

Casting my vote: Not sitting out

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [October 5, 2004](#) issue

In the previous issue, Mark Noll, a distinguished church historian, indicated his intention to sit out the upcoming presidential election because no candidate or national party reflects his sense of the pressing issues of the day ([None of the above](#), September 21). Noll identifies seven issues which he regards as paramount: race, respect for life, taxes, trade, medicine, religious freedom and international law. He believes that Christian faith leads him to have convictions on those issues, and I agree, though I don't share his position on all of them.

In any case, it's his conclusion not to vote that I find most provocative. To not vote? To decline to participate in what many observers think is one of the most important political choices in decades?

My summer reading included Douglas John Hall's *The Cross in Our Context*, in which Hall, in the spirit of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr, declares that we are called to live in this world. The cross speaks of God's passionate and complete love for this fallen creation. Pay attention to the world, Hall urges. The church's task is to be as thoroughly in the world as its crucified Lord was. Never, never abandon the world. Given that understanding, I wonder if one can avoid involving oneself in the messy choices of politics.

I'm involved in several conversations in Chicago between Jews and Christians about difficult issues, including Israel/Palestine and this magazine's coverage of that conflict. Out of these conversations has come a precious friendship with Rabbi Yehiel Poupko, a Judaic scholar at the Chicago branch of the American Jewish Federation. He recently told me about his grandparents, who came to this country from Russia. He also told me that when his grandmother learned that he had decided to sit out the 1968 election because of his dissatisfaction with both candidates, she telephoned him in rabbinical school and said to him in Yiddish: "Your grandfather and I suffered under the czars and then we suffered under Lenin and Stalin. We never had the right to vote, and you're going to now sit out an election and not vote?"

Rabbi Poupko recalled how his grandparents would dress up in their Sabbath best to go to the polls, thrilled to live in a place where their vote counted. "They were always the first ones there, early in the morning. This is a remarkable place. None of our people have ever lived in a place like this in the past 2,000 years."

For me, the thought of that elderly Jewish couple standing outside the polling place at dawn in their Sabbath clothes is another encouragement to jump into this troubled, fallen world and cast a vote.