

**A Commentary to "A Revolution of Tenderness:  
A 2016 Election Pope Francis Voter Guide"**  
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A coalition of national Catholic organizations put together a voter guide for prayerful reflection.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Using the voter guide as a framework and the insights of Bernard Lonergan, I offer a commentary that can expand our reflection on how the presidential candidates address issues. One issue not addressed in the document is the growing movement of people who have decided not to exercise their right to vote because of their dislike of the candidates. This is certainly an option and one might have valid reasons for forfeiting the vote. Yet, it raises questions about the meaning of citizenship and responsibility for the welfare of all in society.<sup>2</sup>

Participation in the political process of the community is not limited to the voting booth; it involves a wider engagement with political processes that will enhance the common good. The 2016 election choice challenges the meaning of the art of informed politics, the right to participation in the political process, and the support of human flourishing. If the challenges are ignored, the presidential election process will deteriorate into another TV reality show and the superficial entertainment of so-called celebrities. What is at stake is the peace and security of our nation and the resultant effects throughout the world.

### **Catholic Citizens**

In the Jubilee Year of Mercy, this voter guide is offered to help Catholics exercise their duty as citizens by thinking through issues facing society in the light of the Gospel and Catholic Social Teaching. Catholics have the duty to participate in the political process as citizens and to contribute to the building up of a more humane society. One vote is not an isolated event, but contributes to an accumulation of many votes that point toward a direction for society. A vote makes sense in a larger context and understanding of what it means to be *political*, that is, as one who is acting within and for the life of the community.

### **Politics and Faith**

When Catholics participate in the political process they are like yeast in the dough. Our faith calls us to go beyond concern for our personal salvation and to be actively involved in promoting the earthly common good.

Catholic citizens have rights and duties, including that of striving to improve the quality of life for all. In fact, Jesus revealed the measure for eternal judgment in Matthew 25:31ff: those who feed the hungry and help the oppressed inherit the heavenly kingdom. Those who do not are cast into darkness. Jesus' language is utterly personal; he identifies himself with those who are in need: "I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it to me."

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<sup>1</sup> The election guide can be found here:

[https://franciscanaction.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_Revolution\\_of\\_Tenderness.pdf](https://franciscanaction.org/sites/default/files/2016_Revolution_of_Tenderness.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Some resources for consideration: <https://paxchristiusa.org/resources/resources-for-election-2016/>

## **Expressing our Faith**

The reality is that people of faith must engage politics to promote the common good and help the “least” in our nation. Belief must be expressed in behavior, and not be abstract. A central claim of Christianity is that Jesus' life, teaching, death, and resurrection had social and political consequences, and by implication, have social and political consequences for us today. The challenge is how do we engage our Catholic faith with the politics that attempt to carve out a particular view of reality with the claims and counterclaims that are put forward. So how do we navigate this political situation of governance “of the people, by the people, for the people”?

## **Knowing our Knowing**

First, as suggested by Lonergan, we must have a clear grasp of our own thinking process. Such a process must be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible in itself and in its outcomes. Do we ask questions about issues and candidate's position on these issues?<sup>3</sup> The fact that we need a "truth commission" or what CNN has called a "Reality Check Team" suggests that facts fall victim to lies.<sup>4</sup> If information is based on dubious facts and lies, how can one make an "informed" decision? The first step is to gather the data on significant issues and to ask and answer questions. One thing to be aware of is the bias and prejudice that infiltrate data to manipulate a desired conclusion. Uninformed opinions and bias of groups that promote ideologies derail the thinking process and prevent a judgment that aims for a higher value. A bad decision is made. A cumulative result of bad decisions leads inevitably to the decline of society as a whole, or a “failed state.”

## **Choosing our Choices**

The second part to the thinking process involves judgment and decision to act or not to act. Once the facts have been acquired, and a thoughtful reflection on the possibility of bias influencing the facts and the truth of the matter, one has to make a judgment about the issue. This judgment is made according to a set of criteria that a person holds dear. According to the outcome of the judgment, the individual will decide to act or not, to favor one candidate over another, or decide to do more research and verify the evidence before making a decision. What is important to recognize is that an opinion on a matter is just an opinion; it is not based on facts, evidence, but on assumptions or entrenched viewpoints. Opinions can be toxic and destroy dialogue.

## **The Common Good**

Catholic Social Teaching provides criteria for evaluating evidence and how one can make a choice. A primary category or criteria is the notion of the COMMON GOOD. All human activity must be directed toward the common good with special attention to the most vulnerable in society. The common good is the organic nature and the goal of the human community. The teaching of Jesus highlights this fact in the parable of the Final Judgment (Mt. 25) and Saul's vision on the Damascus road Acts 9:1-19). The theology of the body of Christ is expressed in the understanding of the common good (1 Cor 12:12-31). All systems, economic and political, are critiqued against the background of how they affect the common good.

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<sup>3</sup> See the websites [Hillaryclinton.com](http://Hillaryclinton.com) and [Donaldjtrump.com](http://Donaldjtrump.com)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/26/politics/fact-check-presidential-debate/>

Another area for reflection that can serve as a tool for making a judgment and decision about a political candidate or issue is the notion of what Lonergan calls the "scale of values." Values are built upon each other. Here they are presented in ascending order:

### **Guide to Values**

#### **VITAL VALUES**

Food, shelter, employment, health care, etc. All the basic necessities for decent standard of living. Clean drinking water and sanitation are vital values.

#### **SOCIAL VALUES**

The delivery system to meet the needs of vital values. Economics and politics are dimensions of social values. Hospitality is a social value.

#### **CULTURAL VALUES**

A sense of meaning is associated with the vital and social values. In American society, freedom of speech is a cultural value.

#### **PERSONAL VALUES**

The respect and dignity that belongs to each human being. Migrants and refugees demand respect and dignity.

#### **RELIGIOUS VALUES**

The value of self-giving love that influences all the values.

A brief commentary is offered for each section in the "voter guide."

- Our Political Foundation: The Sacred Gift of Life and Creation
- The Economy
- Global Peacemaking
- Immigration and Refugees
- The Environment
- Racial Justice
- Freedom of Religion and Conscience

### **1) Our Political Foundation: The Sacred Gift of Life and Creation**

**How does each candidate talk about:**

- **Preventing mass shootings and gun violence in the streets?**
- **Offering alternatives to abortion, euthanasia, assistance to expectant mothers, especially those who are low-income?**

Catholic Teaching:

- Political reality is built on the sacredness of life and creation (religious value)
- Pope Francis: "The great gift of life is the first gift we have received. Sometimes we risk forgetting about this. . . ." (General Audience, 2015)
- All of creation is good; human beings are "images of God" and demand respect and dignity (Personal value)

- Human dignity is denigrated by racism, violence, abortion, constant war, the death penalty, euthanasia, human trafficking, torture, environmental damage, and poverty
- Immigrants and refugees have the right to have their voices heard in the broader political process
- People have a right to healthcare
- Human dignity demands that someone hears the “cry of the poor”
- We defend against *all* threats to life and creation

Other issues:

- The purpose of government: to promote “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”
- Vital values are basic and social values meet these needs through an understanding and implementation of sound politics and economics

## 2) The Economy

**How does each candidate talk about:**

- **The wealth gap in this country**
- **Healthcare reform**

Catholic Teaching:

- The goal of any economy is to raise the *standard of living for everyone*
- Pope Francis: “thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality. Such an economy kills. Money must serve, not rule!” *Evangelii Gaudium* 53)
- “Maximization of profit” as a goal has a negative impact on human life
  - Income inequality and poverty continue to grow
  - Unjust wages, unequal pay for women, lack of federal paid family leave
  - Attacks on labor rights, unemployment, incarceration of people of color

Impact of the present economic situation on vital values:

- Unemployment exacts a human toll on youth and families
- High tuition for college age students hinders higher education;
- Struggle of elderly persons on fixed incomes to make ends meet
- A tax structure that unfairly burdens some segments of society while favoring others
- The historical priority of the elimination of social programs to balance budgets
- Congressional actions and threats to Medicare and Social Security
- A global economy that considers transnational profits more vital than human lives and human flourishing
- America’s thirst for drugs seen in the rise of the use of heroin and other drug addictions
- Proliferation of the sale of weapons to fragile democracies

## 3. Global Peacemaking

**How does each candidate talk about:**

- **Armed conflicts around the world. Lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq?**
- **Attitudes toward dealing with extremism and terrorism and root causes**
- **Our nuclear weapons program and investments in the military**
- **Role of diplomacy, dialogue and peacebuilding in preventing conflicts?**

#### Catholic Teaching:

- Obligation to build a better world and to promote social justice (religious value)
- Pope Francis: “peacemaking calls for courage, much more so than warfare”
- Pope Francis: “war is the negation of all rights and a dramatic assault on the environment . . . justice can never be wrought by killing a human being”
- Duty-bound to convert “the enemy” into a “friend”
- Collaboration with other institutions, like the United Nations, to prevent and to resolve armed conflicts
- Skills and strategies of nonviolent ways of resisting injustice and transforming conflicts
- Recognition of one’s own blind spots and bias

#### Issues that impact peacemaking:

- A view of “the world” in terms of constant warfare, we vs. them attitudes
- Practices of restorative justice, trauma-healing practices, inter-religious dialogue, multi-level diplomacy
- Lack of consensus on the meaning of the term “peace”

### 4. Immigration and Refugees

#### How does each candidate talk about:

- **Our neighbors south of the border who are fleeing violence and failed economies**
- **Pathway for citizenship for undocumented immigrants; deportations; detention of women and children in for-profit prisons**
- **Anti-immigrant rhetoric and the negative narrative in some media platforms**
- **Purpose and logic of national borders**
- **Our broken immigration system**

#### Catholic Teaching:

- Every person has the right to migrate
- Pope Francis to U.S. Congress: “When the stranger in our midst appeals to us, we must not repeat the sins and the errors of the past.”
- Every nation has the right to manage its borders, but this right is not an “absolute” right
- People on the move have human rights
- Hospitality is a religious, as well as a social, value
- Compassion is an aspect of hospitality
- People of faith and bishops celebrate Eucharist at the U.S.-Mexico border; hospitality melts frontiers
- Eucharist is a reminder of the communal nature of the human race
- Pope Francis at Lampedusa: “We are a society which has forgotten how to weep”

#### Issues related to this topic:

- (Summer 2015) Worst refugee crisis since World War II
- Need for comprehensive immigration reform; current 10-20 year-long process is a major injustice
- House of Representatives consistently refused a pathway to citizenship – another major injustice
- Should citizenship be based on nationality or residence?
- Should immigrants be denied the right to participation in the political process?
- What does compassion mean? Has anyone wept?

## 5. The Environment

How does each candidate talk about:

- **Climate change. Any policies for addressing this issue?**
- **Alternatives to fossil fuels, and jobs associated with them?**

Catholic Teaching:

- Everything God created is good (religious value)
- Our mission: Human beings are stewards and protectors, not exploiters, of creation
- There is a global failure to live this mission
- Pope Benedict the “green pope”: “If you want to cultivate peace, protect creation”
- From Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si* on the care of our common home:
  - We are the first generation whose decisions will affect our grandchildren and the life of the planet
  - “We have taken possession of nature and Mother Earth. God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive; but nature never forgives.”
  - Environmental degradation and global warming creates global poverty
  - We must Reduce air pollution: “technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – needs to be progressively replaced without delay”
  - All people must have access to clean water. Water is a vital issue
- We must ask the question: How is the present global economy affecting the environment and the livelihoods of poor people?
- Live simply, protect creation, and address climate change
- *Laudato Si* contributed to the discussion of the United Nations 2015 drafting of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), or *Agenda 2030*, for a better world
- Faith and science can work together on the environment (and other issues) and inform each other; they are not opposites

## 6. Racial Justice

How does each candidate talk about:

- **His or her stance on mass incarceration and reform of the criminal justice system that disproportionately puts people of color in prison for long periods of time**
- **Voter identification laws and other restrictions that suppress voting among people of color**

Catholic Teaching:

- Pope Francis: “The problem of intolerance must be confronted in all its forms”
- Encounter the suffering of others. In the Bible – “Where are you?” and “Where is your brother?” And Ferguson, New York City, Charleston. . . and all those who suffer from the violence of racism
- Pope Francis: this “culture of encounter” will give us the ability to weep with those who suffer
- End the violence and promote healing
- What truth do we discover in Ferguson when we encounter the suffering there, and our own blind spots are removed?

Other issues:

- Invisible violence in our institutions, including the police, as in the gunshot that killed Michael Brown
- Invisible violence of mass imprisonment of people of color and minorities already mentioned
- Invisible domestic and sexual violence
- Invisible violence of indifference
- Invisible violence of inaction in the face of failing schools, decaying cities, racial discrimination in hiring, economic disparities
- Invisible violence of distrust based on color of skin
- Racism is alive in our nation and in our churches

## 7. Freedom of Religion and Conscience

**How does each candidate talk about:**

- **Our Muslim neighbors and refugees from the Middle East**
- **The freedom of conscience of individual, religious institutions, and even private businesses**

Catholic Teaching:

- Pope Francis at the White House: “American Catholics are committed to building a society which is truly tolerant and inclusive. . . .”
- St. Francis reached out in friendship to the Islamic Sultan, we must do the same
- Anti-immigrant laws are to be denounced
- No Catholic institution—or any institution—should use a false notion of religious liberty to discriminate against anyone they employ or serve, particularly the LGBTQ community

Other Issues:

- Hate and fear of religious difference dominates the rhetoric of some presidential candidates
- Freedom of religion in the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment of the Constitution
- Respect people of all faiths, including Muslims
- All are to live in communities and contribute to the common good
- Religious liberty helped unite Americans, not divide them
- Religious consciences are to be honored. The challenge is to work together to find the way forward where we maximize the freedom of expression and denigrate no one

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