



## Voting as a Catholic in 2016 by Archbishop Samuel J. Aquila

I have voted in every presidential election since 1972 and I have never experienced an election like this year's. Both candidates are disliked, lack credibility, and have made comments that make the hair on the back of your neck stand up. The American public is fed up with politics as usual and with the establishment in both parties. So, what should Catholics do when we vote in November?

That question is one that I have been asked by the faithful more this year than in any previous election. Recently in a dinner discussion with a group of Catholics, the conversation turned to politics and became vigorous, as some at the table supported Clinton and some Trump. All eyes turned to me and one of them asked, "Archbishop, what do you think?"

First, I shared my aversion for both candidates. Then I said that they need to reflect on the platforms of both parties, with an emphasis on the human life issues. Everyone at the table knew well the teaching of the Church on life and the dignity of life. They knew that Catholics in good conscience cannot support candidates who will advance abortion. All pretty much agreed that, when it comes to life issues, Catholic politicians on both sides of the aisle have put party ideology before their faith and living their faith in the public square.

This is the most important guidance I can give: allow your ongoing personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the Church to guide your political decisions. I say this because we believe that the truth about ourselves and the world we live in is revealed in and through him. Our society suffers and has suffered for quite some time because too few people live an integrated life – one that does not divide "the personal" from "the public."

This year there are some critical changes to the two major parties' platforms that some at the dinner were not aware of. Most important is that this year the Democratic party platform calls for the overturning of the Hyde Amendment, a provision that both parties have voted to include in the federal budget and on other spending bills for 40 years. The Hyde Amendment prohibits federal taxpayer money from being used for abortion. The platform is aggressively pro-abortion, not only in funding matters, but in the appointment of only those judges who will support abortion and the repealing of the Helms Amendment, which prevents the U.S. from supporting abortion availability overseas. Conversely, the Republican party platform is supportive of the Hyde Amendment and just this year strengthened its support for life by calling for the defunding of Planned Parenthood, banning dismemberment abortion and opposing assisted suicide.

Our conversation then turned to the understanding of the freedom of religion, the freedom of conscience, and the ability for faith-based organizations like the Church to provide charity through shelters, hospitals, homes for the elderly, etc., without fear of government interference and the existence of a respect for religious values.

In that vein, the subject was raised of the Health and Human Services mandate. This regulation requires the provision of contraceptives, sterilizations and some abortifacients through employer's health plans. Most

surprising to me was that all at the table were practicing Catholics who are involved in their faith, and a couple of them had neither heard of the difficulty the Obama Administration has created for the Little Sisters of the Poor, nor the litigation that has occurred trying to force them to violate their consciences.

Catholic voters must make themselves aware of where the parties stand on these essential issues. The right to life is the most important and fundamental right, since life is necessary for any of the other rights to matter. There are some issues that can legitimately be debated by Christians, such as which policies are the most effective in caring for the poor, but the direct killing of innocent human life must be opposed at all times by every follower of Jesus Christ. There are no legitimate exceptions to this teaching.

The health of our nation depends on a deep respect for human life from the moment of conception until natural death, and the future of our society depends on how we protect that right. If we don't, eventually we will go the way of Rome and Greece and other great civilizations that have risen and fallen.

Some, both in politics and in the Church, have stated that it is the Church that needs to change her teaching to include abortion, same-sex unions, and even euthanasia. Yet, in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, to the Gospel and to Sacred Tradition, the Church cannot change her teaching on these issues without denying Christ. She would cut herself from the vine and only wither away, as promised by Christ. The further we move away from Jesus Christ and his teachings, the more will our churches empty.

We are where we are today because too many Catholics and other people of faith have embraced the ways of the world and not the ways of Christ. They have not served as leaven that transforms society, but rather have condoned evil and the throw-away culture that Pope Francis frequently reminds us to reject.

When we fail to do this, the government will step in to fill the void. Indeed, the government will become "god" and impose its beliefs on the citizens. One only needs to look to the Health and Human Service contraceptive mandate, or the attempt by President Obama to force a transgender agenda onto public schools. We may even soon see the federal funding of abortion and the approval of physician-assisted suicide in Colorado. We are witnessing the dictatorship of relativism and the erosion of true freedom. And as Pope Francis often preaches, the devil gets in the mix quickly, especially when people no longer believe in God.

So my advice to Catholics in voting in this presidential election is to first look at who forms you and your conscience. Is it your personal encounter with Jesus Christ and the Church, the voice of God which cannot contradict the truth or revelation, or is it the ideology of some political party? Secondly, look at how you have been a leaven in society. How have you sought the common good and the values of the Gospel, especially by serving the poor, the needy, the unborn and the dying. If you truly live your Catholic faith, you will not find complete alignment with any political party, and that is okay. Thirdly, look at how each party platform supports human life from conception through natural death, the freedom of religion and the freedom of conscience, the family, and the poor. Finally, do vote, as every Catholic has an obligation to participate in the political process.

For many, the presidential election will involve a choice between the lesser of two evils. On the Colorado ballot, we will also face the evil of physician-assisted suicide, known as Proposition 106. In conforming our hearts and minds with the Gospel and its clear teaching on life, all Catholics are called to vote "no" on this issue. A "yes" vote only furthers the throw-away society, and the culture of death. You will be hearing much more on this in the days and weeks ahead. Let us keep our country and state in our daily prayers, praying for God's protection and blessings in these challenging, difficult times in which we live. And let us in charity pray for the conversion of those who support a throw-away culture of death!

The Most Rev. Samuel J. Aquila currently serves as the Archbishop of Denver, Colo. with the episcopal motto, "Do whatever he tells you. (Jn 2:5)"