

For Obama Because Against Abortion

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By THOMAS GROOME

Both friends and strangers have challenged why a Catholic theologian like me would publicly support the re-election of President Obama. The implication always is that my Catholic faith should dictate otherwise.

Of course I cite Catholic social *doctrine* (note the weighty term) and the mandate of my faith to care for “the least” among us (Matthew 25:34ff). Social programs for the common good, and especially for the most vulnerable, are central to Catholic social teaching. By contrast, Ayn Rand’s proposal of a “virtue of selfishness,” besides being an oxymoron, is the antithesis of Catholic faith. If implemented as social policy - a la the Romney/Ryan budget - the neediest among us will suffer by far the most. Some 64% of its alleged “savings” come from cutting programs that aid poor families and individuals.

The comeback is invariably around abortion, whereupon I explain that my opposition to abortion is precisely the tipping point that prompts my unqualified support of the President.

As a loyal Catholic, I accept the teaching of my Church that “Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred” and that abortion is “gravely contrary to the moral law” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2319, 2271). Though the US Catholic Bishops caution, “As Catholics we are not single issue voters” (*Faithful Citizenship*, Nov. 2007), yet with some 1.3 million annually in the US, abortion presents our country with a grave moral crisis.

The dilemma for citizens like me is that the great majority of our fellow Americans favor some possibility of abortion and do not want to criminalize it again. As Thomas Aquinas taught wisely, laws must reflect “the consensus of the governed” and there is no agreement in this country to ban all abortions. (Even Gov. Romney is now making “exceptions” – which is contrary to a strict Catholic position.)

When faced with a strategic dilemma in applying a general moral principle, the same Aquinas argued that Christians should choose whatever appears to be the lesser evil and the greater good. In this light, the most feasible moral choice is to *reduce* the number of abortions. So, Catholics like me and citizens of like mind should support the candidate who has the best abortion reducing policies.

There is ample evidence that good social programs can dramatically reduce the number of abortions – and that the lack of them increase it. The Dutch and the Germans have an abortion rate approximately one third of the U.S. because they have universal health care, including pre-natal and post natal care, and programs to encourage adoption.

All the statistics show a deep correlation between abortion and economic need. More than 3 out of 4 women give economic reasons for choosing abortion and the abortion rate is 300%

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higher among people below the poverty level than those above it. A fine instance of good social services reducing abortion is the Massachusetts health care plan that Governor Romney signed into law (before his flip-flop on health care); it has lowered the number significantly, with a 21% decrease among teenagers.

If Governor Romney makes good on his commitment to rescind the Affordable Health Care Act, coupled with the Romney/Ryan budget proposal that slashes services to poor people, then *under a Romney administration the rate of abortions in the US will skyrocket.*

If elected, Governor Romney would join a line of Republican presidents who campaigned as pro-life but whose social policies increased the number of abortions. The cuts in social services during the Reagan administration caused the abortion rate to rise dramatically. President Clinton, by contrast, having campaigned on a pro-choice position, improved social services and the abortion rate declined nearly 30 percent under his administration – a decline that then stagnated under President George W. Bush. By way of being truly pro-life, it would seem that presidential Republican candidates are no more than “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

Meanwhile, President Obama has made good on the commitment that he personally had inserted into the 2008 Democratic platform (reiterated in 2012), namely to “strongly support a woman’s decision to have a child by ensuring access to and availability of programs for pre and post natal health care, parenting skills, income support, and caring adoption programs.” The current Republican Platform, and certainly candidate Romney, has no such abortion-reducing commitment.

President Obama has signed into law the Pregnancy Assistance Fund – a \$250 million program that helps local organizations support vulnerable pregnant women who wish to have their babies. He has extended and tripled the Adoption Tax Credit and proposes making it permanent. He supports the Child Tax Credit, which the Romney/Ryan budget would cut. Going forward, his overall social policies and affordable health care will insure that the US rate of abortions will decline significantly.

No one could reasonably assert that my Catholic faith requires me to vote for one or another candidate in this election. However, my Catholic conscience prompts me to support President Obama as a practical strategy to reduce abortion in America.

Thomas Groome is a Professor of Theology and Religious Education at Boston College and a National Co-Chair of Catholics for Obama.