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Melady for President!

Michael Sean Winters | Nov. 5, 2012 Distinctly Catholic

A little over a week ago, I was speaking with former US ambassador to the Holy See, Thomas Melady. We were discussing the closeness of the polling in the presidential election. Mr. Melady is one of the national co-chairs of ?Catholics for Romney? so, as you can imagine, his politics are not my politics, but I enjoy the ambassador?s take on issues and always learn a great deal from our conversations. After a few minutes, Melady said, ?Well, whatever happens, the country must come together after the election.? I replied, ?There it is. I am going to write-in your name for president on election day Mr. Ambassador!? And so I shall.

I discussed last week why, in good conscience, I do not feel I can vote for either Mr. Romney or Mr. Obama. Both are decent men. Neither will wreck the republic. But, both men have given ample evidence of plans and programs in which I could not participate by offering the endorsement my vote would confer. And, both have failed, at key times, to demonstrate, beyond rhetorical flourishes, that instinct for national unity that came so naturally to Ambassador Melady. Mr. Romney?s comment about the 47% betrayed a gross misunderstanding of the lives of average Americans. Mr. Obama?s decision to punch the Catholic Church in the nose betrayed a gross misunderstanding of what a president?s job is and is not. Both men are capable of compromise, to be sure, and we will need some compromises to avoid the fiscal cliff, begin to deal with climate change, re-forge a consensus approach to foreign policy, etc. But the instinct for compromise is not precisely the same thing as the instinct that puts nation ahead of political advantage.

Since January, when the President went back on his promise to Cardinal Dolan regarding the conscience exemptions to the HHS mandate, I have been wondering how I would vote. As mentioned previously, in 1996 I faced a similar dilemma as President Clinton?s unwillingness to do anything to save Bosnia led me to conclude I could not vote for him. I had intended to leave that column on my absentee ballot blank, but when the ballot arrived, I was hosting a Russian novelist friend at my home for a week. Of course, this entailed the consumption of large quantities of vodka each evening. On one such evening, discussing my frustrations with US politics with Petya, I said, ?I know, I will write in your name.? And, so I did. It was silly. It was also 1996 and was not going to matter.

In fact, since coming to the Washington area in 1980, my vote has never mattered. Actually, I am still eligible to vote in my home town in Connecticut at our town meeting or in a referendum on a budget issue because I am a taxpayer, but not for general elections. In both DC and now in Maryland, I do not know what it feels like to think your vote will matter. In 2008, of course, there was the sense of history, the fact that I was participating in the election of the first African-American president, which I gladly did. I thought electing Obama was a good thing, not a great thing, but I thought the fact that America was crossing an important threshold in electing a black man was a very great thing, just as great as electing a Catholic in 1960. But, normally, my vote does not affect anything.

Of course, my circumstance is not abnormal. The three largest states in the union ? California, Texas and New York ? are not swing states. Only three of the top ten ? Florida, Ohio, and North Carolina ? are really swing states. It is time for those of us who live in a state that does not swing if there are not more creative ways to

make our ballots have some influence. I will put the question bluntly: Is it time for a Catholic Party? This is a useful thought exercise in any event, but it turns out, speaking about the election to a wide variety of Catholic friends, several of them are writing in names for the presidency this year, rather than cast a ballot for either of the two candidates.

It is untrue when people say that third parties have no effect, although they often have a different effect from the one intended. When Strom Thurmond bolted the Democrats in 1948, he wanted to teach Truman and the party a lesson, that they needed the Southern Democrats. Truman stuck to his guns, kept the robust civil rights plank in the Democratic platform and, in the event, did not need the Dixiecrat vote to defeat Dewey. In 1968, George Wallace took 46 electoral votes, less than Dukakis in 1988, more than Mondale in 1984. What did Wallace achieve? He alerted the GOP to the possibility of a southern strategy that has dominated the politics of the party of Lincoln to this day!

What do these two races have in common? Besides the racism! They were both regional challenges. I am asking myself: Seeing as the Democrats seem insistent on driving us pro-lifers from the party, and they have no means of winning back, say, Bart Stupak?s old seat with a NARAL-endorsed candidate, why not run a Catholic Party candidate in Michigan?s First District? Or in Pennsylvania?s Fifth? And, not just in the Midwest, but what about in Texas, which is getting purple to begin with and purple seems the best color for a Catholic who is committed to all the Church?s teachings! Why not encourage Catholics in non-swing states to use their presidential ballot to send a signal? If we got one or two percent of the vote in, say, Texas, or Maryland, why couldn?t we get one or two percent of the vote in Ohio or Florida, that is to say ? pay attention to us swing voters who, like Ambassador Melady, want our politicians to fight it out at election time but then get down to the business of government once the American people have had their say. Pay attention to those of us who are committed to the defense of the unborn and the undocumented. In this age of SuperPACs, the possibility of approaching our political choices in novel ways is certainly more possible.

I know, I know. In a country where separation of Church and State, albeit often misunderstood, is such a keystone of the national psyche, the opposition to a religiously based party would be huge, even though, as the Holy Father indicated in his speech to the Bundestag, it is one of the hallmarks of Catholicism, that we have always looked primarily to the natural law, and not to explicit revelation, for crafting our political views. But, surely it is time for those of us who live in the non-swing states to find more meaningful ways to make our voice heard? If you live in a non-swing state, and so all the worry about the election being a binary choice is so much foolishness, I invite you to join me tomorrow and cast your ballot for Thomas Melady for President! I will be writing in Sen. Bob Casey for Vice President. Will it matter? No, except that I will sleep soundly at night, which is no small thing. But if I had been more proactive, and if we had garnered, say, 10,000 votes for a write-in candidate in a non-swing state, and, in that same election, Ohio was decided by less than 10,000 votes, would people notice? The thought exercise might not start a movement. But, it should start us thinking.

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