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What does Paul Ryan mean for Catholics?

Mike Sweitzer-Beckman | Aug. 16, 2012 Young Voices

My home state of Wisconsin cannot stay out of the electoral politics headlines. The latest is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney naming Paul Ryan as his vice presidential running mate. Ryan hails from Janesville and currently serves in the U.S. Congress for Wisconsin's 1st District.
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At a homecoming rally for Ryan in Janesville last Sunday, he expressed his love for Wisconsin, stating, "My veins run with cheese, bratwurst, and a little Spotted Cow and some Millers. I like to hunt here, I like to fish here, I like to snow mobile here. I even think ice fishing is interesting."

He's a cheesehead, through and through. However, his devotion to Jesus Christ and Ayn Rand are about as contradicting as someone being both a Packers and a Bears fan.

On the one hand, he's a longtime member at St. John Vianney Catholic Parish in Janesville. He's anti-abortion (even in cases of rape and incest) and against gay marriage, easily aligning himself with much of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on these two social issues.

As recently as 2005, he's a professed fan of Ayn Rand (1905-1982), author of *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, foundational documents for libertarians and believers in small government everywhere. In a 2005 speech [1] to The Atlas Society, he claimed nobody had more influence on his thought than Rand, and even had all his interns read her books.

Ryan gained national prominence with his budget proposal, which had drastic cuts to food stamps, health care for children and the elderly, and other social programs, all while sparing military spending by the Pentagon. Rand denounced altruism, and Ryan's budget proposal does the same. This proposal aligns him closely with the budgetary thought of Ayn Rand, even though Ryan has renounced his affection for her teachings in recent times.

He tried to say these budgetary cuts were rooted in Catholic social teaching, but the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops were quick to question this, urging lawmakers to look at the moral implications of a vote in favor of this budget plan.

Whether Ryan aligns more closely with Ayn Rand or Jesus Christ remains to be seen. However, Ryan's budget proposal raises the question of who is responsible for caring for the least in our society. As Ryan stated in a speech at Georgetown University: "Simply put, I do not believe that the preferential option for the poor means a preferential option for big government."

Romney has been quiet on what parts of Ryan's budget plan he would adopt as part of his own budget platform on the Republican presidential ticket. However, if the direction is to cut spending for social programs and tax the wealthiest less, the burden will fall to those at Catholic, faith-based and secular nongovernmental organizations to pick up the slack on providing a preferential option for the poor and vulnerable. Charities rely on government sources [2] for one-third of their revenue. Those sources would be cut in a Ryan budget that wouldn't even balance the budget until 2040 -- the year that newborns this year would be 10 years out of high

school.

Catholics attempting to be true to their faith have a difficult choice to make this November. Whether they vote for the Barack Obama/Joe Biden ticket or for Romney/Ryan, they are voting for a Catholic vice presidential candidate [3]. However, each vote carries severe moral implications. With this election being termed as one about the economy, the choice seems to be whether to vote for a Catholic who aligns more closely with Ayn Rand than Jesus Christ.

[Mike Sweitzer-Beckman helped launch the blog youngadultcatholics-blog.com/ [4] in 2008. He also blogs at sweitman-solutions.com/ [5] about technology.]

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