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Pope pushes Obama envoy on abortion, conscience protections

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 2, 2009 NCR Today

Rome -- Miguel Diaz presented his credentials to Pope Benedict XVI this morning as President Barack Obama's ambassador to the Holy See, and the new envoy drew a pledge of cooperation on international issues from the pope, as well as clear insistence upon "the inalienable right to life from the moment of conception to natural death," as well as "the right to conscientious object on the part of health care workers, and indeed all citizens."

Both abortion and the rights of conscience are important issues in the health care reform debate currently underway in the United States. Obama has pledged to make any reform package "abortion neutral," but the Catholic bishops in the United States say that so far, none of the existing proposals meet that standard.

In more general terms, Benedict XVI said he looks forward to "fruitful dialogue and cooperation in the promotion of human dignity, respect for fundamental human rights, and the service of justice, solidarity and peace within the whole human family."

tDiaz was nominated by Obama on June 18, confirmed by the U.S. Senate on August 4, and sworn in on August 21. A professor of theology at the University of St. John?s and the College of St. Benedict in Minnesota, Diaz is the first Hispanic to hold the ambassador?s position.

The full text of Benedict's remarks to Diaz this morning follows.

The full text of Diaz's remarks are here: Presentation of Credentials Miguel H. Diaz Ambassador of the United States to the Holy See [1]

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Your Excellency,

I am pleased to accept the Letters by which you are accredited Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America. I recall with pleasure my meeting with President Barack Obama and his family last July, and willingly reciprocate the kind greetings which you bring from him. I also take this occasion to express my confidence that diplomatic relations between the United States and the Holy See, formally initiated twenty-five years ago, will continue to be marked by fruitful dialogue and cooperation in the promotion of human dignity, respect for fundamental human rights, and the service of justice, solidarity and peace within the whole human family.

In the course of my Pastoral Visit to your country last year I was pleased to encounter a vibrant democracy, committed to the service of the common good and shaped by a vision of equality and equal opportunity based on the God-given dignity and freedom of each human being. That vision, enshrined in the nation?s founding documents, continues to inspire the growth of the United States as a cohesive yet pluralistic society constantly enriched by the gifts brought by new generations, including the many immigrants who continue to enhance and rejuvenate American society. In recent months, the reaffirmation of this dialectic of tradition and originality, unity and diversity has recaptured the imagination of the world, many of whose peoples look to the American

experience and its founding vision in their own search for viable models of accountable democracy and sound development in an increasingly interdependent and global society.

For this reason, I appreciate your acknowledgement of the need for a greater spirit of solidarity and multilateral engagement in approaching the urgent problems facing our planet. The cultivation of the values of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" can no longer be seen in predominantly individualistic or even national terms, but must rather be viewed from the higher perspective of the common good of the whole human family. The continuing international economic crisis clearly calls for a revision of present political, economic and financial structures in the light of the ethical imperative of ensuring the integral development of all people. What is needed, in effect, is a model of globalization inspired by an authentic humanism, in which the world?s peoples are seen not merely as neighbors but as brothers and sisters.

Multilateralism, for its part, should not be restricted to purely economic and political questions; rather, it should find expression in a resolve to address the whole spectrum of issues linked to the future of humanity and the promotion of human dignity, including secure access to food and water, basic health care, just policies governing commerce and immigration, particularly where families are concerned, climate control and care for the environment, and the elimination of the scourge of nuclear weapons. With regard to the latter issue, I wish to express my satisfaction for the recent Meeting of the United Nations Security Council chaired by President Obama, which unanimously approved the resolution on atomic disarmament and set before the international community the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons. This is a promising sign on the eve of the Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Genuine progress, as the Church?s social teaching insists, must be integral and humane; it cannot prescind from the truth about human beings and must always be directed to their authentic good. In a word, fidelity to man requires fidelity to the truth, which alone is the guarantee of freedom and real development. For her part the Church in the United States wishes to contribute to the discussion of the weighty ethical and social questions shaping America?s future by proposing respectful and reasonable arguments grounded in the natural law and confirmed by the perspective of faith. Religious vision and religious imagination do not straiten but enrich political and ethical discourse, and the religions, precisely because they deal with the ultimate destiny of every man and woman, are called to be a prophetic force for human liberation and development throughout the world, particularly in areas torn by hostility and conflict. In my recent visit to the Holy Land I stressed the value of understanding and cooperation among the followers of the various religions in the service of peace, and so I note with appreciation your government?s desire to promote such cooperation as part of a broader dialogue between cultures and peoples.

Allow me, Mr. Ambassador, to reaffirm a conviction which I expressed at the outset of my Apostolic Journey to the United States. Freedom ? the freedom which Americans rightly hold dear ? "is not only a gift but also a summons to personal responsibility;" it is "a challenge held out to each generation, and it must constantly be won over to the cause of good" (Address at the White House, 16 April 2008). The preservation of freedom is inseparably linked to respect for truth and the pursuit of authentic human flourishing. The crisis of our modern democracies calls for a renewed commitment to reasoned dialogue in the discernment of wise and just policies respectful of human nature and human dignity. The Church in the United States contributes to this discernment particularly through the formation of consciences and her educational apostolate, by which she makes a significant and positive contribution to American civic life and public discourse. Here I think particularly of the need for a clear discernment with regard to issues touching the protection of human dignity and respect for the inalienable right to life from the moment of conception to natural death, as well as the protection of the right to conscientious objection on the part of health care workers, and indeed all citizens. The Church insists on the unbreakable link between an ethics of life and every other aspect of social ethics, for she is convinced that, in the prophetic words of the late Pope John Paul II, "a society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to

the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized" (Evangelium Vitae, 93; cf. Caritas in Veritate, 15).

Mr. Ambassador, as you undertake your new mission in the service of your country I offer you my good wishes and the promise of my prayers. Be assured that you may always count on the offices of the Holy See to assist and support you in the fulfillment of your duties. Upon you and your family, and upon all the beloved American people, I cordially invoke God?s blessings of wisdom, strength and peace.

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