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A CATHOLIC VOTES

Pastoral Letter
of
BISHOP LIAM CARY
on the 2020 Election

Part I: The Sanctity of Life

At Sunday Mass in September we heard the word of God to the Prophet Ezekiel: “*You* I have appointed watchman for the house of Israel” to do something essential: “you shall warn them for Me.” And if “you do not speak out” when the stakes are high, “I will hold you responsible.”

In time of peril the shepherd must speak out; the watchman must warn. The 2020 election is such a time for American Catholics, for grave and gathering dangers menace the freedom of Catholic conscience in this good land.

It falls to me as bishop to help form and strengthen Catholic conscience according to the teaching of the Church. But I must begin with myself. In what follows I will share the soul searching I’ve gone through personally in the months leading up to the election.

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” St. Paul reminds us. I need to guide my earthly-city deliberations with a heavenly-city perspective. I need to form my conscience according to the mind of my Church, not the mind of

my party. The first step is to rid my mind of confusion concerning crucial moral issues at play. Conscience leads me to clarify what I stand for—and what I can never stand for—before I decide whom to vote for. Consistent Catholic moral teaching lets me make “a clear distinction between political issues about which men and women of good will can disagree and those issues that have to do with human rights and should never be treated politically,” as Bishop David Konderla puts it.

In the earthly city, politics works to attain in ever greater measure the common good of justice. That’s the direction in which I want my country to move, toward a society that gives each person in it his or her due. But visions of justice conflict, and so do consciences that seek to do justice (as they conflicted in the election of 1860 over the nation-dividing issue of slavery). When the time comes to mark my ballot this year, what alternatives will *my* conscience allow? To answer this question I need to take to heart the Church’s prophetic teachings about what justice demands and injustice ignores.

The claims of justice spring from our beginning, from the starting point of human dignity. If I bring my mind to a halt short of that starting point, if I refuse to reach back all the way to our origin, I fail to acknowledge what justice must seek and what it prompts reason to find at the foundation of political life.

That finding is this: “. . . from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already.”

These are the words of Pope St. John Paul II in *The Gospel of Life* (60). In giving us life, the Pope goes on to say, “God demands that [we] love, respect, and promote life. The gift thus becomes a commandment, and the commandment is itself a gift” (52).

With this great gift the Author of Life clears a bright path for justice to follow, in spheres both personal and social. As the American bishops noted in 1998, it is fitting that He Who is Justice shows us the way: “No one but the Creator is the sovereign of basic human rights—beginning with the right to life” (*Living the Gospel of Life*, 15).

Therefore, “*whoever attacks human life in some way attacks God Himself*” (GL, 9); because “No human law can validly contradict the Commandment: ‘Thou shalt not kill’” (LGL, 31). “To claim the right to abortion . . . and to recognize that right in law means to attribute to human freedom . . . an absolute power over others and against others” (GL, 20). This constitutes a betrayal of justice at the very foundation of the legal structure designed to attain it.

From these teachings we American bishops draw a practical conclusion in our statement

for this year’s election: “The threat of abortion remains our preeminent priority because it directly attacks life itself, because it takes place within the sanctuary of the family, and because of the number of lives destroyed.” In the words of Bishop Thomas Paprocki, “To say that an issue is ‘preeminent’ does not mean that it is the only issue, but that it surpasses all others in importance. It is preeminent in that it is the basic human right on which all other rights depend.”

In the 2016 election the formerly pro-choice Donald Trump did not easily convince wary voters of his commitment to the pro-life cause. Though he chose a notably pro-life candidate for vice-president and pledged to appoint Constitutionalist judges to the Supreme Court, his promises as a novice office-seeker clashed with positions he’d taken previously. Would he follow through on them if elected? There was ample reason to doubt that he would. In 2020, however, four years of governance have dispelled that doubt completely: as president, Mr. Trump has an unequalled record of achievement in defense of unborn life. He has more than fulfilled his pro-life promises of 2016.

In his first week in office Mr. Trump reinstated the Mexico City Policy, which bans taxpayer funding of organizations that promote abortion in developing nations. Shortly thereafter, he signed an executive order exempting faith-based employers from laws that forced them to violate their religious beliefs to comply. He went on to encourage Congress to pass the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act and strongly supported the Hyde Amendment, which prohibits federal funding of abortion throughout the United States. He strengthened federal enforcement of religious liberty laws that pro-

tect medical providers from having to assist with abortions. To the dismay of Planned Parenthood, he issued new rules that directed federal funds away from abortion clinics to community health centers. This January he became the first president to attend the annual March for Life in Washington, D.C.

But of all Mr. Trump's interventions on behalf of unborn life, perhaps the most significant has been his re-making of the federal judiciary. True to his promise, he has named three Constitutionalist justices to the Supreme Court and more than 200 similarly minded jurists to the lower federal courts.

In stark contrast, Joseph Biden promises to appoint to the federal courts only judges who pass his litmus test of *support* for *Roe v. Wade*. Indeed, across the whole range of issues regarding the defense of unborn life his positions are diametrically opposed to those of Mr. Trump.

To enact his reproductive health agenda, Mr. Biden would *undo* the good Mr. Trump has *done* and further extend abortion's death-dealing reach. On his campaign website the former Vice President pledges

- to "protect the constitutional right to an abortion" by writing abortion on demand into federal law;
- to repeal the Hyde Amendment;
- to "rescind the Mexico City Policy";
- to "restore federal funding for Planned Parenthood";
- to "stop the rash of state laws" that limit the abortion liberty: parental notification requirements, mandatory waiting periods, and ultra-sound imaging as a condition for abortion.

Over one hundred members of Democrats for Life of America objected that Mr. Biden

is here taking "an extreme position on abortion rights" that recent polls show to be "radically out of line with public opinion":

- 79% oppose Democratic leaders' support for abortion on demand—that is, at any time for any reason;
- 60% oppose taxpayer funding of abortion;
- 76% oppose taxpayer funding of abortion in developing countries.

On this evidence well over half of Americans across party lines want to see the number of abortions *decrease*—precisely the purpose of the two protective measures Mr. Biden would do away with if elected.

Congress passed the first of them, the Hyde Amendment, in 1976, to stop the use of federal Medicaid funds to pay for abortions. In the previous three years Medicaid had funded over 250,000 abortions a year—a total of 750,000 lost lives. The Amendment made an immediate and enduring difference. No other public policy can be said to have reduced the number of abortions so effectively. It is estimated that the Hyde Amendment currently saves up to 60,000 lives a year. But Mr. Biden would undo it—and thereby assure a sizeable *increase* of abortions in America.

In 1994 then-Senator Biden wrote to a Delaware constituent that "the government should not tell those with strong convictions against abortion, such as you and I, that we must pay for them." In 2020, however, he abruptly withdrew this decades-long support for the Amendment that protected his "strong convictions" just when they needed protection more than ever.

This sudden and striking change of course came with no olive branch to the 20 million pro-life-friendly members of his party. In-

stead, Mr. Biden deliberately cast his lot with its extremists, from whose number he carefully picked as his running mate Senator Kamala Harris, a leader eager to tighten abortion's political lock grip and a notably hostile critic of Catholic influence in American public life.

"I'm a practicing Catholic," Mr. Biden says on his campaign website. Nonetheless, though he professes to accept his faith's teaching that abortion is profound social injustice, he will not use the law to stop the abortionist's hand. Personally opposed but unwilling to impose, he will not grant the unborn child what justice demands: birth.

Mr. Biden's stance mirrors the one Governor Mario Cuomo adopted in the early 1980s. Bishop Patrick Ahern's rejoinder to the Governor then fits the nominee for president now:

"You are opposed to abortion personally. Presumably that is because you believe it takes a human life. How then can you believe in and support choice? How can anyone have the right to choose to take the life of another human being? It is like saying, "I am personally opposed to slavery, but I respect your choice to own slaves if you think it is alright." . . .

"The most serious consequence I see in your rhetoric is that it confuses and misleads people who might otherwise think straight on this issue of such enormous consequence to humanity."

Regrettably, "Joe Biden's Agenda for the Catholic Community" does just that. It begins with "a basic tenet in my household": "Treat people with dignity. *Everyone's* entitled to dignity." For Americans, then, "no matter where you start in life, *everyone* should be able to live up to their God-given potential." Our economy should be one

"where *everyone* comes along, and we protect the 'least of these.'"

The word I've highlighted threads through the paragraph, but just how wide a bandwidth does "everyone" cover? Does not everyone "*start in life?*" at conception? Does not everyone begin to develop "*God-given potential*" in his or her mother's womb? Do not the unborn deserve the greatest consideration among "*the least of these*" we are called to "protect"? Sad to say, the candidate who puts himself forward as an exemplary Catholic politician refuses to address such questions at all, and his policies are designed to dismiss them from gaining a foothold in public life.

But "we are the people of life and for life," St. John Paul II wrote, "and this is how we present ourselves to everyone" (GL, 78). It follows that, to be true to ourselves as Catholics, "any political agenda which hopes to uphold equal rights for all must affirm the equal rights of every child, born and unborn" (LGL, 35). Though the issues that cry out for justice are many and complex, "the failure to protect and defend life in its most vulnerable stages renders suspect any claims to the 'rightness' of positions in other matters affecting the poorest and least powerful" (LGL, 22). "No public official . . . claiming to be a faithful and serious Catholic . . . can responsibly advocate for or actively support direct attacks on innocent human life" (LGL, 31).

Since "abortion is the pre-eminent moral issue of our time," warns Archbishop Mitchell Rozanski, "if you don't struggle to justify voting for a candidate whose record or policy would favor or even expand abortion, then you probably aren't forming a Catholic conscience in preparation to vote."

At campaign's end no one can deny that the candidates take diametrically opposed positions on what constitutes justice for the unborn. And there is every reason to believe that both candidates would follow through on their campaign commitments upon election. We can expect Mr. Trump to continue to appoint judges like Judge Barret from his list of prospective nominees, to lift conscience-oppressing regulations, and to validate the pro-life position publicly with the weight of his office. With equal confidence we can trust Mr. Biden to withdraw protections for unborn life and extend the rule of *Roe* by judicial appointment, administrative regulation, and public funding. These are the political facts. I have to face up to them squarely and make a choice. I can't fool myself about what is at stake.

But that's just what Planned Parenthood wants me to do. Planned Parenthood wants me to vote for the candidate who favors abortion, even if I strongly disapprove of the practice myself and withhold my approval of that part of the party agenda. Planned

Parenthood is happy to get my vote along with all the objections my conscience attaches, because conscientious objections don't register at the polls. Only my vote counts; my objections don't. And my vote will be counted as a vote for abortion. I will be voting with—and for—Planned Parenthood.

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones,” Our Lord tells us, “for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look on the face of My heavenly Father.”

Planned Parenthood has had a voice—a very loud voice—in this campaign. The millions of children in the womb have been silent; they cannot speak and cannot vote—unless you and I speak and vote for them.

In the Lord of Life,



Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker
17 October 2020