

“Bernard Evans has written a valuable book for every Catholic voter (and others as well). He makes it very clear that voting, a moral obligation, is an expression of one’s faith. I think chapter 5, ‘Promoting a Pro-life Agenda,’ is especially helpful in deciding on a candidate when no one candidate’s position on various life-issues satisfies all our moral concerns. He stresses, and rightly so, that voting on a single issue is not voting responsibly. *Vote Catholic?* teaches us to vote the Gospel!”

—Bishop Victor H. Balke  
Diocese of Crookston, Minnesota

“In an age of single-issue politics, the marriage of extremist religious and political ideologies, and competing values and agendas, Bernard Evans offers some down-to-earth common theological sense about what should guide Christians when they vote. Firmly rooted in Catholic social teaching, issues like promoting the common good, the dignity and value of all human life, and the ‘preferential option for the poor,’ are central concerns in this context. While written specifically as a guide for Catholics, Christians of various denominations will find this extremely helpful as well. The summaries and study guides at the end of each short chapter make this an extremely useful text for adult education in parishes and schools. Here is a book that needs to be read!”

—Maxwell E. Johnson  
Department of Theology  
University of Notre Dame



# **Vote Catholic?**

## **Beyond the Political Din**

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Bernard F. Evans



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To Bob Carvajal,  
whose passion for justice and politics  
gave lasting shape to the  
Catholic Campaign for Human Development.



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# Introduction

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In the Gospel of Luke we read that Jesus began proclaiming the kingdom of God by announcing good news to the poor, release to captives, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). It was a message familiar to his listeners—a reading from the prophet Isaiah. The prophets of the Old Testament frequently reminded the people that their relationship with God required them to give special care to the poor and vulnerable among them—the widows, orphans, and strangers.

Today our response to Jesus' preaching must be marked by repentance, conversion, and change of life. Like the people hearing Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth and like those to whom the prophets spoke, this conversion is tested by our response to persons whose needs are great.

The Catholic Church teaches that we should reach out to the poor with charity and justice, through direct services and through changing systems and structures so that everyone may do well. One way to promote such change is by electing leaders committed to building a more just society.

In recent years there has been much discussion—and confusion—about how Catholics should vote. Some of this is caused by individuals and organizations seeking

to advance particular agendas. Some of it is the result of honest uncertainty among Catholic voters, especially regarding candidates who may not agree with official church teachings on various issues, abortion being the most obvious among them.

This book attempts to sort out and evaluate some of the more strident claims about how Catholics should vote. The sources for this task are the universal social teachings of the church as well as pastoral statements on voting that have come from the Catholic bishops here in the United States (the most recent of which, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, was released in the late stages of this book's publication, allowing time and space for only brief reference). It is the conviction of this writer that our church's teachings invite us to vote with particular attention to three areas:

1. protecting human life and the dignity of all persons,
2. promoting those living conditions that allow everyone to do well,
3. giving particular attention to the "widows, orphans, and strangers" of our day.

To vote in this way flows out of our gratitude for Jesus' announcement that the kingdom of God is at hand. It is not easy to vote in this way, for it calls us to examine our values and change our lives. However, the payoff for this approach to casting our ballots is very large and goes beyond our personal benefits. To vote in this way may help the poor to hear the good news, the captives to gain release, the blind to recover sight, and the oppressed to experience freedom. Indeed, our vote does matter.

## Chapter 1

# Connecting Faith and Justice

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Religion and politics do mix!

Most of us grew up hearing some version of the opposite claim. We learned that politics and religion make bad bed partners. Religion should stay out of politics and politics should have as little as possible to do with religion. Persons engaged in politics would do well to check their religion at the door. And if the rest of us must talk about politics, let us not inflame an already volatile subject by dousing it with religious viewpoints.

It's difficult to know the origins of this popular attitude regarding the separation of religion and politics. Some people fear the tragic consequences that usually follow a blending of political power and religious fanaticism—a historical reality that continues into the present time. For others, this preferred separation might be a way to ensure harmony when the family gathers for a peaceful Thanksgiving dinner. Whatever its origins, the customary nod to the separation of religion and politics continues in this day, even after the walls of separation have been cracked, breached, and, in some instances, removed altogether.