

GOD, COUNTRY AND NOTRE DAME: FAITH AND VALUES



While a student at Notre Dame I heard the motto, “God, Country and Notre Dame” many times. This phrase is engraved into the stone of the Basilica of the Sacred Heart on the campus of Notre Dame. The importance of Notre Dame in the lives of her students and alumni is whole-heartedly declared with these words.

Notre Dame’s priority in the lives of faculty and alumni is also emphasized with this motto; Notre Dame third after God (first) and Country (second).

When we Catholics vote, where do we prioritize God and Country?

As summer approaches, our nation enters the political theater of the quadrennial national elections. The August conventions merely serve as the prologue; the show begins on Labor Day. Though local elections matter greatly, we Americans focus on the presidential race. Voter turnout for national elections compared to local elections supports this observation.

In recent surveys an average of 90% of those polled have already decided whether to vote for Governor Romney or President Obama. Granted that voters have a known quantity in Obama but without knowing whether Romney, the presumptive Republican candidate, is the candidate who ran in the primaries or the man who governed Massachusetts, it seems premature for 90% of the voting population to have already made up their minds. None of us have taken our seats for the show yet and we’re already writing our critique of the performance.

Our opinions and our criticisms are often formed by our values, initially established at a young age and later strengthened by a selective interpretation of the facts we encounter. Most of our personal philosophies, then, are shaped to conform to our values, personal philosophies such as faith.

In my conversations with hundreds of people of faith (mostly, but not exclusively, Catholics) I find that many entertain a robust political view that is influenced by their registered party affiliation. In the same conversation I learn that their attitude about what their faith, their religion should look like – traditional, Vatican II, focused on social justice, focused on one issue, a reflection of society’s mores -- is in concert with their political views. That is, their values have shaped their faith. They expect that their faith should conform to their values.

In *Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. Catholic Bishops write, “We urge our Catholic pastors and people to continue to use this important statement [Faithful Citizenship] to help them form their consciences, to contribute to civil and respectful public dialogue, and to shape their choices in the coming election in the light of Catholic teaching.”

Let me repeat those last words, “...shape their choices in the coming election in the light of Catholic teaching.” In other words, we are urged to intentionally use the lens of Catholic teaching to form our decisions on political issues and on how – and for whom – we vote. We are called to direct our faith to shape our values and our political tendencies.

As we take our seats for the 2012 political theater, let us pray to the Holy Spirit for the guidance and the wisdom to learn more about our Catholic teachings and with a formed conscience apply these as we vote.

For in the end, we must ask ourselves if our motto is, “God, Country, and (insert party affiliation here)?” Or do we approach our political discussions with, “Party, Country, and God?” Do our values shape our faith? Or does our faith shape our values?



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace