Catholic Voting Guide Quiz

Professor of Moral Theology, Boston College School of Theology & Ministry

1. In the Catholic moral tradition one may never “negotiate” with an action that is intrinsically evil, and therefore if any candidate or political party holds a position on an issue that is deemed intrinsically evil a well-formed Catholic conscience should never vote in favor for that candidate, party, or issue. **True or False**

   The long-established Catholic moral principles of Tolerance, *Cooperatio in malum* (Cooperation with Evil), and the *Minus malum* (Lesser Evil) all recognize that there are often-times instances in which to avoid a greater evil or to lessen an existing evil we may have to participate and negotiate with moral evil in order to lessen its impact. Doing so does not mean that we ourselves are participating sinfully in this moral evil. Moreover, all moral evil is of itself essentially, or “intrinsically” evil.

2. According to the US Bishops there are “5 Non-negotiables” (abortion rights, same-sex marriage, euthanasia, stem cell research) that would automatically disqualify a candidate or political party from receiving the vote or support from a well-formed Catholic conscience. **True or False**

   While it is regrettably true that some Catholic individuals “hold” and promote this view, it is nowhere to be found in a statement of the US Bishops, and indeed would go against the Catholic moral tradition outlined in response to Question #1 above, as well as Pope John Paul II’s magisterial teaching articulated in his 1995 Encyclical *Evangelium vitae* The Gospel of Life who stated that “...when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official, whose absolute personal opposition to procured abortion was well known, could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality. 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.” *Evangelium vitae*, #73. If this would hold true for the politicians themselves then a forteriori it would be even more true for voters.

3. In choosing to vote for a political candidate a well-formed Catholic conscience can take into serious account the candidate’s own personal moral character in choosing to support that person or not, even if the candidate’s current stated positions and/or the political party’s platform on life issues such as abortion-rights are more in accord with Catholic teaching than the opposition candidate or party. **True or False**

   The US Bishops *Faithful Citizenship* document states in #37 that “These decisions should take into account a candidate’s commitments, character, integrity, and ability to
influence a given issue. In the end, this is a decision to be made by each Catholic guided by a conscience formed by Catholic moral teaching.”

4. The US Bishops have indicated that a candidate or political party’s position on abortion-rights would outweigh all of the other issues connected with Catholic social teaching such as immigration rights, social welfare, and the like. True or False

Again, while it is regrettable that some Catholic individuals “hold” and promote this misconstrued position, the Bishops themselves nowhere state that abortion has to outweigh all other issues. In #37 of *Faithful Citizenship* the Bishops state that *it recognizes that all issues do not carry the same moral weight and that the moral obligation to oppose policies promoting intrinsically evil acts has a special claim on our consciences and our actions* and in #34 examples of intrinsic evil given include “abortion and racism.”

5. According to the head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF), it would be morally legitimate to vote for a political candidate or political party on other grounds that are in accord with Catholic moral principles, even if that candidate or political party holds a position on abortion or same-sex marriage that is contrary to official Church teaching. True or False

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (later to become Pope Benedict XVI) wrote in his capacity as Prefect of the CDF in June, 2004 Memorandum to Washington, D.C. Cardinal Theodore McCarrick that “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.”

6. Catholic clerics (deacons, priests, bishops) are explicitly discouraged from explicitly espousing or condemning candidates, ballot proposals, and political parties while engaged at preaching at the celebration of the Eucharist. True or False

This is quite true both on pastoral principles that the presider of the Eucharist is to gather the Christian community together, and also to allow the free choice of individuals in good conscience to exercise their prudential judgment in voting. Also in the United States explicit campaigning in Church services could jeopardize the tax exempt status of churches according to the 1954 Johnson Amendment to the US tax code which prohibits tax-exempt organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.

7. A Catholic voter who chooses to support a candidate or political party precisely because of their support of a position contrary to Church teaching would be guilty of formal cooperation with evil and therefore sinning. True or False
In the same 2004 Memorandum of Cardinal Ratzinger to Cardinal McCarrick, referenced above in Question #5, Ratzinger noted that “A Catholic would be guilty of formal cooperation in evil, and so unworthy to present himself for Holy Communion, if he were to deliberately vote for a candidate precisely because of the candidate’s permissive stand on abortion and/or euthanasia.”

8. Politicians who either support or do not vote to restrict or abolish elective abortion are guilty of serious sin and thereby excommunicated from the Church in virtue of the Canon 1398 which establishes an automatic penalty latae sententiae for all those who help procure an abortion. **True** or **False**

   Canon 1398 refers only to individuals who procure an abortion for themselves or directly aid or encourage the abortion (such as pressuring the woman to have an abortion, paying for it, etc.). Nowhere does the Canon 1398 extend this penalty to politicians, and Canon 18 reiterates the general interpretive principle of odia restringi which indicates that “burdens” such as penalties are to be given a narrow and strict interpretation and never a broad application.

9. Catholics who vote for or support candidates or political parties that support abortion-rights should come to confession indicating repentance for this vote before they can worthily receive Communion **True** or **False**

   While regrettably some individuals and even priests have suggested this, when such an action comes to light it is usually quickly condemned by the local bishop. Sacramental practice and Canon law hold that an individual is obliged to come to confession before receiving Communion only when the person him/herself believes to have committed mortal sin. If an individual votes in good conscience for a particular candidate on the merits of the candidate’s overall worthiness for office and whole range of positions espoused it would be very difficult indeed to cast such a prudential judgment as an instance of mortal sin, which requires grave matter, full knowledge and full consent to commit that serious sin.

10. A bishop may indicate that a Catholic politician should not receive Communion in that bishop’s diocese because of the candidate’s position on a given issue such as same-sex marriage or abortion rights. **True** or **False**

   This is true, and while the bishops themselves are rather divided on the overall advisability of such a procedure, a small minority do take this position on the grounds that an individual bishop has the right within his own diocesan territory to forbid a candidate (or another) from publically receiving Communion in order to avoid scandal of seeing Catholic politicians come to Communion who hold a position on a particular issue which may be contrary to Church teaching. A well-known example of this was the then
St. Louis, Missouri Archbishop Raymond Burke’s refusal to allow 2004 Democratic Presidential Candidate John Kerry from coming to Communion if and when Kerry should find himself in that diocese. Kerry’s own diocesan bishop though explicitly disavowed such a prohibition in Kerry’s home diocese and the Apostolic Nuncio Archbishop Pietro Sambi was photographed giving Kerry Communion at the June 22, 2006 installation of the new Archbishop of Washington, D.C., (Archbishop, later Cardinal Donald Wuerl) in the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Archbishop Burke then was transferred to Rome before the next federal election by Pope Benedict XVI, serving as Prefect of the Apostolic Signatura until he was removed from that office in 2014 by Pope Francis who appointed him to the ceremonial position as Patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta.