

## The Christian and the Voting Booth

*To kill a man is not to protect a doctrine, but it is to kill a man.*

Sebastian Castellio 1515 – 1563

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*No amount of past oppression can justify women's oppression of the most vulnerable among us — or even our repudiation of our own specific vocation as women.*

Elizabeth Fox—Genovese 1941 - 2007

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*"Certainly the Christian vision leads to the expectation of "new heavens" and "a new earth" (Rev 21:1), but this increases, rather than lessens, our sense of responsibility for the world today. I wish to reaffirm this forcefully at the beginning of the new millennium, so that Christians will feel more obliged than ever not to neglect their duties as citizens in this world"*

Pope John Paul II

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*When principals that run against your deepest convictions begin to win the day, then battle is your calling, and peace has become sin; you must, at the price of dearest peace, lay your convictions bare before friend and enemy, with all the fire of your faith.*

Abraham Kuyper 1837 – 1920

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*To us murder is once for all forbidden; so even the child in the womb, while yet the mother's blood is still being drawn on to form the human being, it is not lawful for us to destroy. To forbid birth is only quicker murder. It makes no difference whether one take away the life once born or destroy it as it comes to birth. He is a man, who is to be a man; the fruit is always present in the seed.*

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus c. 160–c. 240

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*"Every epoch has its secular religion, a perverse imitation of Christianity that takes part of the Christian proposition and diverts it toward this world. ...sovereign political bodies are inseparable from a will to power that leads both princes and subjects to address their wishes to the earthly city and to set themselves up as independent, to the detriment of the divine kingdom and the human vocation."*

These words were written not centuries ago but fairly recently in an article published by *First Things*. The late Fr. RJ Neuhauser's judicious reminder of "Augustine's caution that politics, including politics among nations, is inescapably marked by *libido dominandi*, the lust for power, advantage, and glory" should give us pause before entering the voting booth. Consider then the following stated positions, which seem unimaginable for a nation that many would still see as Christian!

The 2012 Democratic nominee for the presidency for the United States not only aggressively defended the right to abortion, he voted against limited restrictions for partial birth abortion.<sup>i</sup> His position was amply reflected in his party's platform and the supposedly overlooked, but clearly absent, and hence "God" insertion on opening night in 2012 was as loudly "booed," as were the "ayes."

On the other side, the Republican platform was specifically pro-life and against abortion, a position certainly to be lauded. Unfortunately, the Republican Party's nominee didn't appear to champion the platform's pro-life position with any enthusiasm during the campaign, albeit his stated position was one of support.

Please understand that I am not suggesting that one or the other party has any monopoly on righteousness. Either party is made up of broken human beings whose natural default disposition is to go "off the rails" when we ignore or abandon biblical principles. Can we really be good without God? Friedrich Nietzsche's (1844 - 1900) village madman, roaming through the village streets crying, "I seek God, I seek God" hauntingly concludes with a despairing philosopher's reply: "*We have killed him—you and I...*

*But how did we do this?*

*How could we drink up the sea?*

*Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon?*

*What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun?*

*Whither is it moving now? Whether are we moving?*

*Away from all suns?*

*Are we not plunging continually?*

*Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions?*

*Is there still any up or down?*

*Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing?*

*Do we not feel the breath of empty space?*

*Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us"?*

If both parties tend to fail us then, is there no hope? Does Nietzsche's madman have the last word? Should one simply give in to despair and forego our civic responsibilities? I would vigorously contend along with the late Pope John Paul II that we should not. We must, however, do our homework and develop our ability to discern. We may need to cross party lines at times to vote and then, if possible, go back to work diligently to bring our party into conformity with timeless Judeo-Christian truths. To vote responsibly is a hard task; we must do our homework. Thus, for the coming election, including the primaries, we would do well to apply the "Nehemiah principle"— we prayed to our God and posted a guard (or voted). (Nehemiah 4:9)

The Church has, to those unfamiliar with its history, overwhelmingly opposed abortion from the early days of its beginning, the last century notwithstanding. Indeed, it has held this position with greater unanimity down through two millennia than virtually any other mores not explicitly spelled out in Scripture. Evangelicals, lamentably, have a mixed history when it comes to taking a position against abortion. That is, earlier when abortion became the focus of national legislation and the Catholic Church staunchly opposed it, merely then did Evangelicals reexamine their position. Providentially awakened; articulate and able spokesmen arose within its ranks to defend the unborn making a robust case that the Scriptures prohibited the procedure though implicitly. Harold O.J. Brown, for example, was unequivocal, "There is very little doubt among biblically oriented Protestants that abortion is an attack on the image of God in the developing child and is a great evil."

It may well be that the hand of providence was at work earlier. With the timely rediscovery (in a monastery in Constantinople in 1873) of an early church document called the *Didache*

or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* the historicity of the church's position came into focus. The *Didache* is very explicit in its denunciation of abortion:

*Chapter 2. The Second Commandment: Grave Sin Forbidden. And the second commandment of the Teaching; You shall not commit murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not commit pederasty, you shall not commit fornication, you shall not steal, you shall not practice magic, you shall not practice witchcraft, you shall not murder a child by abortion nor kill that which is born.*

The *Didache* was commonly used in the early church. Indeed some of the Fathers considered it canonical although others did not. Eusebius (c.324) wrote that some Fathers reject it and others place it in the canon. Modern research now considers it as a composite work likely produced in the same region as the gospel of Matthew because of the similarities. The latest consensus is that it was written shortly after the gospels were written. Although it was not finally included in the canon of Scripture, (there is nothing in the compilation that would tie it to other clearly spurious gospels) it does serve, nevertheless, as an authentic and fascinating window through which one can view the functions and positions of the early church.

The church's position can also be considered as meeting the St. Vincentian canon defining orthodoxy. St. Vincentian's canon, or some restated semblance to it, is much better known currently than the author himself. Vincent of Lérins, as he is now recognized, became a monk on the island of Lérins sometime before 450 AD. His 'Commonitorium' was written to provide a guide in the determination of the true faith. The threefold test of the true faith Vincent established, and it is important to comply with the canon in this sequence, is translated from Latin (*quod semper, ubique, et ab omnibus*) as, *what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all*. Thomas G. Guarino argues persuasively that, "Properly understanding the hallmarks of the Vincentian canon—ubiquity, antiquity, and universality—means understanding these characteristics as *living warrants* through which the *living church* specifies "the faith once delivered to the saints" and determines which developments are congruent with it.<sup>ii</sup> Consequently, to take a position contrary to what the church has always believed, universally, and by all—Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox—is to take a serious step indeed.

There are, however, other contentions. How does one respond to a woman's declaration that it is her body and hence no one, and particularly a male, has the right to tell her what she can or cannot do with her body? Well, consider the act of sexual intercourse. It is an act of congress, no pun intended: a coming together. To engender a baby takes two; I know of only one virgin birth in all of human history. Sexual intercourse is therefore, although severely limited, an act of community. In any healthy functional community, one inevitably gives up some personal rights. The baby or fetus is never just hers, though she certainly bears the immeasurably greater responsibility for the nurture and wellbeing of the fetus. Nevertheless, in truth the unborn baby is his as well. "Man and woman are co-creators" states the late and but ever sagacious Dorothy Day, and adds insightfully "in this lies their great dignity."<sup>1</sup> And, we must add, with great emphasis, she/he finally belongs not only to

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Alvarez, *A Most Improbable Journey: A Big History of Our Planet and Ourselves*, 1 edition (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016), 196–97. Chapter - What Was the Chance of This Happening? – see bottom of following page

them but to us too. This tiny image bearer (with DNA unique to this little one) is beginning a journey within a distinctive community of creatures sharing an exclusive identity with the Creator—*Imago Dei*: ...in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27 NIV) The incredible process of human life coming into existence finally defies all explanations, awe inspiring and insightful as many recent discoveries have proven to be.

But what about the father? Does he merely impregnate and then move on? The lament of some pastors in the U.S. who say they have not had a wedding in their churches for years is no small calamity. The dismal trend of babies born out of wedlock is increasing at an alarming rate.<sup>iii</sup> Pregnant women in particular often experience varying levels of vulnerability and most yearn for care and protection. Ample statistics show that a single mom with children will largely end up in poverty. Surely these are valid reasons why the church advocates and protects the sanctity of marriage. Here, too, is where the church comes to the defense of women. Allegedly, in one of the movies where Tom Cruise plays a major role, his partner rather forlornly declares, “ every time we make love, your body makes a promise.” This is a deep truth! The current sexual culture frantically tries to negate this. The church, on the other hand, must contend, strongly, for the male to keep his promises. And, contrary to the commonly held belief that the church suppresses a woman’s freedom and rights, it does just the opposite though not perfectly. I contend, robustly, that the church is a woman’s greatest advocate and defender.

Allow me to provide several observations to sustain this proposition. Consider Bernard Lewis, an American-British historian and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University. Lewis is considered one of the West’s leading scholars of the Middle East specializing in the history of Islam.<sup>iv</sup> A prolific author and recognized authority, Lewis is frequently consulted by politicians for his insight and experience. Lewis, who will be 100 years of age in May 2016, is also Jewish. So when he made this observation in one of his recent books he defies ethnic expectations and political correctness:

*“In our own day another new dimension of comparable importance has been added, gender history. This is sometimes dismissed as a fad or fashion of the politically correct, and in some hands, it is indeed no more than that. But here is a lot more to gender history, and for the politically correct it can pose agonizing dilemmas. It is of course incorrect to say anything positive about Western civilization, or anything negative about non-western civilizations so how does one deal with the inescapable fact that the position of women in Christendom, though far from equality, was vastly*

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Alvarez, a professor of geology at the University of California, Berkeley most famously known as the scientist who developed the theory that described the extinction of dinosaurs (caused primarily by the horrific impact of an asteroid) wrote this fascinating and insightful book.

In it he writes: If we ask how many individuals will be born into the next generation worldwide, the answer is on the order of a billion, about  $10^9$ . If we ask how many individuals *might* be born into that generation considering the number of eggs and sperm involved, the answer is about  $10^{25}$  in very rough numbers.

What do these numbers mean? Does  $10^{25}$  sound all that much larger than  $10^9$ . Most people don’t often think about the actual meaning of numbers written exponentially. So here is a way to visualize it: If you take grains of fine sand,  $10^9$  is a double handful, but  $10^{25}$  would fill ten Grand Canyons! We who are alive today are the handful of people who were actually born, and the ten Grand Canyons full of sand grains represent all those possible people who never got to live. ...We are the few who *were* born. We few, we fortunate few, are the one who have inherited the earth and this situation...

*better than in most other societies where polygamy and concubinage were legally and socially acceptable."*

Ross Shepard Kraemer writes from the above mentioned "gender history" perspective. Produced with a strong feminist viewpoint, *Her Share of the Blessings*, with the sub title *Women's Religion Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World*, is a book on balance much too cosmopolitan to take the side of the angels, at least not on the side of an angelic host originating from the Trinity. In any event, her research staff comes to a startling conclusion from performing a grid analysis and ends up, astonishingly, by giving Christendom a backhanded concession:

*"Ironically, it seems that myths which are most gynocentric (women centered), come out of ancient Greece, an society that is widely agreed to have been the most repressive and misogynists of Western antiquity. The most androcentric (male centered) myths, those of God the father and Jesus the son, end up licensing the most equality for women, at least in theory, and occasionally even in practice."*

I suspect that the adverb, *occasionally*, used here has reached the limit of a gender-inhibited vocabulary...

But back to the contention that supporting abortion is a deciding factor—a make or break issue—for the candidates for whom we will cast our ballot. I think that without much argument one sees that the fundamental role of a democratic government is to protect. It is not an exclusive role, of course, but this is primary. There are myriad ways in which this is accomplished and certainly not the focus of this article. Nevertheless it would follow that the role of protection is inherently greater for those who are the most vulnerable and helpless. You can see where I am going with this. But what about other pressing needs of society: are they to be ignored at the expense of saving the unwanted unborn?

Permit me this parable. You will sense some familiarity; the original was told so, so much better of course. Supposing a church staff member is taking groceries to a hungry family; a politician is on his way to vote for a bill that might reduce abortion significantly, his vote is critical; a desperate entrepreneur is on his way to salvage a business venture gone catastrophically awry; a pastor on his way to console a dying parishioner; a presidential candidate on his way to give a critical speech; and—humor me a bit here—each is alone and for each even minutes are critical (I will take an excursion into fantasy and say they have no immediate means of communication!) and they are some distance from any habitation or emergency facilities. Each comes across a conspicuous ruffian accosting a young child who is frantically trying to get away. They have passed an older and somewhat dilapidated car down the road and the child's bike is lying close to the obvious abduction attempt. In the different scenarios, each by-passer is unarmed but each believes they have the wherewithal to rescue the child though time and risk are significant factors. The question then has to be confronted: do the urgent tasks of any of the would-be by-passers take priority over coming to the rescue of the child?

Then there is finally this. When Constantine (Emperor of Rome 306—337) died, writes the lucid theologian Peter Leithart, *"He left behind a political order that had been "desacrificed." The end of sacrifice announced by the gospel was effected in the actual history of Rome, during the reign of Constantine Augustus."* This, says Leithart, was no mean achievement. He goes

on: “For millennia every empire, every city, every nation and tribe was organized around sacrifice.”<sup>v</sup> To expand his contention we need to review what all good anthropologists have long recognized, that is, Homo sapiens are deeply religious. How is this relevant we may ask? It seems that woven into our human DNA is a propensity to worship, to acknowledge the existence of a sovereign being. Hence, though often in severely misguided efforts, we perform rituals of sacrifice. We do so—primarily I suspect—in an attempt to mollify the deep wound in our souls and or to appease whatever gods are the fad for the moment. If one has any misgivings about the authenticity of a desperate need for deep contrition down through eons of time in the human race, please review again the well-documented sacrificial atrocities by the Aztec Empire.<sup>2</sup>

But surely we are children of the enlightenment, we protest, this is all so yesteryear. “Nihilistic politics arises when the modern state reassumes the role of sacrificer but then realizes there are no more gods to receive the sacrifice—no more gods but itself” states Leithart and continues the argument: “And there can be no more goats and bulls, since animal sacrifice is cruel and inhumane. Yet there is blood, more blood than ever, more blood than any ancient tyranny would have thought possible, and all of it human.”

Constantine in contrast (one has to acknowledge he had his flaws) not only unreservedly embraced the supreme sacrifice but he also did the unthinkable; he literally bent his knee—*Caesar’s knee*—in contrition when he attended a meeting filled with numerous faithful followers of the Christ. Many of these bishops had suffered grievously: eyes put out, limbs cut off, primarily because they had refused to sacrifice to the “gods” of Rome. There were also many “Christ followers” who were missing—those who had paid the ultimate price. Honored then as now, these martyrs went to their gruesome death, when, had they merely offered a “pinch of incense” to the gods of Rome they could have walked free.

So Caesar’s personal embrace of Christianity positively changed the course of history forever. Some changes took place immediately, the persecution of Christians ended following the edit of Milan in 313 AD. Other changes weren’t readily apparent but were hugely significant nevertheless. Take this one for instance. Little baby girls, if they died, began to show up with greater frequency in cemeteries—instead of the city dump. Ockham’s razor is applicable here: if one responds to the *Hound of Heaven’s*<sup>vi</sup> persuasive call to embrace the one ultimate and supreme sacrifice, then no other sacrifice or sacrifices are necessary—and we move toward life. If, however, we deliberately reject or abandon the one supreme sacrifice, then surely we will increasingly transmogrify into a post-Christian culture. “When mishandled, sex is a rejection of God, and therefore of one’s own dignity.” Dan Hitchens *First Things January 2017*  
Consequently—and inevitably so—there will be blood, innocent human blood.

One other thing must be said (of course not every thing can be said that needs to be said in a brief paper). To legislate against abortion, without a strong advocacy to reinstate the Judeo/Christian institution of marriage, has all the potential of creating state-managed orphanages for unwanted babies. The absolute unspeakable conditions, for example, which

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<sup>2</sup> Rodney Stark, *How the West Won: The Neglected Story of the Triumph of Modernity*, 1 edition (Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014). Note: Stark quotes the historian and anthropologist Inga Clendinnen who estimated that the total number of victims sacrificed (many of them children) during the inauguration of the great new Templo Mayor (circa 1500) was around twenty thousand though others estimated the total as even higher. (page 222 – 223)

developed in state-run institutions operated by the recent Romanian Nicolae Ceausescu regime, were so horrific, as someone wrote, that they have cast their diabolic shadow to this day. Realistically, then, one cannot expect that all babies will have the option of a safe biological parental environment. It should behoove the church, as it has in its distinguished history, to adopt these “orphans” and remember anew the words of Jesus ...*whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine you did for me.* (Mat. 25: 40 NIV)

In the sententious words of Tom Howard, that’s the end of my argument. I hope, even if at times you disagree with me passionately, that you will see my primary motivation is to advocate empathy and care for the pregnant female and her unborn one, and to defend both, albeit keeping both in a state of compassionate tension. To separate either is to stare into the abyss.

With that said, we are called to make a decision. We enter the voting booth privately, and enter we must (though, conceivably there could be exceptions), even if we have to hold our noses. Each must decide if the candidate’s other attributes, attributes that may exceed those of his/her prolife opponent and considering their combined value, would outweigh the candidate’s stated permission, or even an advocacy of taking a helpless and innocent human life. And no unborn bearer of the *Imago Dei* is anything but that.

Aldo Classen

February 2016

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<sup>i</sup> The Born-Alive Infants Protection Act (now law) says that children born alive during an abortion have the same right to care as any other born child. The bill was considered so reasonable that it passed the U.S. Senate 98-0, but Obama spoke against it and voted “No” in Illinois! As a U.S. Senator, Obama was a co- sponsor of the most sweeping piece of pro-abortion legislation ever introduced in Congress, the “Freedom of Choice Act” (FOCA). Re-introduced the day after the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the federal ban on partial-birth abortion, the bill Obama co-sponsored was designed to overturn federal and state partial-birth abortion bans, as well as hundreds of other state and federal laws that protect unborn children and their mothers, such as abortion funding bans, parental consent and notification laws, and Women’s Right to Know laws. Carol Tobias Sep 18, 2012

<sup>ii</sup> *Vincent of Lérins and the Development of Christian Doctrine*, Thomas G Guarino, Baker Academic, 2013

<sup>iii</sup> Unwed pregnancy (in some cultures in the U.S. unwed pregnancy is approaching 75%) and abortion are largely in lock step.

<sup>iv</sup> *From Babel to Dragomans 2004*, Bernard Lewis,

<sup>v</sup> *Defending Constantine, The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of Christendom*, Peter J. Leithart, Intervarsity Press, 2010

<sup>vi</sup> The Hound of Heaven is one of the most famous and beloved Christian poems ever written. Francis Thompson (1859 – 1907), an English poet who had been a drug addict afflicted by poverty and depression, wrote the poem published in 1881. The late and legendary cosmologist, Carl Sandage, though strenuously resisting faith initially was eventually won over by the relentless pursuit of the divine pursuer. “Do you know that poem, *The Hound of Heaven*”? he asks plaintively. “...if the hounds of heaven are not chasing you then you’ll never be converted.” (*The Conversion of Alan Sandage* by William A. Durbin)