

man in co-operation with the current President.

You would not suspect from Messaros's article that the great majority (13 at last count) of AMC faculty have happily embraced the Florida initiative and already moved to Naples; so have 20 staff members. They join over two dozen other distinguished faculty and an extraordinarily talented staff.

Messaros has apparently projected the low morale, confusion, and upset he experienced in Michigan onto the AMU campus in Florida. He seems unable to conceive that AMU could be a success, academically and administratively. It is a pity he has never been here. Had he come, he might, like so many of his former colleagues, have found even more than he had hoped for when he originally signed on to Ave Maria. He would have discovered more than 320 students from 42 states and 10 foreign countries; a new music major and a new doctoral program in theology; and a joyful and faith-filled intellectual atmosphere. He might also have come to recognize that much, if not all, of the distress and disappointment over the relocation to Florida could have been avoided had it not been undermined and disparaged by a small, self-defeating faction in Michigan, who are now, sadly, reaping what they have sown. ■

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# QUEST COLUMN

## **CATHOLIC VOTERS: PLAY HARD TO GET**

In the upcoming November election, Catholics will make up one of the largest groups of voters, with both major parties naturally anxious to have our vote. And it would seem that this is all to the good.

The *Catechism* tells us that it is "morally

obligatory...to exercise the right to vote..." (#2240). My only regret is that too many Catholics don't follow the dictates of their faith when they enter the voting booth.

But I have a slightly different message to give: Don't vote for anyone for president. Catholics should deliberately withhold their votes. Before readers rush to compose letters to the editor attacking me, let me try to justify what I just said. And let me be clear that I am speaking primarily of the presidential election. Congressional and local races vary too much to generalize about, but to the extent that they mirror the situation that prevails in presidential politics, I would say the same thing about them.

I fully admit the importance of orthodox Catholics attempting to influence public policy in a democracy. We can hardly stand by and let others bring our country to ruin. So why do I counsel us not to vote? Because voting in our case means falling into a trap recently set up by the secularist milieu of our country, which gives Catholics no real choice in most elections.

In the past, Catholics in large part identified with the Democratic Party. And there was a reason for this. Not only had Democrats given our immigrant ancestors a welcome back in the 19th century, but the economic policies of the Democratic Party, by and large, comported better with Catholic teaching than did those of the Republicans. (Likewise on cultural issues — it was Republicans, for example, who mostly supported Prohibition.)

In those halcyon days, matters such as abortion and homosexuality were not political issues at all and, it was assumed, would never become such. But as everyone knows, in the early 1970s this began to change. Although Jimmy Carter was still able to run for president in 1976 as a social conservative and an economic liberal, as President he made no serious attempt to stop abortions, and his administration was filled with feminists and others who clearly did not have the interests of the family at heart. As a result, many Catholics, especially those who perceived the horror of abortion, began to turn to the Republicans. They, at least, seemed to be against abortion, seemed to support the family.

But I say "seemed." Yes, the Republican Party has made a few solid pro-family gains, particularly the Mexico City policy, by which U.S. aid money is prohibited from funding or promoting abortion

abroad. But other than such rare achievements, the Republicans have done very little to stop abortion or otherwise do anything about our cultural decline. President George W. Bush, while willing to go out on a limb for his economic proposals and for a war which is very hard to justify, has not risked any political capital fighting abortion. It is true that the Partial-Birth Abortion Act is now law, and this is all to the good. But even many otherwise pro-abortion Democrats supported it, and there are doubts whether it will save the life of even one baby. (Moreover, the law is currently being challenged in court.)

Another real test of the commitment of Bush and his Party occurs when cultural issues such as abortion come into conflict with the Republican economic agenda. A good example was the bankruptcy bill put before Congress in 2001-2002. Senate Democrats succeeded in attaching an amendment to this bill that targeted proliferers, that is, which prohibited the use of bankruptcy for court judgments against those convicted of blockading abortion mills. This amendment was even known as the "anti-Scheidler amendment" in some circles, after prolifer Joe Scheidler. So, what would a prolife President do? Surely oppose the bill until the objectionable feature was removed, right? But no, for this bill was an important part of the Republican economic agenda, a bill strongly supported by the credit card industry, a bill that made it harder to discharge credit card debts in bankruptcy. Many saw the bill as one-sided in that it did nothing to address the shameless solicitations by banks of those people with credit risks, yet penalized those people if they got into financial difficulties, even as the result of illness or accident. The White House and the Republican leadership strongly supported the bill, with the amendment that targeted proliferers. But thanks to a few courageous prolife Republicans (and many liberal Democrats), the bill was voted down in the fall of 2002. So much for the notion that the Republican Party is truly prolife. When push comes to shove, they are pro-business and pro-rich.

So, what should Catholics do? Abandon the political process just because there is no perfect party? No. What I advocate is a tactical cessation of voting in certain cases. Let both parties come courting us. Let them realize that if they want our support, they must earn it. Let Republicans understand that they must make a commitment to putting pro-

life and pro-family issues first — just the way the Democrats place "pro-choice" at the top of their agenda. And let Democrats know that if they want us to even consider voting for them, then they must stop treating abortion as a sacred right and end their servile thrallidom to feminists and homosexuals.

So I say: Catholics, play hard to get. Don't run to the Republicans who promise a lot and deliver next to nothing. Don't run to the Democrats who tell us that all we need to worry about is our pocket-book and we should ignore the murder of the unborn and the homosexual attack on marriage. Don't vote! This tactic may or may not work, but it can't be much worse than what we do now, and — if the pollsters or pundits get wind of it — it could even reverse the tide.

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