

Obama is the Best Candidate – Final Reflections on an Endorsement Well Considered

By his own standard, McCain is more battle-weary, than battle-tested. Old ideas combined with a lack of credible ability to “think anew” to meet the challenges we face make the Senator ill-suited for the presidency; his running mate aggravates that concern.

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Today is the final day of the 2008 presidential campaign. Given my somewhat unusual [endorsement](#), I promised to report at the campaign’s conclusion whether any matter arose to cause me to second-guess my support for Senator Obama for the presidency.

None has. Senator Obama has kept his [covenant](#) not to campaign in a denigrating and divisive fashion. Quite the contrary, throughout the extended primary and the general campaign, he has called us to our better selves, and he has laid out with patience and clarity a blueprint for change that is needed now more than ever in light of the financial mess left by the incumbent. Despite these unprecedented challenges which jeopardize the economic well being of so many American families, Senator Obama remains resilient in hope and ready to govern. His presidency will be an historic moment of re-commitment to a nation under law and international respect and stature.

Yes, his policies are not those of the unregulated free market often extolled by the GOP, but obviously, given the corporate bailout, not always observed. And yes, at times in the years ahead, I suspect this conservative is likely to urge caution in the face of proposed regulatory flourish. But the truth is my fellow Republicans in the last eight years forgot anything associated with conservative principle: from fiscal responsibility to the avoidance of ill-considered and endangering foreign entanglement to the giving of honor to the rule of law – a precept hardly advanced when U.S. Attorneys are removed for sport or new enactments only begrudgingly given effect by a President who seems to have difficulty differentiating the Constitution from royal prerogative. A few good appointments to the federal bench and a tax cut for wealthy friends is all that remains of the deposit of conservative ideas brought to Washington by Ronald Reagan. It’s not enough to renew the lease on The White House. Senator McCain had an opportunity to campaign on first principle and with honor and to differentiate himself from his predecessor. He didn’t. He chose instead to “stay” a misdirected course and take on Sarah Palin whose verbal talents are eclipsed by intellectual and experiential gaps that cannot be masked by humor, snide commentary, or an expensive wardrobe.

Bishops and Republican Partisans – An Unholy and Unseemly Team

If there was one disturbing injustice of the campaign, it was that a few members of the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in America indulged low partisanship, and worse, allowed Republican partisans to purvey – sometimes on church property -- the untenable idea that voting for Senator Obama was contrary to the faith, a cooperation with evil, or an invitation to eternal damnation. Worst of all, a few prelates asserted this false preemption of individual conscience themselves. Thankfully, the conference of U.S. bishops had in place a thoughtful exposition of the responsible considerations to be undertaken by a Catholic in preparation to vote – the most prominent of which was the reminder that we are not to be “single-issue” voters, even as we may find an intrinsic evil to be disqualifying if both the candidate and our intent is to advance that evil and we lack proportionate justification for accepting that evil in a remote way. Notwithstanding the distortions of the less than Grand Old Party that has grown lazy winning on the incitement of fear, neither candidate is an advocate of evil, and the duty of a Catholic voter is a straightforward matter of satisfying the casting of a ballot with right intention. With respect to Senator Obama in particular, as indicated in my book [“Can a Catholic Support Him?”](#) The answer is enthusiastically “yes, we can!”

Obama’s Life of Service & the Social Gospel

The American Catholic Church has gained credibility by placing itself in the service not of the powerful, but the least of these. Of course, this is very much part of what made Barack Obama [“a Catholic natural.”](#) In his early career, Barack Obama was privileged to be part of a project funded by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development – where he found men and women devoted to building up the community with the transformative power of Christ's message embodied best by their own witness and willingness to involve themselves personally in the well-being of another.

The Catholic witness in America is the positive one of the social gospel -- the willingness of the Church to look after the immigrant stranger, the person down on his luck, the poor, and yes, the family, the very heart of the American constitutional body politic. It is the average working men and women of this country who by their daily uncomplaining labors understand that freedom and responsibility are coordinate propositions, and who ask only a fair wage for an honest day's work – and frankly, a mortgage and securities market in which the American people are not sold short. John Paul II reminded us of the dignity of human work; its capacity to extend our creative and constructive personalities into the physical environment and the importance of not elevating capital over labor. The scandals that have broken the back of our financial system necessitate that they now be remedied by the taxpayer, but they also deserve to be fully explained and understood and accounted for. Those leaving office should not consider themselves finished until then. Barack Obama will not leave the American people in the dark about the mishandling of their own resources.

The Truth of the Human Person

So much of Catholic thought is well-expressed in the

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truth of the human person. It is important to recognize how this truth is interwoven in the planning for an Obama administration:

The truth of the human person is affirmed by the payment of a family or living wage;

The truth of the human person is honored by recognizing that a market that is not fair cannot ever hope to be free;

The truth of the human person requires that we preserve the created environment so that our safety will not be put at risk by human development in disregard of the natural environment;

The truth of the human person recognizes that the health of society depends greatly upon health of its citizens in body and mind and spirit and this must come to be understood to be as much a cultural right as is the obligation of due process under law;

The truth of the human person is a reflection of God, Himself, deserving of respect without reference to race or gender or ethnicity or sexual orientation;

And yes,

The truth of the human person encourages respect for the gift of life at all its stages – from conception to natural death and every point in between and ladies and gentleman, we need not wait for a new justice on the Supreme Court to express that respect.

Building a Culture of Life by New and Compassionate Means

Some see Senator Obama's respect for the decision of an expectant mother as inviting a denial of the truth of the human person; it is not. An Obama administration will reach out to any pregnant woman whose economic and social circumstance clouds the truth of a human person.

Some insist that truth demands legal coercion; that without the Supreme Court's cooperation, truth must be held in abeyance like a "suspended" political campaign.

Well, the unfortunate and undeniable truth is that the evil of poverty and lack of social support is a major collaborator of abortion. The Catholic faith encourages us not to cooperate with evil. Barack Obama doesn't intend on cooperating with social injustice, and to the extent that resources permit, an Obama administration will never leave a woman without the support needed to encourage a choice for life.

The Catholic faith has guided my professional and personal life notwithstanding the gratuitous assessments of "disservice to the Church" in the personal opinion of Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput or the equally ungrounded posted libel of Bishop Brandt of Greensburgh, Pennsylvania, who banned me from the campus of Seton Hill University in Pennsylvania without even realizing that my remarks were already finished, and by happenstance audio-taped by NPR. Should the good bishop listen to them, he will discover that they were in tone and substance both solidly complimentary of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. He will discover as well, of

course, the view that there is more than one way to be pro-life, including the way proposed by Senator Obama – namely, greatly enhancing the social and economic assistance given to an expectant mother. This, of course, is less than what the Catholic faith champions as the ideal, but in truth, it is more than the opposing party delivers, or can deliver, even with all its speculations and excuses about judicial vacancies and reconsidered precedents. I have never once suggested that the Church forego pursuing life's full protection in law. I have, however, insisted that none of us need wait upon the law to do good.

A Nation of Many Faiths

While the United States consists of citizens worshiping God in their differing ways who nevertheless hope to believe without reservation of conscience in a common political ideal, one lesson still often overlooked is that "churches do not always suffer their members to be really free."

With respect to Senator Obama in particular, as indicated in my book "Can a Catholic Support Him?" the answer is enthusiastically "yes, we can!"

"Thou shalt have no other gods but me, 'thundered the Jewish Jehovah from Sinai, and ever since the gods of the churches have demanded that their control be not abridged nor diminished." Likewise, but in the state's direction, Thomas More would be yanked from his respectful silence in the face of Henry's oath of supremacy since there the state was a jealous god that could not bear the impertinence of having Thomas die, as he ultimately did, "the King's good servant, but God's first."

Admirably, Barack Obama started this campaign in the hope of lessening the division among red and blue states – of restoring beyond the artificially provoked culture war of partisans, the United States of America. Compelled support for one religious view over another or compelled support for the Supreme Court's view will likely leave us wrongly divided for years to come in the trenches of opposing views. The way out is to remember that as the creeds clash about us, that it is not primarily in political programs that religion may have its place.

No, sometimes the law must simply leave space for the exercise of individual judgment because our religious or scientific differences of opinion are for the moment too profound to be bridged collectively. When these differences are great and persistent, as they have unfortunately been with abortion, the "common political ideal" to which we aspire may consist only of that space. This does not of course leave the right to life undecided or unprotected. Nor for that matter does the reservation of space for individual determination usurp for Caesar the things that are God's, or vice versa. Rather, it allows this sensitive moral decision to depend upon religious freedom and the voice of God as articulated in that individual's voluntary embrace of one of the manifold ways of faith known to America.

Tangibly Helping the Born and Unborn

Yesterday, on All Souls, we remembered the souls that have walked the earth. I am certain my friends who remained behind to support Senator McCain willingly would join now with those of

us in the Catholic outreach of the Obama campaign in a commitment never to overlook those who were not permitted their first steps. Tomorrow, whomever merits our confidence for president, let us as we vote recall the far too numerous number of children whose lives were tragically taken in the womb. And as we remember them, let us do so not to condemn, but instead with extended hands of compassion -- that with humility must also be frequently folded in prayer—to ask God's strength of purpose to meet the needs of expectant mothers in more tangible and helpful ways than ever before. In this manner, may something far more powerful than any law made by man -- faith and reason – be permitted to resolve in freedom the respect due unborn life.

No one should ever underestimate the likelihood of an individual conscience formed in the Catholic religious tradition to choose life – Senator Obama doesn't, nor should anyone else.