

Dominik Prümmer, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*

The loyalty due to leaders demands that subjects do nothing unjust to remove themselves from the jurisdiction of their superiors, nor plot anything to dispossess their leader from his legitimate throne. Nowadays, it is customary that kings and rulers, at the beginning of their reign, take an oath over their constitution, i.e. that they intend faithfully to observe whatever their constitution sanctions. But if a ruler gravely violates this oath to his constitution and breaks this promised trust, neither are his subjects bound to remain loyal, according to the Rule of Law (75): “In vain does one demand the return of trust that he himself has refused to keep.” – Nonetheless, neither rebellion nor so-called tyrannicide is lawful in this case. Be that as it may, this will be very rare in civilized regions.

In nearly all civilized regions today, the people elect *representatives* who assemble to manage public affairs – whether for a kingdom, a province, or a city – by means of their decisive (and not simply consultative) votes. For this reason, the good of the entire state depends largely on the votes of its representatives. It is as clear as day, then, how important it is that good representatives be elected, endowed with a spirit of fortitude, a Christian spirit, skillfulness in governing, knowledge of political matters, and sufficient eloquence. It is also apparent, for this reason, how gravely derelict of their office and of legal justice are those who abuse their right to elect representatives and thus permit perverse ones to be chosen. This obligation of electing good representatives is by no means excused by slight causes, e.g. any loss of time, the derision of others; nor, probably, by the likely inutility of one’s vote. For, although a good candidate will not be elected due to the plurality of contrary votes, it is still greatly expedient to exhibit by one’s vote what the will of upright citizens is. If only all good citizens would always fulfill their duty of electing good representatives! Surely there would not be as many unjust laws as there are today. Hence, unless a truly grave harm arises for an elector, e.g. to his fortune, an imminent risk of losing his office, etc. there is no sufficient reason that excuses one from voting. In practice, it is difficult to determine whether one has sinned gravely by neglecting his obligation to elect good representatives, since the gravity of this sin depends on the seriousness of the harm that was either certainly committed or certainly not avoided. This seriousness of harm, moreover, is oftentimes unclear. In order that upright citizens more effectively and more diligently concur in the election of good representatives, priests ought insistently and concertedly to exhort them; permanent associations should be established for this purpose; learned laymen gifted in eloquence and zeal (but not priests, since this can lead to grave inconveniences) should hold public audiences where they instruct electors in the manner and duty of voting and discuss the qualities of candidates. During elections, all good citizens should be called upon to vote, and even the senior among them should be morally compelled.

On the election of an unworthy representative. Though it be much advised to always choose a more worthy representative, as this will provide better for the common good, per se it is enough to elect a worthy and suitable candidate and forgo one more worthy. The reason is that nowhere is it prescribed that the more worthy be elected, but only one who is worthy. To elect a representative who is certainly unworthy is, per se, a grave sin, since such an election is an illicit cooperation in a grave misfortune to society. Indeed, electors participate mediately in every evil which is caused by wicked representatives. Nonetheless, since this participation is not formal, but material, it is sometime lawful to elect an unworthy candidate. That this participation is essentially material and not formal, is evidence from the fact that the election of a representative is intrinsically an indifferent action, and that it is through his own fault a representative so elected abuses the right entrusted him by an election. In practice, however, in order that it be lawful to elect an unworthy candidate, not only is an honest end required, but also a very serious cause. First, an honest end; on this account, one sins gravely if he votes for a depraved candidate with the intention that he later be able to take advantage of unjust laws against religion. Next, a grave cause, nay,

an exceedingly grave cause, is required; such causes are averting serious inconveniences either from the elector himself or from the state. Thus, e.g. a laborer may elect a bad representative if he would otherwise lose his office and would be unable to find another one; it is lawful to elect a bad candidate to impede the election *of a worse one*. This is not uncommon in a so-called "second ballot." For, then, one is given only the option between two candidates. In most cases, it is necessary publicly to declare, so to prevent scandal, that this election happened solely to exclude a more unworthy candidate. Sometimes, too, it is lawful to elect a few evil representatives who are placed in a group containing many good ones, if otherwise the entire group will not be elected to the great detriment of religion and the state.

Hieronymus Noldin, S.J., *De praeceptis Dei et Ecclesiae*.

On the obligation of electing representatives.

Representatives are elected either to royal parliaments or to provincial and municipal assemblies; the obligations, however, incumbent upon representatives are, keeping due proportion, everywhere the same. It is equally of no importance whether a government is Catholic or non-Catholic or liberal, provided it is lawful to make use of the ability to vote. The obligations of those who have the right of election are twofold: of voting in an election, and of choosing a suitable candidate.

On the obligation of voting. Every citizen is bound by legal justice to use their ability to vote, wherever the use of this ability is either useful or necessary to promote good or hinder evil, unless a man be legitimately excused; for every man is bound, insofar as he is able, to promote what is necessary and useful to the common good and to prevent harm befalling the state.

a. The right to vote does not belong to citizens by virtue of duty or office; therefore, in not using this right when they are bound to do so, they do not act contrary to commutative justice and therefore are not bound, *per se*, to repair the damage their negligence brings about. The right to vote must rather be considered as a privilege conceded to them by their ruler, for which certain conditions are verified. Therefore, the grant of the ability to vote does not yet cause thereby the obligation to vote in an election, since no one is bound *per se* to use a privilege. This obligation arises either from the obligation of promoting the common good or by civil law, if anywhere citizens are bid to vote in elections; but this obligation is one of legal justice. Those, then, who exercise this right to vote contribute by legal justice to the common good; and yet, there exists no obligation of contributing to the common good if not under the demand of necessity or utility.

b. It would not be lawful to use this faculty if, in some case, an election could be understood as the acknowledgement of an usurped rule.

c. Legitimate excuse must be admitted in the obligation of voting, because affirmative laws do not bind under grave inconvenience. But this inconvenience must be all the greater to the degree the evil that might be prevented is greater. In fact, even if no grave harm were feared, some slight obligation to vote can exist, where it is of considerable importance to demonstrate publicly what Catholic men think. Even a slight inconvenience excuses from this demonstrative voting.

d. The obligation of voting, especially when prescribed by law, will be grave or slight in proportion to the good which can be promoted or the evil which can be averted from the community. Now, all nowadays agree that the good of both Church and state depends greatly on elections; wherefore, there can be a grave obligation to vote at elections. In particular, however, it should be noted: α . if two candidates must be chosen, of whom one is good, the other wicked, or one more wicked, the other less, the obligation to vote exists so long as it can prudently be hoped that the good or less wicked candidate will be elected; β . If one can prudently hope that one's voting will draw many others to vote and thus prevent a wicked election, for that person, there is a grave obligation to vote.

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On the obligation of choosing a worthy candidate. There is no obligation to choose a more worthy candidate; but every man is bound under mortal sin to choose a suitable candidate, if one can foresee grave harm from the election of an unworthy man. The reason for the first is, that nowhere is it prescribed that superiors be the best, but only that they be apt and suitable. The reason for the second is, a. that, *per se*, electors are considered to approve of the principles and actions of those whom they elect; b. that those

who knowingly choose an inept candidate cooperate in all the evil that the candidate, if elected, inflicts upon the state or Church; c. others will be scandalized.

α. A candidate must be deemed inept, not only when a lack of knowledge, prudence, or experience makes him unfit for his office, but also and especially when he is hostile to the Catholic religion. Wherefore, as truly suitable could be regarded a Catholic man, who not only enjoys the praise of intelligence and wisdom, but also bases his service upon Catholic principles.

β. Whoever knowingly chooses a candidate who is hostile to Catholic principles, as are liberals and socialists, and who intend to aid the same in the accomplishment of his deviant purposes, even he otherwise possesses expertise, is guilty of grave sin; for he formally cooperates in evil.

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On the election of an unworthy candidate. There are times it is lawful to elect an unworthy candidate. The cases where this can happen, that a wicked candidate be lawfully elected, are these:

a. If one cannot elect a good candidate without very grave inconvenience, e.g. the loss of his office.

...

b. If an evil candidate must be chosen to prevent the election of one even worse.

Should it happen that electors are presented only with a choice between two candidates, both of whom are wicked, yet one of whom is less unworthy and the other more, per se they ought to abstain from voting; if, nonetheless, their votes can make it so that the more unworthy candidate is rejected and the worthier elected, it is lawful for them to vote; for it is lawful to cooperate by indifferent actions in a lesser evil in order to prevent a greater. That electors in this case also must vote, some affirm and other deny.

c. If it can rightfully be hoped that the election of a wicked candidate will bring about great benefit (to a city, province, or state).

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Génicot, Institutiones Theologiae Moralis

Since in many modern States citizens can or must vote in order to designate those persons who should obtain the legislative power or various magistracies, it is necessary to say a few words about the obligations arising thence. Namely:

A. Voting in public elections is generally regarded as an obligation in conscience, properly so-called.

1. The reason is that all citizens, as members of the Church and the State, are bound to promote the good and prevent the evil of either society: but it is undeniable that, at least in modern circumstances, the happy or adverse condition of the Church and the State hang largely on the outcome of public elections. An exception to this is when participation in such elections would lead to the acknowledgement of an illegitimate government or to greater evils.

The obligation seems not to arise from strict, commutative justice: for the right to vote, albeit exercised for the common good, yet is not received by way of some public duty, but rather by way of privilege, which is given universally to those who satisfy certain conditions. – But if electors (as in Belgian) are required to vote, generally this law is merely penal. It would then be satisfied by a blank ticket, as they say, being placed into the boxes.

2. Those who abstain from voting sin gravely when, being hindered by no just cause, they must probably fear that, if they abstain, a sufficient number of good citizens will not be elected, and thus great evils will be perpetrated by a perverse faction.

It seems the same ought to be said, if the one who abstains is of so great authority that, by voting, he would draw others to vote and influence the success of a good candidate, which rarely occurs. – From fear of grave harm, it will be lawful to abstain for almost the same reason as we shall explain in (B) about electing an unworthy candidate; in fact, it will be slightly easier, in that by not voting no positive cooperation is given.

B. To vote for a candidate who is opposed to the Church or to the good of civil society:

1. Is a grave sin, if one's intent is aid those perverse ends; for this is formal cooperation.

Yet many do not clearly perceive what they intend of candidates and what effect their vote might have: wherefore, one must carefully consider the circumstances of place, time, and even individual persons, before anyone is judged of sin.

Solely material cooperation is also, per se, not lawful. And indeed, under grave sin if it is probably feared that one's evil vote will have an efficacious influence.

Reasons of friendship, greater experience, etc. do not suffice to aid in inflicting grave harm upon the state or religion. For this reason Leo XIII says: "Favor must be given to men of ensign virtue, who shall earn for themselves the Christian name; nor can there be any cause why it should be permitted to elect those perversely animated against religion."

Per accidens it will be lawful to materially support an unworthy candidate:

a) If only an unworthy and more unworthy candidate are running, say, a liberal and socialist. – For whoever chooses the less unworthy in these circumstances, does nothing other than choose the lesser of two necessary evils, and in certain situations this is the best means of combatting the enemies of the Church. Yet it is important that scandal, which can arise from such a manner of acting by Catholic, be

removed, e.g. by declaring in newspapers in what sense one is showing support for an unworthy candidate. Nor might one object that evil is not to be done so that good made come about: to vote for a less worthy candidate is not to approve of his designs, but only to aid him in achieving a duty which he may indeed abuse, but by his own perversity: thus, the principle of double effect is rightly applied here.

b) If one is driven by grave fear of harm to vote for an unworthy candidate, and is unable to avoid this danger by a promise by which he is certainly not bound, and which, using purely mental restriction, will by no means be a lie. – It is necessary prudently to compare the gravity of the threatened harm with the gravity of the evil that will likely result from the unjust vote. Indeed, it is true it can happen that a representative, elected by a single vote, is the cause why calamitous laws are adopted; but what is merely possible does not readily become probable. It would be incorrect, then, to conclude from this all that such material cooperation is always gravely evil. It will often be the case that private harm can be placed before the considerable damage to be feared from voting, e.g. because there is a sufficient number of electors or representatives who will outnumber the wicked ones, or, conversely, because it is morally certain that an evil candidate will be elected, etc.

These obligations of Catholics should be made known to all, for which reason it seems more expedient under the direction of an ordinary, e.g. by means of good journals, pamphlets, catechesis, etc.

We are dealing with a matter on which depends the conservation and prosperity of religion. – But, notwithstanding, the confessor must be careful not to disturb the good faith of certain penitents without any hope of benefit.: for, especially in small regions, most find it difficult to separate the vices or qualities of persons from the principles which they profess, especially those who are enrolled in perverse parties and yet present themselves with great moderation, or if Catholic candidates are hardly commendable in their private lives.

On the duties of subjects.

1. In regions where representatives are elected, who concur by their votes in the management of public affairs in various assemblies and councils, the primary duty of those who have the right to vote is to prudently and strenuously labor for the election of a suitable candidate.

This matter, with which we are now dealing, is especially in our times of the greatest importance: for, in the aforementioned assemblies, questions are oftentimes raised which are not only commercial and industrial, but also moral and religious, on the solution of which depends not only the temporal but also the spiritual good of a great multitude, nay, of an entire nation. Now, the solution of such questions hangs largely upon elections: if prudent and honest men are elected, endowed with a courageous soul, a Catholic spirit, and, as much as possible, eloquence, religion will flourish together with the country; if, on the other hand, unwise, wicked, and irreligious men are elected, a door is opened not only to temporal ruin, but also to the corruption of morals and innumerable errors against the faith. Wherefore, all electors have a duty, in itself grave, to vote in public elections, and to strenuously concur in the election of a suitable candidate, from which they cannot be excused save for a proportionately grave cause.

(A) On the obligation of voting. – This obligation is, of itself, grave: from which slight excuses hardly excuse, as are a loss of time, hunting or honest recreation, or the derision of malevolent compatriots: for these all are pittance compared to the public good. Nor, in general, does the uselessness of one's vote likely excuse, e.g. because there is scarcely any hope of electing a good candidate; for, even in this case, it is greatly expedient to use given outward signs to show good citizens not to despair, but to be prepared to use all lawful means until good representatives are at last elected. – That one be dispensed from such a duty, an altogether grave cause is required, as would be the loss of an office necessary to one's honest maintenance. – But, notwithstanding, if it is morally certain that one's vote will be to utterly no avail, or that society will suffer no detriment from an election, regardless which candidate is elected, e.g. because either is equally good or bad, a lesser cause will suffice so that one might abstain from voting. Nonetheless, even in these causes, it is more often than not expedient for an upright citizen to cast his vote, that thus a good example may be given; which more urgently presses those who possess greater authority and can draw other by their example to voting as well.

(B) On the choice between candidates. – If the only option given is between two unworthy candidates, yet one of whom is worse than the other, e.g. between a socialist and another man imbued with liberal errors, it is allowed and usually expedient that the less unworthy man be voted for; for it is lawful to choose the lesser of two evils; but, in order to avoid the "scandal of little ones," one ought to declare publicly that he is doing this for the sole purpose of preventing the evil that will ensue from the election of a wicked candidate; additionally, good citizens who do vote for a less unworthy candidate should take care only to concur in his election in order to strenuously oppose the evil principles advocated by the other candidate and to spurn unjust laws; for thus shall he strive to act more cautiously.

Citizens who enjoy the right to vote are generally bound to properly use that right. The reason is that everyone is bound according to his abilities to prevent evils and promote goods. The Sacred Penitentiary, Dec. 1, 1866, responded that there is nothing opposed to bishops and ordinaries, on the occasion of an election, whenever they are questioned, recalling to the minds of the faithful that all are bound according to their abilities to prevent evils and promote goods. “Is it not the duty of every Catholic to use the political arms in their hand to defend the Church, to contain political arguments within their proper realm and to compel that, when they are rendered in favor of the Church, as they ought, they leave it undisturbed in all other matters?” – Pius X, Litt. Encycl. Notre Charge Apostolique. The precept of electing worthy representatives (be they communal or political) in every legitimate government is incumbent upon all electors, and (precluding other circumstances) they sin not only when they cast their vote for wicked men, but also when by their failure to vote they contribute to the election of a wicked man by others: everyone is bound to avert evil from the state, if there is hope of doing so.

History attests to the evil and good that befall society where laws are made by the enemies of the Church, or by her friends. Furthermore, the present condition of things that is so deplorable in many regions has its cause in the fact that Catholics have remained idle in political activity. Now, this obligation of using their right can in many cases be grave, namely if, on the one hand, there is a threat of grave harm to society, and, on the other hand, it appears one’s vote will have an effect. It must be noted that political leaders dread votes to the highest degree; they will go to great length that they be given them. And although it is not, per se, a grave sin not to vote, if the evil party undoubtedly has the greater number, this is by no means a reason to abstain from voting: for the action and voting of good men will, little by little, strip wicked leaders of their security and be a cause of anxiety for them: and in this way, they shall not always perpetrate the same evils by creating unjust laws. If, nonetheless, it is certain that the evil that will come about from the influence of this candidate is grave, and it is doubtful whether or not my action and voting will be able to decide the matter, it seems that in such a case I would sin gravely by omitting to vote. In this hypothesis, each good man is bound to do his part and to procure the election of good candidates. “The obligation,” says Palmieri, “is present: and unless it takes hold of every man, in reality it will be null.”

Whensoever, therefore, citizens cast their vote in public elections: “they must favor men of ensign virtue, who shall earn for themselves the Christian name.” – Leo XIII, *iSapientiae Christianae*.

But if one casts his vote for an unworthy candidate who shall act contrary to the Church or good morals, precisely for the end that an unjust law be created, he sins gravely. In general, when my cooperation directly and surely influences such evils so that, without it, the same do not occur, my cooperation is formal. This case will be rare, but it cannot be said to be impossible.

But if the election is between a distinguished enemy of the Church and another who is at least less than worthy, one may vote for this latter, who indeed shall inflict less evil; and thus, by your action, you shall prevent a greater evil, nay you will be able to act publicly to obtain his election.

Aertnys-Damen, Theologia Moralis

On the election and duties of representatives. Since in our times and in nearly every region the constitutions of kingdoms entrust a portion of rule to the people, the same are met with the duty, especially by electing representatives, to provide for the public good. Wherefore, it is necessary to add a few words about the election of representatives.

I. The duties of electors. 1. They are bound to concur in the election of good representatives, if there is a prudent hope that by this agreement, unjust laws, opposed to the common good, will be impeded or abolished, while good and useful laws will be promoted. The exception, however, is when the election itself can be understood as the acknowledgement of a usurped rule.

2. There is a grave obligation for those who must fear that, if they refrain from an election, they will be the cause why there is not a sufficient number of representatives, and thus wicked laws are created or sustained, causing grave public harm. The reason for this is the very necessity of the common good, especially of religion, that all who have the ability must protect in a case of necessity.

3. Per se, it is never lawful to elect a candidate who espouses wicked principles. Per accidens, however, it is sometimes lawful; namely, if a choice is given between two only, neither of whom foster sound principles, then it will be lawful to elect the one who is less unworthy, provided: a) the vote for his election appears necessary, so that a worse candidate is excluded, and b) it is made known somehow that one's support for this election is given solely for that purpose.