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Giselle Loucks

Sister Margaret: Christians and Political Participation

Abstract: This is an excerpt of an interview with Sister Margaret, a sister in the Salesian order, in which she discusses the role of all Christians in regards to political participation.

I asked Sister Margaret about politics and religion. She fervently replied that not just Catholics, but all Christians should participate in politics. It's not just a civic duty, but a moral obligation. This idea of interconnection of church and state has made some uncomfortable. These people would argue that the United States has a separation of these two entities and they should be in completely different areas of thought at all times. She disagrees completely. It is mandatory for all Christians to fulfill God's law, part of which is to reach the poor, marginalized, and oppressed. Political participation is a powerful way to achieve these goals. Sister Margaret mentioned a Catholic document entitled *Faithful Citizenship*. This document is re-examined every few years by U.S. bishops and directs Catholics to their duties as citizens. Article 91 of Faithful Citizenship states that what is important is not party or specific political preference or belief but defending the dignity of life. It does not say who to vote for or which party to join; it restates Catholic beliefs and directs them towards political topics. This ability to participate in both realms is due to being a citizen of both heaven and earth. I can't help but remember the Nuns on the Bus who travelled around to raise awareness of multiple social justice matters. They spoke out on issues they thought were important. By doing this Sister Simone Campbell, one of the bus nuns, believed they were living as Jesus did; "That's all we do" she said (Piazza, 49). As expected there was great controversy. Some of this was in part because of their choice to step

into the political ring and some was due to the accusation that they were out of step with the Catholic doctrines and “in arrogant disobedience” (Piazza, 55). As also in the case of the sisters who went to Selma to support civil rights marchers, they found that not everyone supported them supporting the cause. One responded “they should stay in their chapels and churches and do their praying there” (McGuinness, 164). But did Jesus stay home and pray? One of the first arguments Sister Margaret made was that Christians should follow the example of Christ. He led by words and example and spoke out. Sister Simon Campbell is quoted to have said, “We work every day to live as Jesus did in relationship to the people in the margins of society” (Piazza, 49). The document *Faithful Citizenship* repeatedly uses the term “human dignity.” This is the idea that all humans are of worth. Nothing can change that. It is because God has made all people in his image (Gen. 1:27). This makes not only each individual but humanity inherently valuable. As such, it is simple to understand Sister Margaret’s point of view. It would be immoral to allow any sort of policy that would endanger the dignity to anyone. Therefore, all Christians must stand for policies that uphold the dignity of all.

McGuinness’s Call to Service quotes an anonymous person’s support of the sisters who travelled to Selma. This person’s perspective is that “if both the state and the federal government refuse to act against an overt moral wrong, it is up to the people to call attention to that wrong” (McGuinness, 164). I think Sister Margaret would readily agree. She thinks it is of great importance to listen to others when deciding solutions and that Christians must not shy away from difficult conversations because they are needed to create and uphold the value of life.

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