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# Chaput rejects cardinal's upbeat appraisal of Obama

John Thavis Catholic News Service | Oct. 8, 2009

**ROME** -- Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver has taken issue with a retired Vatican official's positive assessment of President Barack Obama's speech last May at the University of Notre Dame.

In an essay published by the Italian newspaper *Il Foglio* Oct. 6, Chaput said Swiss Cardinal Georges Cottier, the papal theologian under Pope John Paul II, had been overly generous in his appraisal of the president's words.

In his speech, Obama expressed commitment to reducing the number of abortions and guaranteeing conscientious objection rights for health workers. Cottier said in July that the president had moved in the direction of finding "common ground" with the church, and that "his words go in the direction of diminishing the evil."

Chaput , noting that many U.S. bishops had objected to the president's appearance at the Indiana university, suggested that Cottier might have deferred to the judgment of local pastors.

"Regrettably and unintentionally, Cottier's articulate essay undervalues the gravity of what happened at Notre Dame. It also overvalues the consonance of President Obama's thinking with Catholic teaching," Chaput wrote. The English text of his article was published on the Web site of *Il Foglio* under the headline **Politics, morality and a president: an american view** [1]

Chaput said Obama's views on vital bioethical issues, including abortion, "differ sharply from Catholic teaching." While many have pointed to Obama's sympathy to the church's social teaching, the archbishop said, "there is no 'social justice' if the youngest and weakest among us can be legally killed."

He said the strong opposition by many U.S. bishops to Notre Dame's hosting and honoring the president was based not on partisan politics but on "serious issues of Catholic belief, identity and witness -- triggered by Mr. Obama's views -- which Cottier, writing from outside the American context, may have misunderstood."

Chaput added that the president's search for "common ground" with the church, praised by Cottier, is not necessarily a good thing.

"So-called 'common ground' abortion policies may actually attack the common good because they imply a false unity," he said. "The common good is never served by tolerance for killing the weak -- beginning with the unborn."

Noting Cottier's praise for Obama's "humble realism," Chaput said he hoped the cardinal would turn out to be right.

"American Catholics want him to be right. Humility and realism are the soil where a common-sense, modest, human-scaled and moral politics can grow," the archbishop said.

"Whether President Obama can provide this kind of leadership remains to be seen. We have a duty to pray for him -- so that he can, and does," he said.

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