

VOTER'S GUIDE

for

SERIOUS CHRISTIANS

Nothing in this voter's guide should be construed as an endorsement of any particular candidate or political party.

HOW THIS VOTER'S GUIDE HELPS YOU

If you take your Christian faith seriously then this voter's guide is for you. It will help you cast your vote in an informed manner consistent with Christian moral teaching. It helps you avoid choosing candidates who endorse policies that cannot be reconciled with moral norms that used to be held by all Christians.

On most issues that come before voters or legislators, the task is selecting the most effective strategy among several morally good options. A Christian can take one side or the other and not act contrary to the faith. Most matters do not have a "Christian position."

But some issues concern "non-negotiable" moral principles that do not admit of exception or compromise. One's position either accords with those principles or does not. No one endorsing the wrong side of these issues can be said to act in accord with the Christian faith. Democracy must be based on the true and solid foundation of non-negotiable ethical principles, which are the underpinning of life in society.

This voter's guide identifies five issues involving non-negotiable moral values in current politics and helps you narrow down the list of acceptable candidates, whether they are running for national, state, or local offices.

You should avoid to the greatest extent possible voting for candidates who endorse or promote intrinsically evil policies. As far as possible, you should vote for those who promote policies in line with the moral law.

In many elections there are situations where all of the available candidates take morally unacceptable positions on one or more of the non-negotiable issues.

In such situations, a citizen will be called upon to make tough choices. In those cases, citizens must vote in the way that will most limit the harm that would be done by the available candidates.

In this guide we will look first at the principles that should be applied in clear-cut races, where there is an unambiguously good moral choice. These same principles help lay the groundwork for what to do in situations that are more difficult.

Knowing the principles that are applied in ideal situations is useful when facing problematic ones, so as you review the principles you should keep in mind that they often must be applied in situations where the choice is more difficult. At the end of the guide we will offer practical advice about how to decide to cast your vote in those cases.

YOUR ROLE AS A CHRISTIAN VOTER

Christians have a moral obligation to promote the common good through the exercise of their voting privileges. It is not just civil authorities who have responsibility for a country. Service of the common good requires citizens to fulfill their roles in the life of the political community. This means citizens should participate in the political process at the ballot box.

But voting cannot be arbitrary. A well-formed Christian conscience does not permit one to vote for a political program or an individual law that contradicts the fundamental contents of faith and morals. A citizen's vote most often means voting for a candidate who will be the one directly voting on laws or programs. But being one step removed from law-making doesn't let citizens off the hook, since morality requires that we avoid doing evil to the greatest extent possible, even indirectly.

Some things always are wrong, and no one may deliberately vote in favor of them. Legislators, who have a direct vote, may not support these evils in legislation or programs. Citizens support these evils indirectly if they vote in favor of candidates who propose to advance them. Thus, to the greatest extent possible, Christians must avoid voting for any candidate who intends to support programs or laws that are intrinsically evil. When all of the candidates endorse morally harmful policies, citizens must vote in a way that will limit the harm likely to be done.

THE FIVE NON-NEGOTIABLE ISSUES

These five current issues concern actions that are intrinsically evil and must never be promoted by the law. (For information on additional issues, see the appendix at the end of this guide.) Intrinsically evil actions are those which fundamentally conflict with God's law and can never be deliberately performed under any circumstances. It is a serious sin to deliberately endorse or promote any of these actions. No candidate who really wants to advance the common good will support any action contrary to the non-negotiable principles involved in these issues.

1. Abortion

Abortion is the intentional and direct killing of an innocent human being, and therefore it is a form of homicide. It is never licit to support abortion, for it violates the commandment "You shall not murder" (Ex. 20:13). Scripture is clear that the unborn are humans. When Mary visited Elizabeth, who was pregnant with the unborn John the Baptist, Elizabeth declared: "As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy" (Luke 1:44). The Bible is clear: Unborn babies are babies, and they must be treasured and protected as such.

The unborn child is always an innocent party, and no law may permit the taking of his life. Even when a child is conceived through rape or incest, the fault is not the child's, who should not suffer death for others' sins.

2. Euthanasia

Often disguised by the name "mercy killing," euthanasia also is a form of homicide. No person has a right to take his own life, and no one has the right to take the life of any innocent person.

In euthanasia, the ill or elderly are killed, by action or omission, out of a misplaced sense of compassion, but true compassion cannot include intentionally doing something intrinsically evil to another person. Like abortion, euthanasia violates the commandment, "You shall not murder."

3. Embryonic Stem Cell Research

Human embryos are human beings. It is grossly immoral to kill embryonic humans in order to use their bodies as medical consumables, but this is precisely what happens in embryonic stem cell research. Unborn children are killed to extract their stem cells for use in medical experiments. This practice also violates the commandment, "You shall not murder."

Recent scientific advances show that often medical treatments that researchers hope to develop from experimentation on embryonic stem cells can be developed by using adult stem cells instead. Adult stem cells can be obtained without doing harm to the adults from whom they come. Thus there is no valid medical argu-

ment in favor of using embryonic stem cells. And even if there were benefits to be had from such experiments, they would not justify destroying innocent human beings.

4. Human Cloning

God designed the human race to reproduce by the union of man and woman. Every child has the right to be born of a father and a mother. Human cloning violates God's design by trying to create a child with only a genetic father or only a genetic mother.

Human cloning also involves abortion because the "rejected" or "unsuccessful" embryonic clones are destroyed. Some people want to create human clones simply to experiment on them, yet each clone is a human being.

5. Homosexual "Marriage"

True marriage is the union of one man and one woman. Legal recognition of any other union as "marriage" undermines true marriage, and legal recognition of homosexual unions actually does homosexual persons a disfavor by encouraging them to persist in an objectively immoral arrangement.

God designed marriage to be a union between a man and a woman: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). Paul warns of dire consequences for those who try to replace this natural union with unnatural, homosexual ones: "Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion" (Rom. 1:26-27).

Our society will not escape unscathed if it undermines true marriages by pretending that homosexual unions are equivalent to what God designed.

WHICH POLITICAL OFFICES SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT?

Laws are passed by the legislature, enforced by the executive branch, and interpreted by the judiciary. This means you should scrutinize any candidate for the legislature, anyone running for an executive office, and anyone nominated for the bench. This is true not only at the national level but also at the state and local levels.

True, the lesser the office, the less likely the office holder will take up certain issues. Your city council, for example, perhaps never will take up the issue of human cloning but may take up issues connected with abortion clinics. It is important that you evaluate candidates in light of each non-negotiable moral issue that will come before them in the offices they are seeking.

Few people achieve high office without first holding a lower office. Some people become congressional representatives, senators, or presidents without having been elected to a lesser office. But most representatives, senators, and presidents started their political careers at the local level. The same is true for state lawmakers. Most of them began on city councils and school boards and worked their way up the political ladder.

Tomorrow's candidates for higher offices will come mainly from today's candidates for lower offices. It is therefore prudent to apply comparable standards to local candidates. One should seek to elect to lower offices candidates who support Christian morality so that they will have a greater ability to be elected to higher offices where their moral stances may come directly into play.

HOW TO DETERMINE A CANDIDATE'S POSITION

1. The higher the office, the easier this will be. Congressional representatives and senators, for example, repeatedly have seen these issues come before them and so have taken positions on them. Often the same can be said at the state level. In either case, learning a candidate's position can be as easy as reading newspaper or magazine articles, looking up his views on the Internet, or studying one of the many printed candidate surveys that are distributed at election time.
2. It often is more difficult to learn the views of candidates for local offices because few of them have an opportunity to consider legislation on such things as abortion, cloning, and the sanctity of marriage. But these candidates, being local, often can be contacted directly or have local campaign offices that will explain their positions.
3. If you cannot determine a candidate's views by other means, do not hesitate to write directly to the candidate, asking for his position on the issues covered above.

HOW NOT TO VOTE

1. Do not just vote based on your political party affiliation, your earlier voting habits, or your family's voting tradition. Years ago, these may have been trustworthy ways to determine whom to vote for, but today they are often not reliable. You need to look at the stands each candidate takes. This means that you may end up casting votes for candidates from more than one party.
2. Do not cast your vote based on candidates' appearance, personality, or "media savvy." Some attractive, engaging, and "sound-bite-capable" candidates endorse intrinsic evils, while other candidates, who may be plain-looking, uninspiring, and ill at ease in front of cameras, endorse legislation in accord with basic Christian principles.

3. Do not vote for candidates simply because they declare themselves to be Christian. Unfortunately, many self-described Christian candidates reject basic Christian moral teaching.

4. Do not choose among candidates based on "What's in it for me?" Make your decision based on which candidates seem most likely to promote the common good, even if you will not benefit directly or immediately from the legislation they propose.

5. Do not vote for candidates who are right on lesser issues but who will vote wrongly on key moral issues. The common outcry, which is justly made on behalf of human rights—for example, the right to health, to home, to work, to family, to culture—is false and illusory if the right to life, the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights, is not defended with maximum determination. One candidate may have a record of voting in line with Christian values except, say, for euthanasia. Such a voting record is a clear signal that the candidate should not be chosen by a Christian voter, unless the other candidates have voting records even less in accord with Christian teaching.

HOW TO VOTE

1. For each office, first determine how each candidate with a real even if unlikely chance of winning stands on each of the issues that will come before him and involve non-negotiable principles.
2. Rank the candidates according to how well their positions align with these non-negotiable moral principles.
3. Give preference to candidates who do not propose positions that contradict these principles.
4. Where every candidate endorses positions contrary to non-negotiable principles, choose the candidate likely to do the least harm. If several are equal, evaluate them based on their views on other, lesser issues.
5. Remember that your vote today may affect the offices a candidate later achieves.

WHEN THERE IS NO "ACCEPTABLE" CANDIDATE

In some political races, each candidate takes a wrong position on one or more issues involving non-negotiable moral principles. In such a case you may vote for the candidate who takes the fewest such positions or who seems least likely to be able to advance immoral legislation, or you may choose to vote for no one.

A vote cast in such a situation is not morally the same as a positive endorsement for candidates, laws, or programs that promote intrinsic evils: It is only tolerating a lesser evil to avoid an even greater evil. For example, in a situation where it is not possible to overturn or com-

pletely defeat laws allowing abortion, measures aimed at limiting the harm done by such laws are needed.

Christians must strive to put in place candidates, laws, and political programs that are in full accord with non-negotiable moral values. Where a perfect candidate, law, or program is not on the table, we are to choose the best option, the one that promotes the greatest good and entails the least evil. Not voting may sometimes be the only moral course of action, but we must consider whether not voting actually promotes good and limits evil in a specific instance. The role of citizens and elected officials is to promote intrinsic moral values as much as possible, while continuing to work toward better candidates, laws, and programs in the future.

THE ROLE OF YOUR CONSCIENCE

Conscience is like an alarm. It warns you when you are about to do something that you know is wrong. It does not itself determine what is right or wrong. For your conscience to work properly, it must be properly informed—that is, you must inform yourself about what is right and what is wrong. Only then will your conscience be a trusted guide.

Unfortunately, today many Christians have not educated their consciences adequately regarding key moral issues. The result is that their consciences do not "sound off" at appropriate times, including on Election Day.

A properly informed conscience will never contradict Christian moral teaching. For that reason, if you are unsure where your conscience is leading you when at the ballot box, place your trust in the unwavering moral teachings of the Christian faith.

WHEN YOU ARE DONE WITH THIS VOTER'S GUIDE

Please do not keep this voter's guide to yourself. Read it, learn from it, and prepare your selection of candidates based on it. Then give this voter's guide to a friend, and ask your friend to read it and pass it on to others. The more people who vote in accord with basic moral principles, the better off our country will be.

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APPENDIX: Other Political Issues

This voter's guide focuses on five non-negotiable issues. These were selected because they involve principles that never admit of exceptions and because they currently are being debated in U.S. politics, giving voters the opportunity to influence these issues through the candidates they elect. The guide does not focus on issues that do not meet the tests of non-negotiability and being "in play" politically.

Issues That Are Not Non-Negotiable

Some issues allow for a diversity of opinion, and Christians are permitted leeway in endorsing or opposing particular policies. This is the case with the questions of when to go to war and when to apply the death penalty.

The same is true of many other issues that are the subject of political debate: the best way to help the poor, to manage the economy, to protect the environment, to handle immigration, and to provide education, health care, and retirement security. Christians legitimately may take different approaches to these issues, and so none are "non-negotiable" in the sense that this guide uses the term.

Non-Negotiable Issues That Are Not "In Play" Politically

There are additional issues that are non-negotiable but that are not "in play" politically. For example, American politicians are not presently advocating the evil of genocide, the indiscriminate killing of an entire people, and so this guide does not list genocide among the non-negotiables it focuses on. In reality, it is non-negotiable. Genocide is intrinsically evil. But it is not "in play" politically in the United States.

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