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A CATHOLIC VOTES

**Pastoral Letter
of
BISHOP LIAM CARY
on the 2020 Election**

Part II: Religious Liberty

In the 2020 election the issue of abortion does not stand alone or apart. Quite the contrary: in our hyper-politized world advocates of abortion have made it a prominent feature in divisive debates on a host of vital issues—the Supreme Court, constitutional law, health care, education, race relations, immigration, foreign aid. In each of these areas the cause of abortion fuels a gathering threat to religious liberty—the first freedom which the First Amendment protects from state-sponsored violation of conscience.

“Deep within his conscience man discovers a law which he has not laid upon himself but which he must obey,” we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. “His conscience is man’s most secret core and his sanctuary. There he is alone with God, whose voice echoes in his

depths . . . ever calling him . . . to do what is good and to avoid evil.”

Up to this point in our history as a nation we have gone to great lengths to respect the conscience of our fellow citizens. The First Amendment guarantees “free exercise” of one’s chosen religion, because in America the government is forbidden to establish religion. Caesar may not coerce citizens to think and act as Caesar decrees. In America we render unto God what is God’s. We do not force the conscience.

In recent years, however, the all-pervasive internet has vastly restricted the range of what is politically correct to think and what is politically allowable to do. With ever-widening scope and chilling social scrutiny the religion of

secular progressivism summons consciences to judgment before its unforgiving tribunals. Health Care Mandates force the conscience of the Little Sisters of the Poor to provide contraceptive insurance. Lawsuits pressure Catholic hospitals to offer abortions and Catholic doctors to perform them. Administrative agencies direct counselors to offer no conscientious objection when children opt for sexual transition without their parents' knowledge or consent.

The Declaration of Independence grounds our equality under God in "certain unalienable rights" which it is the duty of government to "secure." These rights come to us in a very specific progression: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. To enjoy the right to life, I must first be born and kept alive by others who respect my right to life and willingly nurture my dependence on their care. When the time comes for me to assume responsibility for my life, I take my right to liberty in hand and begin to exercise my right to pursue happiness, mindful that others are pursuing it too.

But if I forget or deny that others have this right, something ominous happens to the sequence of liberties we share. Now the right to pursue happiness comes to the head of the list, to the place always held by the right to life, which in turn finds its place at the end. Instead of life, liberty and happiness, the new sequence reads: happiness, liberty, and life.

In this new order, when I reach the point of pursuing happiness, I can throw old priorities into reverse. I can bring my happiness to the fore. If your liberty gets in the way of my happiness, then your liberty must yield to my happiness. If another person's life is an obstacle to my happiness, then that life has to go away in order that my pursuit may go on.

In the American South, African Americans lost their liberty to segregation because white Southerners would not pursue happiness in a mixed-race society. In Nazi Germany, Hitler claimed the Jews sabotaged the pursuit of national happiness, so he first restricted their liberty and then rid the land of their life. In both instances the unimpeded pursuit of happiness trumped everything else, regardless of its impact on the life and liberty and happiness of others.

An election is about handing on a heritage. As you mark your ballot, give careful thought to the impact your vote will have on the life, liberty, and happiness of those who come after you.

In the Lord of Life,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Liam Cary".

Most Reverend Liam Cary
Bishop of Baker

27 October 2020