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What does it mean to be religious this election?

Pat Perriello | Aug. 20, 2012 NCR Today

Timothy Stanley in a CNN blog [1] analyzes the Catholic vote in a similar vein to what I suggested in my recent blog, "How does a Catholic Choose Who to Vote for in November?" [2] Stanley highlights the many issues that will cause individual Catholics to lend their support to a particular candidate.

I agree with much of what Stanley has to say, but I would quibble with his division of Catholics into religious and nonreligious voters. His data indicates that the more religious a Catholic is, the more likely he or she is to vote for Romney. It of course depends on one's definition of being religious. Certainly, a discussion could be had on whether one is religious because of certain religious practices and ritual or because of the effort to live a good life.

Stanley quotes Vice President Joe Biden as indicating that his understanding of the greatest sin is in the "abuse of power." Obama Catholics are likely to be those who support the social justice teachings of the church. Put another way, Obama Catholics tend to see their Catholicism as a way of life. While neither liberal nor conservative Catholics have a corner on goodness, I do think a debate on what it means to be religious might be worth having. Without denigrating individual piety, I think it may be well to remember that Jesus in Matthew 15 was quite harsh with those "who honored him only with their lips, but whose hearts were far from him."

Ultimately, I believe the point I was making in my initial blog on this topic is that both Ryan and Biden are Catholic. Most Catholics see their own faith as more closely represented by one or the other of these candidates. This is why the Catholic vote will split. It is also why unity in our church may best be achieved if the institutional church and Catholics themselves understand their church as big enough to embrace both approaches to faith.

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[1] http://www.cnn.com/2012/08/17/opinion/stanley-catholic-candidates/index.html?hpt=hp_abar
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/31766