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Cardinal Laghi praises Obama's election

Francis X. Rocca Religion News Service | Dec. 24, 2008

VATICAN CITY (RNS) A Vatican cardinal on Monday (Dec. 22) voiced optimism for relations between the Catholic Church and President-elect Barack Obama, while acknowledging potential friction over questions of medical ethics.

"There are many points on which there will be agreement" with the Obama administration, said Cardinal Pio Laghi, 87, the former Vatican envoy who represented the Holy See to Washington from 1980 to 1990.

Speaking at a panel discussion in Rome, Laghi said Obama's positions on health care and immigration were among the parts of his agenda "in consonance with the social doctrine of the church."

The cardinal noted tensions with Obama over embryonic stem cell research and abortion, both of which the Catholic church opposes. Laghi specifically mentioned an Obama campaign promise to sign the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA), a proposed law that would remove many existing restrictions on abortion.

But the cardinal expressed hope that the president-elect would change his positions on these issues. "We hope that time brings good counsel," he said.

Praising Obama for running a campaign in the "spirit of national reconciliation of Lincoln," Laghi said Obama?s election as the first black president "can be considered as a liberation from that horrendous original sin that for so many years stained the face and nature of the United States, that is, slavery."

Laghi?s comments stand in stark contrast to those of Cardinal James Francis Stafford, former archbishop of Denver, who said after the election that Obama?s statements on abortion reflect "an agenda and vision that are aggressive, disruptive and apocalyptic."

Laghi, who is now retired, helped established full diplomatic relations between Washington and the Holy See in 1984. In early March 2003, Pope John Paul II sent Laghi back to Washington, where he met with President George W. Bush in an unsuccessful attempt to avert the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq.

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