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In the United States, the summer marks the opening of the general election campaign that will elect a president as well as determine control of Congress. What principles should inform Catholic voting decisions for candidates? Are Catholics obligated to vote? Are they obligated to vote for particular candidates? We will explore the principles that assist us in answering these questions and apply them to the circumstances we face in August 2020.

The Common Good and Authority

The starting point is the obligation to pursue the common good. Catholic teaching unequivocally condemns individualist liberalism, which places the liberty of each individual as the highest good. Individuals should be free, according to Liberalism, to pursue whatever goals they set for themselves; they owe nothing to other individuals except not to interfere with others pursuing their own liberty. For Catholics, people are more than individuals. Man is a social and political animal, which means that he cannot attain the perfection of his nature alone. As Aristotle once remarked, a being that lives outside of society is either a beast or a god. The lie that rugged individuals can ride off into the sunset and be happy on their own is wrong. Part of nature requires that we strive to practice virtue in society with others. This means we owe obligations to others more than simply not interfering with their liberty.

Whereas Liberalism sees authority as an evil, necessary at best, that interferes with liberty, Catholics hold that authority is good. Political authority was created by God. He chose to share His sovereign authority over the universe with His mere creatures. He so constituted human nature that some of us will be vested with His authority to make laws for our fellow men. Proceeding from God and reflecting an attribute of His own nature, authority can never be only a necessary evil. As St. Paul states in his Epistle to the Romans, "Let every soul be subject to higher powers. For there is no power but from God: and those that are, are ordained of God. Therefore, he that resisteth the power resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist purchase to themselves damnation. ... For he [the ruler] is God's minister to thee, for good. ... Wherefore be subject of necessity: not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:1-2, 4, 5). Now, this does not mean that everything an authority figure does is good. They possess this great God-given power, but it is circumscribed within God's law. They possess only the authority to enact and enforce laws to the extent they conform to the natural and divine law. To the extent they do otherwise, they exceed the scope of their delegated authority and are no law at all.

Thus, to participate in the government of any society – a family, a town, a state, or a nation – is a good willed by God. It is a participation in His divine kingship and therefore something that imposes itself upon all people to varying degrees depending upon their circumstances.

The particular virtue that obligates us to participate in the government of the societies of which we are a part (to the extent consistent with our station in life) is legal justice. St. Thomas Aquinas explains that justice always regulates duties to other individuals but legal justice considers debts owed to other individuals in their capacity as members of a common political community. He explains in his *Summa Theologiae*:

“Justice, as stated above [II-II, q. 58, a. 2], directs man in his relations with other men. Now this may happen in two ways: first as regards his relation with individuals, secondly as regards his relations with others in general, in so far as a man who serves a community, serves all those who are included in that community. Accordingly, justice in its proper acceptation can be directed to another in both these senses. Now it is evident that all who are included in a community, stand in relation to that community as parts to a whole; while a part, as such, belongs to a whole, so that whatever is the good of a part can be directed to the good of the whole. It follows therefore that the good of any virtue, whether such virtue direct man in relation to himself, or in relation to certain other individual persons, is referable to the common good, to which justice directs: so that all acts of virtue can pertain to justice, in so far as it directs man to the common good.” ([II-II, q. 58, a. 5](#))

This term (“the common good”) embodies the obligations we as individuals have not to other individuals (which is commutative justice) but also to the societies in which we live. Yet, this debt owed to the community is not to be understood in the collectivist sense that considers the collective community an entity distinct from the individual members. Working for the common good of the community is also working toward, and cannot be inconsistent with, working toward our own personal good. Since our ultimate end is the same as the ultimate end of the common good – to render honor and glory to God as individuals and as a nation – there can be no conflict between our individual good and the common good. Only in flawed political systems (liberalism and communism) does such a conflict arise.

Even though all of us are obligated to work for the common good, not all of us can and should participate in the same way in this effort. A nation in which everyone rules is a nation in which no one rules. Aristotle and St. Thomas considered such a state to be a tyranny of the masses. Some will be called to fill offices of authority and some will be called

to obey the just commands of the authority. Each in their own way are fulfilling the duties of legal justice.

How Are Rulers to Be Designated? Is Voting Moral?

Yet, how are such authorities called? To this question, God has not prescribed a universal answer. That there must be some legitimately constituted authority for all communities is universal. The obligations and constraints upon all human authority are also universal. However, the means of determining who should hold such esteemed office is left to human custom to determine. The Church has always been clear that she does not require a nation to adopt a particular form of government such as a monarchy, an aristocracy, or a republic. As Pope Leo XIII explains: “no one of the several forms of government is in itself condemned, inasmuch as none of them contains anything contrary to Catholic doctrine, and all of them are capable, if wisely and justly managed, to insure the welfare of the State” (*Immortale Dei*, n. 13). With the support of the Church, any form of government is capable of working toward the common good of man and rendering homage to God.

Regarding the participation of the citizens of a state in the selection of those who lead a commonwealth, the Church again urges us to avoid to opposite errors. The election of rulers is not required for the just functioning of a commonwealth. The authority of a ruler does not derive from the governed. If a president is elected, the president does not receive his power from the electorate. Those who claim that the authority to govern is conferred by an election, and therefore that elections are necessary for a government to be legitimate and just, are wrong. Authority to govern comes down from God, not up from the people, even if the one upon whom God confers it is selected by the citizenry. The opposite error, sometimes espoused by Traditionalists, is that voting and elections are inherently unjust and must be avoided. They confuse the evils perpetrated by Liberalism in the past 200 years with the means that has sometimes been used to perpetrate those evils, namely, broad voting rights. Once again Leo XIII explains the balanced teaching of the Church toward voting: “Neither is it blameworthy in itself, in any manner, for the people to have a share greater or less, in the government: for at certain times, and under certain laws, such participation may not only be of benefit to the citizens, but may even be of obligation” (*ibid.*). To argue that voting and elections are per se immoral would argue against the very constitution of the Church. The Supreme Pontiff is elected by the College of Cardinals who represent the clergy of Rome. Monasteries throughout Christendom have elected their abbots and abbesses. The Church for centuries sanctioned the election of the Holy Roman Emperor by the designated electors of the empire. The Church has never condemned voting but only the misuse of voting.

Even if voting is morally permissible, can it be morally obligatory? In the general sense, yes.

Since we have an obligation to work for our society to strive for the common good and so to live according to God's law and will, we are obligated to make use of means provided by our society for our participation in the common good. Thus, as a matter of principle, people are not universally obligated to vote, but if a community provides for voting by its citizens to designate leaders then refusing to exercise this right without a legitimate excuse would be a moral failure. An excuse could include illness or physical impossibility or prevention due to other obligations such as work which cannot be avoided. Another excuse would be if the only candidate or candidates who stood for election were enemies of the Church and would clearly harm the common good. In such a case, a vote for none of the candidates by abstention could be consistent with our duties in legal justice. Absent these excuses, we are obligated to vote if we have the right in our system to do so.

Yet, are Catholics obligated to vote for a particular candidate? We are morally obligated to vote for the candidate who will work most for the common good, including defending the rights of God and His Church. Determining which candidate meets such standard or best meets it is a decision in prudence typically left to individuals. Yet, in extreme circumstances the choice may be so clear that it becomes a moral obligation. On March 10, 1948, for example, Pope Pius XII [told](#) the clergy of Rome that they must instruct the people that they were morally obligated on pain of sin to vote in the upcoming elections so as to defeat the Popular Front (a coalition of communists and socialists) from taking control of the Italian government. Certainly, the command of Pius XII in 1948 to Italians to vote against the Popular Front was an extraordinary action. In normal circumstances, the Church would leave to electors the prudential decision of which candidates are worthy to hold office. All members of a community have a duty to participate to the extent permitted in their community but do not typically have an obligation to vote for a particular candidate – or any candidate, if all candidates are enemies of the Church. Yet, in extraordinary times, when the threat to the Church and natural law is great, Catholics may have moral duties to vote for a particular candidate.

The Current Field of Conflict

How do these principles apply in the United States in 2020? Our country has been ordered in a way that citizens have the right to vote for members of Congress and, indirectly (through the electoral college), the president of the United States. Now, certainly many aspects of the American political system are contrary to the Church's teaching on the constitution of nations, but merely the fact that the citizens elect their leaders is not in and of itself an error. It becomes an error when the citizens elect evil rulers who attack the Church and her teachings. Thus, Catholics are obligated in every election to investigate the candidates and see if one or more of them would promote the interests of the Church and

her teaching. We are clearly living in extraordinary times. We can thank the COVID-19 illness for exposing many of the desires of the enemies of the Church who seek to establish a worldwide totalitarian government built on Marxist principles. These evil globalists (on whom *Catholic Family News* has reported for years) seek to suppress the true religion and to promote every perversion against the natural and divine law. We have seen clearly how they use a virus to forbid the public worship of Christ the King. They close churches but exempt abortion mills as “essential services.” The threat posed by the communist-dominated globalists is greater than in the time of Pius XII because they have already dominated the halls of power in the U.S. and elsewhere for decades.

Lest I am accused of exaggerating our predicament, Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò in his [letter to President Trump](#) described the current situation in apocalyptic terms:

“These two sides, which have a *Biblical* nature, follow the clear separation between the offspring of the Woman and the offspring of the Serpent. On the one hand, there are those who, although they have a thousand defects and weaknesses, are motivated by the desire to do good, to be honest, to raise a family, to engage in work, to give prosperity to their homeland, to help the needy, and, in obedience to the Law of God, to merit the Kingdom of Heaven. On the other hand, there are those who serve themselves, who do not hold any moral principles, who want to demolish the family and the nation, exploit workers to make themselves unduly wealthy, foment internal divisions and wars, and accumulate power and money: for them the fallacious illusion of temporal well-being will one day – if they do not repent – yield to the terrible fate that awaits them, far from God, in eternal damnation.”

An Unlikely Champion of Catholic Principles

An opponent to these forces of atheistic totalitarianism has arisen from a very unlikely source – a non-Catholic, twice-divorced billionaire from New York City. Donald Trump hardly seems the person we would expect to fight against the enemies of God and the Church. Yet, so often throughout history, God has used unlikely instruments – people we would never expect.

What has Donald Trump done to give us reason to believe he is working to advance the cause of the Church? He has done more than any president in modern (and likely longer) history to defend the rights of the Church and the natural law. I will list only a few key examples:

- When governors around the nation were shutting down churches and forbidding priests to bring the sacraments to the dying, he declared religious worship an “[essential service](#)” which must not be prohibited for public health reasons. He threatened to fight governors who shut down churches.
- Donald Trump [accepted a statue of Our Lady of Fatima](#) for the White House, and according to some reports, a Catholic priest exorcised the building.
- He encourages and promotes the practice of religion, prayer, penance, and fasting in bold terms. He has paid tribute to Christianity and especially Catholicism more than any other president, many of whom merely paid lip service to Deist concepts such as “the Creator” or even simply “God” without invoking specifically Catholic language (see, for example, his [Message for Ash Wednesday 2020](#)).
- He has committed his administration to an aggressive anti-abortion policy. He is the first president to [attend and address in person](#) the March for Life. By executive order, he [reversed](#) the federal government’s policy of funding non-governmental agencies that perform or actively promote abortions internationally.
- President Trump [reversed](#) President Obama’s policy that let openly transgender people serve in the US military.
- He has [cut U.S. funding to the World Health Organization](#) (WHO) and begun the process of withdrawing from the organization. The WHO is a globalist clique that is aligned with Communist China and promotes abortion, contraception, and euthanasia.
- He has [confronted and sanctioned Communist China](#) for atrocities they commit on their own people, including persecuting Christians (meanwhile, the Vatican has appeased and flattered the Communists in Beijing and abandoned the underground Church to their mercy).
- He has committed to appoint judges (and, in particular, Supreme Court justices) who will [overturn the abominable ruling of Roe v. Wade](#) that legalized the killing of the unborn as a Constitutional right. The two justices he has appointed (Gorsuch and Kavanaugh) have voted to restrain abortion in the one case decided since their appointment, so on this issue the president seems to have selected correctly.
- Trump’s Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) undid the Obama administration’s mandate that all employers provide contraception in their medical coverage. At Trump’s direction, the department adopted a rule that said no group or employer could be forced to pay for contraceptives against their religious or moral beliefs. When liberal governors sued to invalidate this rule, his team [helped the Little](#)

[Sisters of the Poor](#) defend the rule all the way to the Supreme Court.

Some Republican presidents have paid lip service to a few of the above issues. Yet, none have actually accomplished anything close to pushing back (not completely, but in significant ways) the agenda of the Marxists and globalists. Has Donald Trump done all that could be done to restore the natural law and make this country a place in which the Church can thrive? Clearly not. However, he has made more progress than anyone in holding the line against the “offspring of the Serpent,” to quote Archbishop Viganò. He has even reversed some of said offspring’s ill-gotten gains in public office. Not only does Archbishop Viganò see Donald Trump as fighting the good fight against these “children of darkness,” but they themselves recognize the same epic struggle. Nancy Pelosi, Joe Biden, Barrack Obama, and the president of Planned Parenthood all see this November election as a significant inflexion point. They see the things Donald Trump has done as a threat to their evil designs and are desperate to see him removed from office after their attempt at impeachment fell flat on its face.

I am not claiming that Donald Trump’s re-election will bring about the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart (only the consecration of Russia will do that). Yet, his record clearly shows that he will do more to improve the abysmal state to which our country has sunk under radical liberalism and globalism.

But Donald Trump Might Do Some Bad Things!

I have noted several times that Donald Trump is not a Catholic and cannot be relied upon necessarily to do everything an integrally Catholic president would do. There are some [signs that he may be soft](#) on the issue of so-called same sex “marriage”. Some may disagree with some of his changes to the tax system. Yet, no candidate must be perfect (on issues or personal moral uprightness) to claim the vote of a Catholic. The political parties opposing the Popular Front in Italy in 1948 were not perfect. Some were soft on significant moral issues, but the threat from the Communists was so grave that Pius XII could declare it a moral duty to vote against them.

How can we be obligated to vote for a candidate whose record indicates he will do much good if there is a also reasonable risk he may do some things that are not good during his time in office? The answer is the principle of double effect. Catholics would vote for Donald Trump with the reasonably formed intention that he will continue to fight against the forces opposed to the Church and natural law as he has done for four years. Even though there is a risk that he may do other things to which we would object, we are not voting for him with the intention of those things occurring. The things he might do wrong are not disproportionate to the good that he has done to hold at bay and even reverse the

Marxist/Globalist revolution. On the issue of abortion alone, his ability to appoint one or two more Supreme Court Justices could be the difference that will finally end legalized abortion in many parts of our country.

Sadly in 2020, we cannot expect the same sort of clear moral guidance from Rome as was given in 1948. This is the most significant understatement of this article, but Francis is no Pius XII. Yet, we have had a prelate rise up for our time. By the grace of God, Archbishop Viganò has come to see the “deep church” of Vatican II and called for “the best Council the Protestants ever had” (to use John Vennari’s favorite epithet for the Vatican II) to be cast aside and forgotten. He clearly has identified President Trump as fighting on the right side, even if he is not personally on that side yet (i.e., not yet Catholic).

It’s Not All About Trump

One final note is necessary. The 2020 election is not only about Donald Trump. Under our Constitution, the president has vast but not limitless power to change our nation. It is critical that he have a Congress that will support his work to roll back the forces of atheistic globalism. For example, he will not be able to appoint solidly reliable justices to the Supreme Court unless a majority of the Senate will confirm his appointments. I am not advocating just “pulling the Republican lever” in a voting booth. Yet, we must also cast our votes for representatives and senators who will not impede but enable the good work (some of which is documented above) that Donald Trump has done for the Catholic cause in our country. We must demand that our members of Congress will vote to implement and support the forays that President Trump attempts to send against the “offspring of the Serpent.”

Our First Duty of Prayer

We must also not forget that man proposes but God disposes. We must not despair, regardless of the outcome of this election. God will ultimately deal with the children of darkness. He may intend a reprieve for us from their evil domination or He may not. To adapt one of Padre Pio’s famous phrases, we should pray, vote, and not worry. Our primary duty is to pray for our country and our president. In this regard, [Archbishop Viganò has composed a prayer](#) to be recited until November 3 for the resurgence of Christianity in America and the re-election of Donald Trump (see page 28). Let us pray this prayer and pray for the President, that whatever grace is moving him to do the right thing in so many instances will continue to flow. We should also pray that his faithfulness to these critical Catholic causes will merit for him the grace of Faith so as to convert to the Catholic Faith and thus be able to receive the loving absolution of the Church for his past sins.

For whatever reason, President Trump seems to be an instrument serving some purpose in

God's plan for our time. May that service draw down upon him the grace of conversion.

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