to endorse, even when first offered in 2004, another election year.)

"I do not believe that just because you are opposed to abortion, that that makes you pro-life. In fact, I think in many cases, your morality is deeply lacking if all you want is a child born but not a child fed, a child educated, a child housed. And why would I think that you don't? Because you don't want any tax money to go there. That's not pro-life. That's pro-birth. We need a much broader conversation on what the morality of pro-life is."

*She stood by this quote, when asked in May of 2019,
and confirmed that it came in interview with Bill Moyers, after the election of 2004.
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/sr-joan-chittisters-2004-quote-pro-life-versus-pro-birth-goes-viral>
http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/archives/chittister_now_flash.html*

It is audacious to try to instruct someone in matters of their own tradition. Still, I have attempted, and I believe that I have managed to present without distortion these perspectives, coming from within the Roman Catholic tradition. And I have provided ample information so that, if you wish, you can pursue them further.

And, I also believe they sufficiently answer the question

"how anyone who is a Christian can..."

While there is much more that could be said, including bringing in perspectives that are more from my own tradition (the United Methodist Church), I would only note, in conclusion, that I do not find as credible the accusation that

"the person they are electing supports killing babies and will force that same belief down churches, colleges, religious sects (nuns) to provide financial support to people who want to kill babies".

I think this mischaracterizes the significance, and intent, of the Hyde Amendment.

Just as you reached out to me in this matter, I hope that you will continue to try to see things from the perspectives of others. For example, there are people who can see, in some circumstances, a potential positive good in allowing legal abortion. Just as I serve as pastor for people on both sides of the political aisle, so also for this question. We have been talking past one another for a long time. Really listening is difficult work but, as I see it, breaking OUT of our "silos" is the only way forward for our nation. Again, I am sorry that this is a difficult time for you, and I hope you too can acknowledge that it is difficult for many thoughtful Americans of conscience. Tensions have been high, and a celebratory release of pent up emotion, "dancing in the streets" is certainly understandable. Now it is time for those celebrating to take off those "dancing shoes", and put on "working boots".

May grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Rev. Dave Hodsdon

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