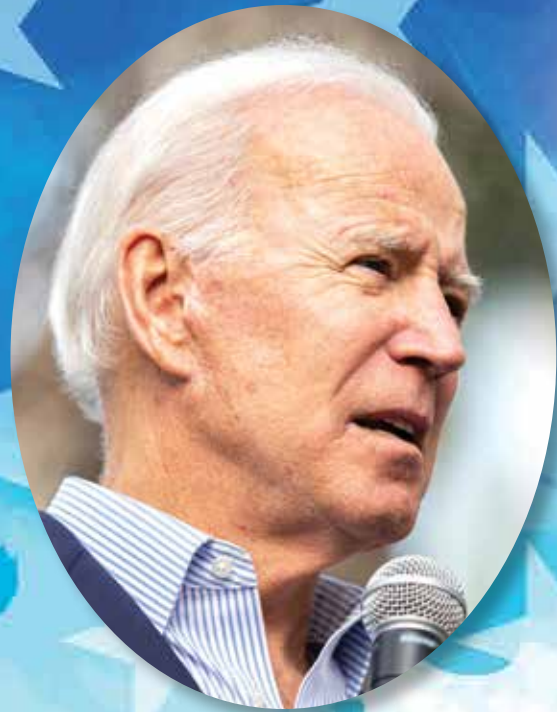


The Candidates, the Issues And Church Teaching

A VOTER'S GUIDE



As Catholics prepare to vote in the 2020 election, they are called both to form their consciences in light of Catholic teaching and to be informed about where the two major presidential candidates and their parties stand on the most important moral issues facing the country.

For Catholics, understanding the positions of President Donald Trump and former Vice President Joe Biden, as well as the Republican and Democratic Parties, is essential in making an informed decision on how to vote. It is also key in helping family, friends and colleagues make an equally enlightened choice on Nov. 3.

The Register is pleased to offer this special section on the candidates, the issues and Church teaching. Each section includes brief excerpts on what the Church or Church leaders teach about important topics (e.g., abortion, assisted suicide, embryonic stem-cell research, religious liberty, marriage, education, capital punishment, racism and the environment), followed by the actual words or pledges of the candidates and the two parties. While the Democratic Party platform has changed, the Republican Party platform is the same as in 2016. We hope that you find this guide helpful in your prayerful discernment.



Democratic Party



Republican Party



Church Teaching



Joe Biden



Donald Trump

Sanctity of Human Life

Abortion



"Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person — among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life. ... Since the first century the Church has affirmed the moral evil of every procured abortion. This teaching has not changed and remains unchangeable. Direct abortion, that is to say, abortion willed either as an end or a means, is gravely contrary to the moral law. ... Formal cooperation in an abortion constitutes a grave offense. The Church attaches the canonical penalty of excommunication to this crime against human life" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2270-2272).



Democrats: "Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should be able to access high-quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion." — Democratic Platform



Biden: "As president, Biden will work to codify *Roe v. Wade*, and his Justice Department will do everything in its power to stop the rash of state laws that so blatantly violate the constitutional right to an abortion, such as so-called TRAP laws, parental notification requirements, mandatory waiting periods, and ultrasound requirements." — JoeBiden.com



Republicans: "The Constitution's guarantee that no one can 'be deprived of life, liberty or property' deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that 'all' are 'endowed by their Creator' with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the 14th Amendment's protections apply to children before birth." — Republican Platform



Trump: "All of us here today understand an eternal truth: Every child is a precious and sacred gift from God. Together, we must protect, cherish and defend the dignity and sanctity of every human life. When we see the image of a baby in the womb, we glimpse the majesty of God's creation. When we hold a newborn in our arms, we know the endless love that each child brings to a family. When we watch a child grow, we see the splendor that radiates from each human soul. One life changes the world. ... And from the first day in office, I've taken historic action to support America's families and to protect the unborn." — Remarks by President Trump at the 47th-annual March for Life, Jan. 24, 2020

Taxpayer Funding for Abortion



"The federal government should not use its funding power to support and promote elective abortion and should not force taxpayers to subsidize this violence. Even public officials who take a 'pro-choice' stand, and courts that have insisted on a constitutional 'right' to abortion, have agreed that the government has every right (in the Supreme Court's words) to 'encourage childbirth over abortion'" (Cardinal Seán O'Malley, archbishop of Boston and chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee on Pro-Life Activities, 2015).



Democrats: "We will repeal the Title X domestic gag rule and restore federal funding for Planned Parenthood, which provides vital preventive and reproductive health care for millions of people, especially low-income people, and people of color, and LGBTQ+ people, including in underserved areas. Democrats oppose and will fight to overturn federal and state laws that create barriers to reproductive health and rights. We will repeal the Hyde Amendment, and protect and codify the right to reproductive freedom." — Democratic Platform



Biden: "The Obama-Biden administration fought Republican attacks on funding for Planned Parenthood again and again. As president, Biden will reissue guidance specifying that states cannot refuse Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood and other providers that refer for abortions or provide related information and reverse the Trump Administration's rule preventing Planned Parenthood and certain other family planning programs from obtaining Title X funds." — JoeBiden.com



Republicans: "We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. ... American taxpayers should not be forced to fund abortion. As Democrats abandon this four-decade-old bipartisan consensus, we call for codification of the Hyde Amendment and its application across the government, including Obamacare. We call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and healthcare plans that include abortion coverage." — Republican Platform



Trump: "President Trump worked with the Congress to sign a bill overturning an Obama midnight regulation that prohibited States from defunding abortion service providers. ... The Trump Administration published guidance which promises to enforce the Obamacare requirement that taxpayer dollars should not support abortion coverage in exchange plans." — DonaldJTrump.com

Assisted Suicide



"Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible. Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2276-2277).



Democrats (for Life): "The practice of assisted suicide is antithetical to liberal values. We acknowledge that those who support physician-assisted suicide do so out of a place of deep compassion for vulnerable, suffering people. But most people who honestly contemplate the long-term consequences of this legislation realize that legalizing the practice does the opposite of what is intended." — DemocratsforLife.org



Democrats: The Democratic Party has not publicly stated a position on the matter.



Republicans: "We oppose the non-consensual withholding of care or treatment from people with disabilities, including newborns, the elderly and infirm, just as we oppose euthanasia and assisted suicide, which endanger especially those on the margins of society. We urge the Drug Enforcement Administration to restore its ban on the use of controlled substances for physician-assisted suicide." — Republican Platform

Embryonic Stem-Cell Research



"Cloning and destruction of human embryos for research or even for potential cures are always wrong" (U.S. bishops' "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship").



Democrats: "Scientific research is at the heart of medicine — and of health care. Democrats want the United States to be at the forefront of scientific research and discovery for the benefit of our people, our economy, and our global competitiveness. ... We will also build on the foundation of the Obama-Biden Administration's Cancer Moonshot to break down silos and accelerate research into cancer and cancer treatments by creating an agency with the sole mission of finding new cures and treatments for cancer and other diseases." — Democratic Platform

"Current immunotherapy treatments represent only the tip of the iceberg of what is possible, and human studies using newly developed, cutting-edge technologies are key to further advances. The combined use of ever-improving genetic tools, synthetic biology tools, and *stem cell biology* may enable the manipulation of the immune system to eliminate diverse types of cancer." — "Cancer Moonshot" Report (emphasis added)

"Cancer Moonshot funding would provide the opportunity to coordinate a network of collaborating investigators with expertise in proteomics/structural biology, genomics/epigenomics, chemistry, experimental therapeutics, and disease-specific biology to do the following ... [d]evelop a comprehensive collection of genomically characterized cell line, mouse, and induced *pluripotent stem cell* models of fusion-driven pediatric cancers. Currently existing models are limited and inadequate." — "Cancer Moonshot" Report (emphasis added)



Republicans: "We oppose embryonic stem cell research. We oppose federal funding of embryonic stem cell research. We support adult stem cell research and urge the restoration of the national placental stem cell bank created by President George H.W. Bush but abolished by his Democrat successor, President Bill Clinton. We oppose federal funding for harvesting embryos and call for a ban on human cloning." — Republican Platform



Trump: "In September 2018, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) terminated a contract between Advanced Bioscience Resources, Inc. and the Food and Drug Administration that provided human fetal tissue from elective abortions to develop testing protocols. ... Promoting the dignity of human life from conception to natural death is one of the very top priorities of President Trump's administration. The audit and review helped inform the policy process that led to the administration's decision to let the contract with UCSF [University of California San Francisco] expire and to discontinue intramural research — research conducted within the National Institutes of Health (NIH) — involving the use of human fetal tissue from elective abortion. Intramural research that requires new acquisition of fetal tissue from elective abortions will not be conducted." — Statement from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, June 5, 2019

Marriage



"The family is the original cell of social life. It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security and fraternity within society. The family is the community in which, from childhood, one can learn moral values, begin to honor God and make good use of freedom. Family life is an initiation into life in society. ... The family should live in such a way that its members learn to care and take responsibility for the young, the old, the sick, the handicapped and the poor. There are many families who are at times incapable of providing this help. It devolves then on other persons, other families and, in a subsidiary way, society to provide for their needs: 'Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction and to keep oneself unstained from the world.' ... The family must be helped and defended by appropriate social measures. Where families cannot fulfill their responsibilities, other social bodies have the duty of helping them and of supporting the institution of the family. Following the principle of subsidiarity, larger communities should take care not to usurp the family's prerogatives or interfere in its life. ... The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family. Civil authority should consider it a grave duty 'to acknowledge the true nature of marriage and the family, to protect and foster them, to safeguard public morality and promote domestic prosperity'" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2207-2210).



Democrats: "Democrats applaud this year's U.S. Supreme Court decision that made clear that employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity violates the law, but we know we still have work to do to ensure LGBTQ+ people are treated equally under the law and in our society. We will fight to enact the Equality Act and at last outlaw discrimination against LGBTQ+ people in housing, public accommodations, access to credit, education, jury service, and federal programs. We will work to ensure LGBTQ+ people are not discriminated against when seeking to adopt or foster children, protect LGBTQ+ children from bullying and assault, and guarantee transgender students' access to facilities based on their gender identity. Democrats will ensure federally funded programs for older adults are inclusive for LGBTQ+ seniors." — Democratic Platform



Biden: "Joe Biden believes that every human being should be treated with respect and dignity and be able to live without fear no matter who they are or who they love. During the Obama-Biden Administration, the United States made historic strides toward LGBTQ+ equality — from the repeal of 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' to Biden's historic declaration in support of marriage equality on *Meet the Press* in 2012 to the unprecedented advancement of protections for LGBTQ+ Americans at the federal level." — JoeBiden.com



Republicans: "Traditional marriage and family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the foundation for a free society and has for millennia been entrusted with rearing children and instilling cultural values. We condemn the Supreme Court's ruling in *United States v. Windsor*, which wrongly removed the ability of Congress to define marriage policy in federal law. We also condemn the Supreme Court's lawless ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. ... In *Obergefell*, five unelected lawyers robbed 320 million Americans of their legitimate constitutional authority to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman." — Republican Platform



Trump: "President Donald J. Trump is determined to protect the rights of all Americans, including the LGBTQ community. President Trump continues to be respectful and supportive of LGBTQ rights, just as he was throughout the election. The president is proud to have been the first ever GOP nominee to mention the LGBTQ community in his nomination acceptance speech, pledging then to protect the community from violence and oppression." — White House statement, Jan. 31, 2017

Immigration



"Immigration can be a resource for development rather than an obstacle to it. In the modern world, where there are still grave inequalities between rich countries and poor countries, and where advances in communications quickly reduce distances, the immigration of people looking for a better life is on the increase. These people come from less privileged areas of the earth, and their arrival in developed countries is often perceived as a threat to the high levels of well-being achieved thanks to decades of economic growth. In most cases, however, immigrants fill a labor need which would otherwise remain unfilled in sectors and territories where the local workforce is insufficient or unwilling to engage in the work in question. ... Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. In this context, the right of reuniting families should be respected and promoted. At the same time, conditions that foster increased work opportunities in people's place of origin are to be promoted as much as possible" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 297-298).



Democrats: "A 21st century immigration system that honors our values is an essential prerequisite not just to recovering from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, but to strengthening our democracy and guaranteeing America's long-term economic competitiveness. That's why Democrats believe in improving and increasing opportunities for legal, permanent immigration. Our family, humanitarian, and diversity pathways have contributed immeasurably to the vibrancy and productivity of American society and should continue to be the centerpiece of our immigration system." — Democratic Platform



Biden: "As president, Biden will commit significant political capital to finally deliver legislative immigration reform to ensure that the U.S. remains open and welcoming to people from every part of the world — and to bring hardworking people who have enriched our communities and our country, in some cases for decades, out of the shadows. This is not just of concern to Latino communities; this touches families of every heritage and background." — JoeBiden.com



Republicans: "The greatest asset of the American economy is the American worker. Our immigration system must protect American working families and their wages, for citizens and legal immigrants alike, in a way that will improve the economy. Just as immigrant labor helped build our country in the past, today's legal immigrants are making vital contributions in every aspect of national life. Their industry and commitment to American values strengthens our economy, enriches our culture, and enables us to better understand and more effectively compete with the rest of the world." — Republican Platform



Trump: "To restore the rule of law and secure our border, President Trump is committed to constructing a border wall and ensuring the swift removal of unlawful entrants. To protect American workers, the President supports ending chain migration, eliminating the Visa Lottery, and moving the country to a merit-based entry system. These reforms will advance the safety and prosperity of all Americans while helping new citizens assimilate and flourish." — WhiteHouse.gov

Education



"As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental. As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2229). "Parents have the right to choose the formative tools that respond to their convictions and to seek those means that will help them best to fulfill their duty as educators, in the spiritual and religious sphere also. Public authorities have the duty to guarantee this right and to ensure the concrete conditions necessary for it to be exercised. In this context, cooperation between the family and scholastic institutions takes on primary importance. ... Parents have the right to found and support educational institutions. Public authorities must see to it that 'public subsidies are so allocated that parents are truly free to exercise this right without incurring unjust burdens. Parents should not have to sustain, directly or indirectly, extra charges which would deny or unjustly limit the exercise of this freedom.' The refusal to provide public economic support to non-public schools that need assistance and that render a service to civil society is to be considered an injustice. Whenever the state lays claim to an educational monopoly, it oversteps its rights and offends justice. ... The state cannot without injustice merely tolerate so-called private schools. Such schools render a public service and therefore have a right to financial assistance" (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, 240-241).



Democrats: "As Democrats, we believe that education is a critical public good — not a commodity — and that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that every child, everywhere, is able to receive a world-class education that enables them to lead meaningful lives, no matter their race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, religion, disability status, language status, immigration or citizenship status, household income or ZIP code. Charter schools were originally intended to be publicly funded schools with increased flexibility in program design and operations. Democrats believe that education is a public good and should not be saddled with a private profit motive, which is why we will ban for-profit private charter businesses from receiving federal funding." — Democratic Platform



Biden: "As President, Biden will build an education system that starts investing in our children at birth and helps every student get some education beyond a high school diploma, whether a certification, associate's degree, or bachelor's degree. Systemic racism is persistent across our institutions today — including in our schools — and must be addressed. President Biden will make sure that no child's education opportunity is determined by their ZIP code, parents' income, race, or disability." — JoeBiden.com



Republicans: "Parents are a child's first and foremost educators, and have primary responsibility for the education of their children. Parents have a right to direct their children's education, care, and upbringing. ... We reject a one-size-fits-all approach to education and support a broad range of choices for parents and children at the state and local level. We likewise repeat our long-standing opposition to the imposition of national standards and assessments, encourage the parents and educators who are implementing alternatives to Common Core, and congratulate the states which have successfully repealed it. Their education reform movement calls for choice-based, parent-driven accountability at every stage of schooling." — Republican Platform



Trump: "We're fighting for school choice ... in this country. Frankly, school choice is the civil-rights statement of the year, of the decade, and probably beyond, because all children have to have access to quality education. A child's ZIP code in America should never determine their future, and that's what was happening. So we're very, very strong on school choice." — Press briefing, White House, June 16, 2020

Care for Creation



"Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2415).



Democratic Party: "Democrats reject the false choice between growing our economy and combating climate change; we can and must do both at the same time. We will use federal resources and authorities across all agencies to deploy proven clean energy solutions; create millions of family-supporting and union jobs; upgrade and make resilient our energy, water, wastewater, and transportation infrastructure; and develop and manufacture next-generation technologies to address the climate crisis right here in the United States." — Democratic Platform



Joe Biden: "Any sound energy and environmental policy must advance public health and economic opportunity for all Americans, in rural, urban, and suburban communities, and recognize that communities of color and low-income communities have faced disproportionate harm from climate change and environmental contaminants for decades. It must also hold corporate polluters responsible for rampant pollution. ... Officials setting policy must be accountable to the people and communities they serve, not to polluters and corporations." — JoeBiden.com



Republican Party: "The Republican Party reaffirms the moral obligation to be good stewards of the God-given natural beauty and resources of our country. We believe that people are the most valuable resources and that human health and safety are the proper measurements of a policy's success. We assert that private ownership has been the best guarantee of conscientious stewardship, while some of the worst instances of degradation have occurred under government control. Poverty, not wealth, is the gravest threat to the environment." — Republican Platform



Donald Trump: "America's energy independence is critical to environmental stewardship. While boosting [domestic] energy production, the United States still continues to be a world leader in clean air, including in the reduction of energy-related CO2 emissions. ... To continue our progress, I proudly signed the Great American Outdoors Act, which will direct royalties from energy production on Federal lands and waters toward conserving and repairing our national parks, forests, refuges, public lands, and tribal schools." — Oct. 1, "Proclamation on National Energy Awareness Month"

Resources: EWTN's Catholic Voter's Guide on Moral Principles, Specific Issues, Party Comparison via EWTN.com/vote

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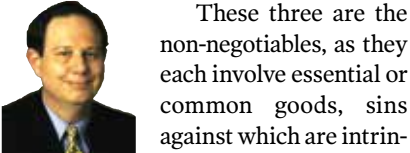
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ELECTION 2020

Proportionality and Voting: What Is Non-Negotiable?

One of the questions that Catholic voters often ask is how to navigate the potentially treacherous waters of moral theology when it comes to voting. We are all obligated to form our consciences properly, and that is easy to do when faced with a candidate who either clearly adheres to Catholic moral teaching or who promotes policies and ideas in direct contradiction to it, especially on life, on marriage and family, and on religious freedom.



COLIN DONOVAN

These three are the non-negotiables, as they each involve essential or common goods, sins against which are intrinsically evil. There is no middle ground between support for an intrinsic evil and opposition to it. There is no motive or set of circumstances which can justify the direct taking of innocent human life, for example, whether of the unborn or the sick and dying. The same is true of the other non-negotiables, marriage and religious freedom.

However, what if a candidate strongly promotes the essential goods in themselves but has a mixed record on their application to policy matters? These negotiable issues also engage the essential goods, such as respect for the dignity of an *existing* human life, whether in providing health care, in immigration, in policing or other issues, though people of goodwill can disagree on the means to achieve them.

Alternately, what if the candidate is weak on protecting the essential goods yet strongly promotes a basket of negotiable issues important to Catholics? Is this enough to permit voting for such a candidate?

In an important letter to the U.S. bishops' conference in July 2004, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, then head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, wrote, "When a Catholic does not share a candidate's stand in favor of abortion and/or euthanasia, but votes for that candidate for other reasons, it is

considered remote material cooperation, which can be permitted in the presence of proportionate reasons."

This statement contains a good summary of the three necessary elements of a good moral act (object, intention and circumstances), which the moral tradition teaches must be present for any action to be integrally good. First, he states that the voter must have a good moral object. It may not, therefore, be the evil the candidate might do, but the foreseeable good he will do in other areas.

Second, this good object is embraced by the voter's will, while the evil the candidate might do is rejected by the voter.

Third, and this is key to the justification that must be present, the good expected to be achieved must be proportionate to the evil which may be done by the candidate. Then, and only then, is such a vote justifiable, as the link between voting for the candidate for justifiable reasons and the evil he will do is only remotely connected to the will of the voter. This is what is meant by "remote material cooperation."

This last point is indeed the crux of the moral issue, granting the good object and good intention of the voter.

What, then, is the justifying proportionality? The usual argument is that the many policy issues that do reflect Catholic teaching contain the values essential to the common good. Their presence in policies which advance health care, immigration and other "Catholic" issues, therefore, balance out the defects of the candidate in not supporting the essential goods (life, marriage, religious freedom) directly.

This logic is erroneous on two grounds.

First, with respect to proportionality. In abortion, the assault on human life is direct and intended. This is why it is gravely evil. In health care, however, with the exception of abortion and euthanasia packaged as "health care," it will

generally be a failure of multiple causes. One factor may indeed be the absence of health insurance, but that is unreasonably said to be equivalent to the choice to directly and willfully take the life of the unborn, or the sick and elderly.

There is no proportionality, therefore, between certain essential issues and policy issues. Cardinal Ratzinger alludes to this in the same letter when he contrasts abortion and euthanasia on the one hand with the negotiable issues. Later, as Pope Benedict, he would speak of this *qualitative* difference between the *non-negotiables* and the *negotiables*.

"As far as the Catholic Church is concerned, the principal focus of her interventions in the public arena is the protection and promotion of the dignity of the person, and she is thereby consciously drawing particular attention to principles which are not negotiable. Among these the following emerge clearly today: a) protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death; b) recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage and its defense from attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different forms of union which in reality harm it and contribute to its destabilization, obscuring its particular character and its irreplaceable social role; c) the protection of the right of parents to educate their children" ("Address to European Parliamentary Group," March 30, 2006).

The Pope and the moral tradition, therefore, while excluding the approval of evils contrary to the non-negotiables, teach that evil effects (abortion, etc.) may nonetheless be permitted as "remote material cooperation" and only "in the presence of proportionate reasons."

The second reason this logic is erroneous is a practical one. A prudent act of voting includes, among other things, understanding the present and foresight regarding the

consequences of one's choice (St. Thomas Aquinas). Regarding understanding, the operative question is, are there in fact candidates who, while tolerating or ignoring the essential goods, really do provide an authentic basket of goods consistent with Catholic teaching?

The honest answer is that there is not. That basket is riddled with holes, regarding protections for innocent life, regarding protecting and promoting authentic marriage and family, and, increasingly, regarding protecting the right of belief, and even more so the right of exercising one's religious and conscience beliefs concerning life, marriage and liberty.

Most such candidates are even prepared to hit believers over the head with the basket in order to protect abortion, euthanasia and gender ideology — even to the point of demanding acts contrary to these goods from those whose religious beliefs cause them to object.

Any question of justification of one's vote is lost on grounds of both proportionality and prudence. One simply will not get to a consistent ethic of life, the advancement of marriage and family, and the protection of religious and other conscience freedoms by such a vote. Rather, one is likely to advance their opposite.

The Jewish tradition teaches that "every life is like a universe." This idea encapsulates well the Catholic Tradition on the dignity of human life and the human person. This dignity is inseparable from marriage and family in which that life is nurtured, or from freedom of religion, by which individuals, family and societies know truth and are empowered to live it in charity. The loss of respect for human life, dignity, marriage and freedom, therefore, in addition to being fatal to the weak and most innocent among us, will ultimately be fatal to family life and society itself.

Colin Donovan, STL, is vice president for theology at EWTN.

Is There a Lesser of 2 Evils?

Editor's note: This column has been updated since it last appeared in the Register in October 2016.

It is a consistent feature of every election that Catholics must choose between imperfect candidates and imperfect positions. Seldom, if ever, is it the case that a politician holds the Catholic position on all the issues and yet remains electable in a democratic and pluralistic society.

Since the purpose of politics is practical, to protect and advance the common good, voting should be practical, as well. This typically means, therefore, having to choose between two imperfect candidates with two imperfect sets of positions, rather than choosing a candidate who will seek the common good in perfect agreement with Catholic teaching.

In an address to a European Parliamentary Group March 30, 2006, Pope Benedict XVI laid out the hierarchy of values that should govern the voting of Catholic legislators and citizens, given the imperfect nature of candidates and legislation. He divided political issues into two general classes, those that are "non-negotiable" and those that are "negotiable."

The "non-negotiables" are those essential elements of the common good on which all other goods are dependent and whose violation is an intrinsic evil forbidden by the moral law for any motive and in all circumstances. They are "protection of life in all its stages, from the first moment of conception until natural death," "recognition and promotion of the natural structure of the family as a union between a man and a woman based on marriage," and "the protection of the right of parents to educate their children."

A Catholic must take into account in the first place, therefore, these essential goods, voting for life, natural marriage and parental rights (religious freedom). However, even in considering a politician's positions on policy matters (negotiables), the three essential or common goods are necessarily central to them, as well.

Since no candidate is perfect, the question naturally arises: Can one justify a vote for any candidate who does not hold the Church's teaching across the board or for a candidate who holds an imperfect but less extreme position than another candidate's position on non-negotiables?

Confusion first arises from the name often used for the moral principle at play: the lesser of two evils. This description suggests something true: that in voting for the candidate with the less extreme position there is the appearance of voting for the evil that he or she would allow in some areas. However, although you cannot vote for a candidate because of their position contrary to Church teaching (abortion, same-sex "marriage," religious freedom, immigration, health care, etc.), you can vote for them to prevent an even more extreme candidate from being elected, especially on the more essential goods, since these govern all issues.

St. Thomas Aquinas enunciated this principle in the *Summa Theologiae*, where he noted that the object of the will's choice is the possible good, not the impossible good (I-II q13, a5). Applying this principle, Pope St. John Paul II taught in *Evangelium Vitae* that it is legitimate for a legislator to vote for a more restrictive law curbing abortion when complete abrogation of the pro-abortion law is not possible. He wrote: "This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects, in order to prevent worse legislation from being adopted" (73). This was not a new teaching by John Paul or applicable solely to legislators, but the application of long-standing principles of moral theology.

Thus, the Jesuit moralist Father Henry Davis wrote in the 1930s, "It is sinful to vote for the enemies of religion or liberty, except to exclude a worse candidate, or unless compelled by fear of great personal harm, relatively greater than the public harm at stake." If the object of the act of voting is to limit the evil that would occur if the worse candidate, or legislation, succeeded, then one's intention should also be predominately directed to that object. It should not be primarily to lesser purposes, such as keeping a party in power, aiding this group or that, or to gain personal advantage derived from policy choices. When so much attention is focused on the minutiae of policies, as necessary as that is, authentic concern for the common good begins with defending the non-negotiable values upon which a morally, politically and economically healthy society depends.

CONTINUES ON PAGE B4

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION.

These are the three most important factors in real estate.
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Racism

 “Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it. They are the basis of the moral legitimacy of every authority: by flouting them, or refusing to recognize them in its positive legislation, a society undermines its own moral legitimacy. If it does not respect them, authority can rely only on force or violence to obtain obedience from its subjects. It is the Church’s role to remind men of goodwill of these rights and to distinguish them from unwarranted or false claims. Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as “another self,” above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity.’ No legislation could by itself do away with the fears, prejudices, and attitudes of pride and selfishness which obstruct the establishment of truly fraternal societies. Such behavior will cease only through the charity that finds in every man a ‘neighbor,’ a brother. The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be. ‘As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’ This same duty extends to those who think or act differently from us. The teaching of Christ goes so far as to require the forgiveness of offenses. He extends the commandment of love, which is that of the New Law, to all enemies. Liberation in the spirit of the Gospel is incompatible with hatred of one’s enemy as a person, but not with hatred of the evil that he does as an enemy. Created in the image of the one God and equally endowed with rational souls, all men have the same nature and the same origin. Redeemed by the sacrifice of Christ, all are called to participate in the same divine beatitude: All therefore enjoy an equal dignity. The equality of men rests essentially on their dignity as persons and the rights that flow from it: Every form of social or cultural discrimination in fundamental personal rights on the grounds of sex, race, color, social conditions, language, or religion must be curbed and eradicated as incompatible with God’s design” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1930-1935).


 **Democrats:** “Democrats are committed to standing up to racism and bigotry in our laws, in our culture, in our politics, and in our society, and recognize that race-neutral policies are not sufficient to rectify race-based disparities. We will take a comprehensive approach to embed racial justice in every element of our governing agenda, including in jobs and job creation, workforce and economic development, small business and entrepreneurship, eliminating poverty and closing the racial wealth gap, promoting asset building and homeownership, education, health care, criminal justice reform, environmental justice, and voting rights.” — Democratic Platform

 **Biden:** “Vice President Joe Biden will make sure that people historically left out of the middle class — whether due to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, or religion — have the chance to succeed. He will be unflinching in confronting the systemic racism in our country that is built into our laws, our policies, and our institutions and will take aggressive action to correct them — ripping out the inequities in housing, health care, education, the economy, our criminal justice system, and so many other areas. Rooting out systemic racism and ensuring that everyone is treated with dignity and has equal opportunity is built into all of Joe’s domestic policies.” — JoeBiden.com


 **Republicans:** “We denounce bigotry, racism, anti-Semitism, ethnic prejudice, and religious intolerance. Therefore, we oppose discrimination based on race, sex, religion, creed, disability, or national origin and support statutes to end such discrimination. As the Party of Abraham Lincoln, we must continue to foster solutions to America’s difficult challenges when it comes to race relations today. We continue to encourage equality for all citizens and access to the American Dream. Merit and hard work should determine advancement in our society, so we reject unfair preferences, quotas, and set-asides as forms of discrimination. Our ranks include Americans from every faith and tradition, and we respect the right of each American to follow his or her deeply held beliefs.” — Republican Platform


 **Trump:** “In one voice, our nation must condemn racism, bigotry and white supremacy. These sinister ideologies must be defeated. Hate has no place in America. Hatred warps the mind, ravages the heart, and devours the soul.” — Remarks by President Trump in response to the mass shootings in Texas and Ohio, Aug. 5, 2019


Religious Liberty


 “Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order. ... The political community has a duty to honor the family, to assist it and to ensure especially:

- the freedom to establish a family, have children and bring them up in keeping with the family’s own moral and religious convictions;
- the protection of the stability of the marriage bond and the institution of the family;
- the freedom to profess one’s faith, to hand it on, and raise one’s children in it, with the necessary means and institutions;
- the right to private property, to free enterprise, to obtain work and housing and the right to emigrate;
- in keeping with the country’s institutions, the right to medical care, assistance for the aged and family benefits;
- the protection of security and health, especially with respect to dangers like drugs, pornography, alcoholism, etc.;
- the freedom to form associations with other families and so to have representation before civil authority” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1738; 2211).


 **Democrats:** “Religious freedom is a core American value and a core value of the Democratic Party. Democrats will protect the rights of each American for the free exercise of his or her own religion. It will be the policy of the Democratic Administration to advocate for religious freedom throughout the world. Democrats celebrate America’s history of religious pluralism and tolerance, and recognize the countless acts of service of our faith communities, as well as the paramount importance of maintaining the separation between church and state enshrined in our Constitution.” — Democratic Platform


 **Biden:** “The Biden Plan for Safeguarding America’s Faith-Based Communities recognizes that we must involve federal, state, and local governments, as well as our houses of worship, in order to strike at the core of extremist violence and the social conditions that give rise to it. As president, Biden will lead by example: with tolerance and understanding from the highest levels of our government. He will also restore a national culture of inclusiveness that encourages individuals of all faiths to celebrate their beliefs openly and without fear of harm or reprisal.” — JoeBiden.com


 **Republicans:** “We pledge to defend the religious beliefs and rights of conscience of all Americans and to safeguard religious institutions against government control. ... We likewise endorse the efforts of Republican state legislators and governors who have defied intimidation from corporations and the media in defending religious liberty. ... We support laws to confirm the long-standing American tradition that religious individuals and institutions can educate young people, receive government benefits, and participate in public debates without having to check their religious beliefs at the door.” — Republican Platform


 **Trump:** “We have taken decisive action to protect the religious liberty — so important. Religious liberty has been under attack all over the world, and, frankly, very strongly attacked in our nation. You see it better than anyone. But we are stopping it, and we’re taking care of doctors, nurses, teachers and groups like the Little Sisters of the Poor.” — Remarks by President Trump at the 47th-annual March for Life, Jan. 24, 2020


Capital Punishment

 “The efforts of the state to curb the spread of behavior harmful to people’s rights and to the basic rules of civil society correspond to the requirement of safeguarding the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Punishment has the primary aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offense. When it is willingly accepted by the guilty party, it assumes the value of expiation. Punishment then, in addition to defending public order and protecting people’s safety, has a medicinal purpose: As far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party. Recourse to the death penalty on the part of legitimate authority, following a fair trial, was long considered an appropriate response to the gravity of certain crimes and an acceptable, albeit extreme, means of safeguarding the common good. Today, however, there is an increasing awareness that the dignity of the person is not lost even after the commission of very serious crimes. In addition, a new understanding has emerged of the significance of penal sanctions imposed by the state. Lastly, more effective systems of detention have been developed, which ensure the due protection of citizens but, at the same time, do not definitively deprive the guilty of the possibility of redemption. Consequently, the Church teaches, in the light of the Gospel, that ‘the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person,’ and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2266-2267; updated in 2018).

 **Democrats:** “... Democrats continue to support abolishing the death penalty.” — Democratic Platform

 **Biden:** “Because we cannot ensure we get death penalty cases right every time, Biden will work to pass legislation to eliminate the death penalty at the federal level, and incentivize states to follow the federal government’s example. These individuals should instead serve life sentences without probation or parole.” — JoeBiden.com

 **Republicans:** “The constitutionality of the death penalty is firmly settled by its explicit mention in the Fifth Amendment. With the murder rate soaring in our great cities, we condemn the Supreme Court’s erosion of the right of the people to enact capital punishment in their states. In solidarity with those who protect us, we call for mandatory prison time for all assaults involving serious injury to law enforcement officers.” — Republican Platform

 **Trump:** In response to the mass shootings in Texas and Ohio in early August 2019, Trump said he was “directing the Department of Justice to propose legislation ensuring that those who commit hate crimes and mass murders face the death penalty and that this capital punishment be delivered quickly, decisively and without years of needless delay.” — Remarks by President Trump in response to the mass shootings in Texas and Ohio, Aug. 5, 2019

Compiled by Joseph O’Brien,
Register correspondent.

Donovan

CONTINUING PAGE B3 SIDEBAR
Finally, the circumstances can also determine whether we can choose the lesser evil. Father Davis affirmed this in noting that such a vote is justified, made morally possible, by the need to exclude a worse candidate — one whom he places among the “enemies of religion and liberty.” Other theologians of the period speak of “enemies of morality.” Together, these categories are reminiscent of Pope Benedict XVI’s non-negotiables (human life, marriage and family, and religious liberty). This is likewise consistent with St. John Paul’s analysis of the legislator’s predicament. Circumstances can create a compelling reason to vote for the imperfect candidate, the so-called lesser of two evils. In doing so, Pope John Paul tells us, our “absolute personal opposition” to the evil the candidate does embrace must be known. In this way, our true motive is seen and the scandal of appearing to vote for evil is undermined. It is therefore quite clear from the moral-theology tradition and specific magisterial teaching that a Catholic may vote for a candidate who does not wholly embrace Catholic teaching on the non-negotiable issues. This can be done: ■ in order to limit the evil that would result if a worse candidate on these issues were elected; ■ provided that this is predominately the intention of voting; and ■ provided that the other candidate is indeed worse and any scandal caused by the appearance of voting for evil is corrected, such as by explaining Catholic teaching and one’s full adherence to it.

— Colin Donovan



SHUTTERSTOCK

Election Prayer

BY SERVANT OF GOD FATHER JOHN ANTHONY HARDON, SJ
Lord Jesus Christ, you told us to give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God. Enlighten the minds of our people in America. May we choose a president of the United States, and other government officials, according to your divine will. Give our citizens the courage to choose leaders of our nation who respect the sanctity of unborn human life, the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of marital relations, the sanctity of the family, and the sanctity of the aging. Grant us the wisdom to give you what belongs to you, our God. If we do this, as a nation, we are confident you will give us an abundance of your blessings through our elected leaders. Amen.

Composed by Father John Anthony Hardon, SJ
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