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Okay, I admit it. I cried

Michael Sean Winters | Jul. 10, 2009 NCR Today

Okay, I admit it. I cried. The picture of President Obama being welcomed by Pope Benedict XVI in the frescoed halls of the Vatican touched my heart as well as my mind. These two men, so different in many ways ? and so differently powerful ? seemed to immediately transcend the bizarre aspects of such meetings, e.g., having to begin their meeting and exchange pleasantries while dozens of cameras are clicking away.

What was most striking about the pictures was the array of house cassocks and watered-silk sashes on the various Vatican officials, who all seemed quite eager to shake the President?s hand. We did not see any house cassocks on the stage at Notre Dame. Indeed, with today?s meeting, the controversy surrounding Obama?s appearance at Notre Dame seems like it is old news in a way that it was not yesterday.

There will be a great deal of spin coming from left and right about what did and did not transpire at today?s meeting. But, most of that spin will reach only to the respective choirs of the ideological extremes. For most mainstream news outlets, it is the photos that matter and they will be played again and again. Frescoed halls, bishops in cassocks, chairs that all look like thrones, great works of art everywhere. You can?t beat those with a picture of a GM plant.

For American Catholics, it is good to remember that there was a time when such meetings could not happen. There was a time when the Pope?s contribution of a marble slab for the Washington Monument was tossed into the Potomac. There was a time when ?Popery? was the exact ideological antithesis of what it meant to be an American. Those times have past. Whatever one?s views of Obama, every American Catholic should feel a bit of pride that it is even expected that our President should call on the Pope.

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