

# The Catholic Vote: A Guide for the Perplexed

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Encounter Catholicism

August 31, 2016

## Outline

- Overview of Catholic faith re: politics and democracy
  - Avoid Ideology
  - Voting and Catholic Conscience
  - Beware of.....
  - Conclusion – How to be a “Rooted Citizen”
- ❖ Overview of Catholic faith re: politics and democracy
- St. Augustine – Government’s purpose is peace: “Tranquility of Order” (“cooperative order for giving and accepting commands among fellow citizens” *City of God*, xix.13)
  - St. Thomas Aquinas – Government is a Natural Good: justice & common good (“Now to order anything to the common good belongs either to the whole people or to someone who is the vicegerent of the whole people.” Law = “an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by one who has care of the community, and promulgated.” *ST*, I-II, 90, art. 3-4.)
  - CCC §§1897-1912; see also §§2234-2246
  - Live as *pilgrims* in any political system; however, democracy is more in accord with human dignity than alternative systems
  - Catholic Social Thought/Teaching/Doctrine (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Vatican)

Sisters of St. Joseph of Rochester Volunteer Corps

"Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching" (tee-shirt)

1. Dignity of the Human Person  
"All people are sacred, made in the image and likeness of God."
2. Community and the Common Good  
"The human person is both sacred and social, when one suffers we all suffer. "
3. Rights and Responsibilities  
"People have a fundamental right to life, food and shelter, health care, education and employment."
4. Option for the Poor  
"The moral test of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. "
5. Dignity of Work  
"The economy exists to serve people not the other way around. "
6. Solidarity  
"We are called to work globally for justice. "
7. Care for God's Creation  
"The earth is God's — love, protect and respect it. "

- ❖ Avoid Ideology
  - Human persons are persons in community; oriented to love, truth, & beauty
  - Closed systems of all-encompassing social, political, and economic explanation
  - Therefore, Catholics should avoid ideologies (most based on individualism and/or limited aspect of truth).
    - Liberalism/Progressivism
    - Conservatism
    - Libertarianism
    - Environmentalism
    - Feminism
    - Liberationism
  - “American Exceptionalism” – also an ideology
  - Qualified support for quasi-loyalty to political parties

❖ Voting and Catholic Conscience – See USCCB, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*  
3 Considerations

1. Issue Positions of Candidates and/or Parties

- Positions themselves
- Positions “in play”
  - Office(s) being contested
  - Likely agenda for next 2 or 4 or 6 years
- Likelihood of success re: implementing “good” or avoiding “bad” positions
- Are there “Catholic” positions?
  - Virtue of Prudence & Catholic Social Doctrine
  - “mediating institutions” important
  - Examples:
    - ◆ Economic justice – government programs to increase opportunity; minimum wage; income support; anti-poverty; economic equality
    - ◆ Health care as universal human right
    - ◆ Support for families
    - ◆ Strong public schools & educational choice
    - ◆ Religious liberty for persons and institutions
    - ◆ Racial and ethnic justice
    - ◆ Opposition to abortion, physician-assisted suicide, & death penalty
    - ◆ Environmental protection
    - ◆ Generous immigration policy
    - ◆ Non-violence; increasing skepticism re: possibility of just war

2. Candidates: Character and Leadership Ability – commitment to the Common Good and ability to pursue it.

### 3. “Structural” Considerations – Elections, candidates & issues as they effect preserving and improving democratic institutions and citizenship

- ❖ Beware of.....
  - “Catholic” Voter Guides (example)
  - “Catholic” websites
  - Single-issue voting
    - “Non-negotiables” & exceptionless moral norms
  - Exaggerated claims by candidates, supporters, clergy, friends, etc.
- ❖ Conclusion – How to be a “Rooted Citizen”
  - Center for Public Justice (handout)
  - September 1 – “Day of Prayer” for Care of Creation (handout)
  - September 9 – USCCB “Day of Prayer for Peace in Our Communities” (Feast of St. Peter Claver)