

Pro-Obama Catholic predicts 'very positive' ties with Vatican

John L. Allen Jr. | Oct. 1, 2008



One of the more prominent Catholic backers of the presidential aspirations of

Barak Obama today predicted warm U.S./Vatican relations under an Obama administration, arguing that it would enable new partnerships built around the church's social teachings.

Douglas Kmiec, former legal counsel for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, also said that while he has given "no thought" to the prospect of serving as Obama's ambassador to the Vatican, he would "never rule anything out."

Kmiec, a law professor at Pepperdine, is author of *Can a Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question about Barack Obama*, in which he argues that the pro-life teachings of the church can be reconciled with voting for Obama despite the Democratic candidate's pro-choice stance. Kmiec spoke this morning to reporters in a conference call organized by the "Matthew 25 Network," a coalition of Christian groups that has endorsed Obama.

Relations with the United States are a diplomatic priority in the Vatican, and some analysts have speculated that an Obama victory would create new tensions between Rome and Washington because of differences over the "life issues," above all abortion. Kmiec, however, offered a different forecast.

"An Obama presidency would open the door to what is frequently called the best-kept secret of the Catholic church, which is the balance of its social teaching," Kmiec said. He argued that many of the Vatican's social concerns are broadly congruent with the likely priorities of an Obama administration, including health care, a living wage, economic policies that promote the well-being of families, and environmental protection.

Kmiec also pointed to a broad meeting of minds between Obama and the Vatican over the war in Iraq.

"The mindset that took us to war is not his," Kmiec said. "He believes that our greatest strength as a country comes not just from military defense but international diplomacy, for the kind of understanding which the Vatican has repeatedly asked America to have of other cultures and other religions."

For those reasons, Kmiec predicted, "relations with Benedict XVI and the Holy See under an Obama administration would be very, very positive."

Given Kmiec's improbable emergence as a pro-life Republican making a Catholic case for Obama, some

handicappers have speculated that, should the Democrats prevail, Kmiec would be a logical choice to represent the new administration to the Vatican.

Ironically, Kmiec began the '08 election season as an advisor to the Mitt Romney campaign alongside the current U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican, Mary Ann Glendon, who at the time was still serving as a law professor at Harvard.

Kmiec said that he has not thought about the post, and that "it would take an awful lot of persuading for Mrs. Kmiec to leave her home" in California. Nonetheless, he said, "I never rule anything out."

During the conference call, Kmiec repeated what has become his standard pitch to Catholics on the campaign trail: While abortion is a grave moral evil, there are alternative ways to promote the right to life beyond efforts to reverse *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion.

"McCain represents the old view that hasn't succeeded, of promoting life as an abstract proposition through the criminal law, pointing the finger of condemnation," Kmiec said. Obama, he said, represents the view that "the way forward is not debates over law or philosophy, but extending a hand of compassion" to women dealing with unexpected or unwanted pregnancies.

"By addressing the circumstances in which women often find themselves, especially those who are poor or without a spouse, offering them resources and an ethic of personal concern, you have a greater chance of life being chosen and a culture of life being honored," Kmiec said.

Conceding that Obama does not have "a perfect Catholic position on abortion," Kmiec nonetheless insisted that voting for the Democrat is "not inconsistent with the teaching of the church."

"I have no grievance with the hierarchy," Kmiec said, "but with some of my fellow Republicans." Kmiec charged that "some partisan Republicans think the Catholic vote is permanently indentured to the Republican Party" because of the abortion issue, which he called a "misstatement of the faith."

Allen is NCR Senior Correspondent.

Support independent reporting on important issues.



Source URL (retrieved on 07/22/2017 - 04:00): <https://www.ncronline.org/news/politics/pro-obama-catholic-predicts-very-positive-ties-vatican>

Links:

[1] <https://www.ncronline.org/donate?clickSource=article-end>