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## Pope Benedict XVI Writes To John Boehner

by Michael Sean Winters

Distinctly Catholic

Dear Mr. Boehner,

I write to congratulate you on becoming Speaker of the House on Wednesday, only the second Catholic Republican to hold the gavel. It is a source of pride for you, for your family and for all Catholics in the Great Republic. Please be assured of my prayers and apostolic blessing.

I also want to congratulate you for articulating so strongly your commitment to the defense of unborn human life. The bishops tell me that this new health care law provides federal funding of abortion and that this is one of the reasons you opposed that law. I am not so sure. I am eighty-two, and at eighty-two, you learn to listen very attentively to the sisters about health care, and they tell me the new health care law does not provide federal funds for abortion. Nonetheless, I hope that even if you are able to strengthen the rules preventing any government monies for abortions, you will beat back any effort to overturn to the health care law as a whole. Frankly, the rest of the world has been laughing at the U.S. for decades because you spend so much on health care and don't even cover all your people. I have not been laughing. I have been scandalized that a great and religious country like yours has taken so long to guarantee health care as a right. I have spoken about this as clearly as possible and I am sure that you, Mr. Boehner, as a good Catholic will heed my voice in this matter.

Of course, another area where the U.S. spends a great deal more money than the rest of the world is on military bases. I drove past Ramstein once ? it took me like an hour to get past the thing it was so huge and, of course, Aviano is up north, not too far from Trent. I am wondering: Why do you still have all these forces in Europe? It has been twenty years since the fall of the Berlin Wall? More importantly, have you noticed how yours is the only Western country that keeps finding itself in a war? The rest of us in Europe send troops because of NATO, but can you imagine Italy or France or Brazil or Canada starting a

war? Even my native country, Germany, is no longer a military threat. When was the last time you heard someone call my people Huns?

There are some other areas of Catholic social teaching that I wish to call to your attention. As you know, in the past few years, one of the dominant themes of my speeches has been the moral imperative to address global warming. (I am told that in the U.S. you have to say "climate change" because "global warming" does not poll well, especially during the winter months, but here at the Vatican we do not take polls so I can call it what it is.) I invite you, my dear son, to look at the future generations of the world the way you look at an individual unborn child, as demanding protection because of their inherent dignity. Being good stewards of the environment, sir, is being pro-life too.

As I am sure you are aware, the Church also insists that public authorities and all Christian peoples exercise a preference for the poor. The growing income inequality in your country is, like the military spending, something we just don't see here in Europe and, frankly, our economies are doing no better or worse over time than yours. I especially call your attention to the situation of so many immigrants in America, men and women who share your Catholic faith, who came to your country because they share your sense of hopefulness about America. This week we celebrate the Epiphany, when three foreign wise men came to worship at the crib. In recent days, we have been reminded that Jesus himself was born poor and that St. Joseph was forced to flee with Mary and the baby Jesus across an international boundary to do what was best for his family. I am confident that you will work with President Obama to come to the aid of these immigrants in your country.

So, my dear son, in extending my apostolic blessing to you and all whom you hold dear, I urge you to exercise responsibly your Catholic vocation as a member of the laity, to enact those values the Church has taught in season and out of season in the public sphere. I am told you are a loyal son of the Church and so I know you will not dissent from such clear and repeated teachings of the Church as those I have called your attention to regarding peace, the environment, the right to health care, and concern for the poor and the immigrant.

Given at St. Peter's, this third day of January 2011, the sixth of my pontificate, Benedict XVI, P.P.

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