



THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION AND THE CONCERNS OF U.S. CATHOLICS

An evaluation of the first 6 months

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Crossroads: Good evening, and welcome on behalf of Crossroads Cultural Center. We would like to especially thank the co-sponsor of tonight's event, Fordham Campus Ministry.

The reason for this event is that the first six months in office of a new president provide a reasonably good milestone at which to stop and try to assess what's going on. In fact, our specific theme, the President Obama administration and Catholic concerns, was brought sharply into focus a few weeks ago by the controversy surrounding the commencement ceremony at the University of Notre Dame. In our opinion, those events demonstrated very well the challenges that are faced today by the Catholic presence in the public life of our country. On the one hand, we have a ruling political class and a cultural elite that are generally quite distant from the Catholic view of life, and sometimes even hostile to it. On the other hand, the Catholic presence itself appears divided and at times unable to offer an original proposal. By and large, US Catholics seem to divide exactly along the same ideological lines as everybody else, which reveals how deeply we have been penetrated by the dominant cultural categories of the age. The goal of tonight's discussion, however, is not to rehash the usual discussion about which political side is more in step with those social and political issues important to Catholics. For better or for worse, we have a new administration. We know how culturally foreign it is to Catholicism in some respects. The questions we want to ask our panelists are: in the context of an Obama presidency, how can we offer the country an original Catholic point of view? How is it possible not just to react to trends that come from outside, but to constructively propose what we hold most dear, also in the public arena? How can we bring to the political table the great Catholic themes: life, freedom, solidarity, subsidiarity, the family, education? If you wish, the question for the evening is: what is the task of a Catholic *presence* in the social, cultural and political life of the United States during the presidency of Barack Obama? Tonight, we are fortunate to be able to ask these questions to two distinguished speakers. But I will leave the introductions to Msgr. Lorenzo Albacete, chairman of the Crossroads' advisory board.

Albacete: In order of appearance, tonight we will first hear from Christopher Bacich. He is a high school teacher here in New York, and the U.S National Coordinator of Communion and Liberation. Communion and Liberation is an ecclesial movement whose purpose is the education to Christian maturity of its adherents and the collaboration in the mission of the Church in all the spheres of contemporary life. It began in Italy in 1954 when the late Msgr. Luigi Giussani established a Christian presence in Berchet high school in Milan with a group called Gioventù Studentesca (Student Youth), GS for short. The current name of the movement, Communion and Liberation (CL), appeared for the first time in 1969. It synthesizes the conviction that the Christian event, lived in communion, is the foundation of the authentic liberation of the individual. Communion and Liberation is today present in about seventy countries throughout the world and here, all across the Unites

States, there are groups of Communion and Liberation in more than 120 cities. There is no type of membership card, but only the free participation of persons. The basic instrument for the formation of its adherents is a weekly catechesis called “School of Community.” The official magazine of the Movement is the international monthly, *Traces*.

Ramesh Ponnuru is a senior editor for *National Review*. Mr. Ponnuru grew up in Kansas City and graduated summa cum laude from Princeton's history department. He has published articles in numerous newspapers including *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, *Newsday*, and *The New York Post*. He has also written for *First Things*, *Policy Review*, *The Weekly Standard*, *The New Republic*, *Reason*, and other publications. He is the author of the monograph *The Mystery of Japanese Growth*. He has been a fellow at the Institute of Economic Affairs in London and a media fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution.

He has appeared on CNN's *Inside Politics*, NBC's *The McLaughlin Group*, MSNBC's *Buchanan & Press and Donahue*, CNBC's *Kudlow & Cramer*, PBS's *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, CSPAN's *Washington Journal*, Comedy Central's *Politically Incorrect*, Fox News, and NPR's *Morning Edition*. Mr. Ponnuru lives in Washington D.C.

We will hear from Mr. Bacich first.

Bacich: Thank you, Lorenzo.

This evening, in my presentation, which I will keep short, I wanted to speak not so much of new policy proposals, but I wanted to try to outline what our concerns are in the movement of Communion and Liberation here in the United States, and offer them to the broader Catholic population here in the United States as a set of talking points for us among ourselves as Catholics here in the U.S., and I wanted to start out with two quotes as a sort of premise for this presentation. The first comes from Fr. Giussani, the founder of Communion and Liberation, and this quote is my translation of something that he said in 1997 to some of us who were gathered in the mountains there. At a certain point he said:

The modern state, since its origins needed to create a different mentality from that of the Church...For this reason the state sought to enter directly into education and the schools, above all feeling the Church to be refractory, it sought to strike at institutions, social functions and associations that incarnated the content of the message of the Church...In this sense, the attitude of the greater part of the episcopate historically evolved: from clarity and persuasiveness in proclaiming the value of the Christian message, to the attempt—above all after 1700—to defend the Church highlighting ethics with respect to ontology, seeking, in some way, to make peace with the state...Emphasizing common values...made it easier for the Church to be accommodated within a society where influences and themes were changing...Now I am speaking above all of the consequences that followed the French Revolution...what was privileged in the content of the Christian message was always more moral values.

The second quote comes from Romano Guardini in his *The End of the Modern World*:

At many points in our study we have noted how this non-Christian culture commenced its growth at the very outset of the modern age. At first the attack upon Christianity was directed against the content of Revelation. It was not made against those ethical values, individual or social, which had been perfected under the inspiration of Faith. At the same time modern culture claimed those very values as its own foundation...The modern world dedicated itself to the theory that it had discovered and developed those ethical

values... This point of view was expressed in many ways by many groups, pre-eminently in the voicing of the “Rights of Man” during the French Revolution... Those who maintain that these values and cultural attitudes are simply one with the autonomous development of human nature misunderstand the essential role of a Christian economy of Revelation, Faith and Grace. In fact the misunderstanding leads—permit me to speak plainly—to a kind of dishonesty which, as anyone who takes a clear-eyed view can see, is integral to the contemporary world itself... The knowledge of what it means to be a person is inextricably bound up with the Faith of Christianity. An affirmation and a cultivation of the personal can endure for a time perhaps after Faith has been extinguished, but gradually they too will be lost... The coming era will bring a frightful yet salutary preciseness to these conditions. No Christian can welcome the advent of a radical un-Christianity... Yet it is good that modern dishonesty be unmasked. As the benefits of Revelation disappear even more from the coming world, man will truly learn what it means to be cut off from Revelation... The last decades have only suggested what life without Christ really is. The last decades were only the beginning.

Mr. Guardini wrote this book in 1953 and the last decades that he was speaking of were the decades of the 1940s which saw the advent of National Socialism in Germany.

Our understanding of our current situation is very much in sync with these two quotes; that is, on the one hand we find ourselves in the midst of a church that for good reasons has often stressed moral, ethical and social values. In most recent times we could say that here in the United States of America, these values have sometimes been identified with values such as *the preferential option for the poor*, at other times, *the right to life*. But nonetheless, no matter which version of the set of values one chooses to identify him or herself with, it’s always one set of values. On the other hand, we find ourselves in an ever more un-Christian, post-modern culture that daily, to quote the great poet T.S. Eliot, “advances progressively backwards.”

So this is how we read the current situation, and it is for this reason that our concerns are these:

First and foremost, as we look at the relationship between Christians and the state, the first thing that concerns us is that we are lucky and grateful to live in a place where the vision of government was always one that was supportive of the individual and groups of individuals and their rights. It is this view of government that we want to defend. It is this view of government that we want our politicians to champion—a view of government that sees itself at the service of individuals, and at the service of groups of individuals who want to exercise rights which are not given by the state—recognized and defended, but not given by the state. So from this point of view, this is our first concern.

Within this context then, the freedom that we consider to be the most elementary and necessary, in particular at this moment of our history, is religious freedom. And here I want to stress that we consider religious freedom not to be primarily the freedom to believe something in one’s own personal conscience. Rather, we believe that religious freedom is the freedom of a group of people to gather collectively, and to collectively take action and positions in society, publicly, in every sphere of public life.

From this point of view, three recent events are of utmost concern for us. First, Proposition 8 in California. Proposition 8 was a proposition put on the ballot which asked to define within the California State Constitution marriage as being between one man and one woman. Some of its supporters were the Mormons. They spent quite a bit of money in a public campaign trying to influence the outcome of that proposition, and indeed they did. The proposition passed, and just recently passed muster with the California State Supreme Court, which said that yes, indeed, the people of California have changed the Constitution to define marriage as between one

man and one woman. What we found to be of particular concern during that time was the way that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was attacked from some corners of our society in a way which was vicious and really unprecedented (well really not unprecedented if we go back far enough), but it was a vicious, vicious assault on the fact that a religious group had tried to influence public policy. This is of great concern to us.

A second recent event. In Connecticut, I don't know how many of you are aware, there was the attempt by the state legislature to simply enter the Roman Catholic Church and to change the structure of the Church's finances. This was just an out and out attempt by the state to enter into Church business and redirect and redefine the relationship between the bishop and the finances of the diocese. When this took place, the bishop put out a number of public pleas for help from concerned Catholics, and indeed there was going to be a rather large protest. What has happened most recently is that the state legislature is now accusing the Catholic Church in Connecticut of being a lobbyist and not being registered with the state. Had the Roman Catholic Church registered as a lobbyist, it would then come under certain limitations that the state would set as far as what it could do or not do when it comes to trying to influence policy in the state. In other words, there is a very disturbing attack on the freedom of the Church going on right now in the state of Connecticut.

A third point of concern for us here in New York State and in states around the United States are what are being called "Window Laws." Window Laws are laws which would open up a window ignoring the Statutes of Limitations on sexual abuse cases. So theoretically a person could sue for sexual abuse that happened in 1922. This window would be opened for victims. There are periods of time that vary depending on the particular state that you're dealing with, but the idea would be that this window would be opened only for private institutions. In other words, victims of sexual abuse in public institutions would not have the same opportunity to sue the state of New York, the state of California, the other states that are considering these kinds of laws. So these Window Laws are being aimed only at private institutions. Well, if you go back far enough, the institutions tend to be almost exclusively religious institutions that are private institutions where these kinds of things might have happened. This is a third example of what seems to be a more or less direct attack on a group of believers in their practice of their religion in this nation.

Within this concern for religious freedom, we would highlight as our primary concern freedom of education. Our founder once said, "Make us go naked in the streets, but give us freedom to educate." (Perhaps not the best quote given our current cultural climate!) The crisis for funding of Catholic schools is defacto creating a situation where Catholic education simply cannot exist except for those who possess certain financial means. Put bluntly, what this means is that the rich evermore are the only ones who can avail themselves of a Catholic education, and Catholic schools find themselves in a situation where they can evermore only cater to the rich because of the extremely high costs of education right now. This is a serious concern for us, and again we would wish for a state, for politicians who would see the role of the government as something that is there to help citizens and groups of citizens to flourish in the ways that they see fit. We welcome all kinds of confessional schools being supported by tax dollars. They can be Muslim, they can be Roman Catholic, they can be Protestant. We welcome a state, we welcome a government that sees that people who have a concern to educate their young people, will do it as well as they can. If you give them the support that they need, they will do an excellent job educating. And so this is another major concern of ours.

Again within this freedom of religion, the freedom to create other social works—hospitals, orphanages, and educational initiatives that go beyond just schools are also of prime concern for us. I work with teenagers; I'm a high school teacher, and before I took the leadership of Communion and Liberation nationally, I worked nationally as the leader for the high school and university realities here in the United States. Every summer for the last fifteen years, I've headed up a summer camp of sorts for a week with high school students from up and down the east coast. For a long time we held our summer camp up in Plattsburg here in New York State until it was made clear to us that the County Health Department had been badgering the local university where we were staying because there are laws here in the state of New York which say that any youth camp must come under

the regulation of the County Health Department. So we looked into keeping our camp running up in Plattsburg, and we asked the county for the various hoops that we had to jump through, so to speak, and they presented us with 250 pages of application to be filled out in order to continue to run our high school youth camp in Plattsburg. We found another place in New Hampshire whose state motto is “Live free or die!” We are very much hopeful that they keep the spirit of that motto and allow us to keep running our youth camp up there.

But these kinds of things really concern us a lot, concern us a great deal because of our concern for education. Obviously then, concerns like the right to life, protection of the family, and the recognition of its privacy above other institutions, subsidiarity including the concern for non-profit organizations, and solidarity—these are all major, major issues for us as well, but fundamentally they come for us in the second place because as those in power change in the subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the values that this society has, we see our main concern right now being the possibility to introduce people to Christian reality so that they can be introduced to certain values which are disappearing from our society. These are meant to be points from which we can begin a discussion more than something set in stone.

The last thing that I’d like to touch upon before giving the microphone over to Mr. Ponnuru, is our current administration. It’s difficult to evaluate right now after only six months because it’s been obsessed with the financial crisis, and so I avail myself to a few speeches that the President has given. The first is the one that he most recently gave in Cairo, and I quote, “Freedom in America is indivisible from the freedom to practice one’s religion. That is why there is a mosque in every state of our union and over 12,000 mosques within our borders. That is why the U.S. government has gone to court to protect the right of women and girls to wear the Hijab, and to punish those who would deny it.” This quote from Mr. Obama in Cairo seems to bode well for us. We hope that his defense of freedom of religion will include all sorts of religions including Christianity and Christians.

Another speech that we availed ourselves of as we looked at this situation today is what he most recently said when he was at Notre Dame:

The ultimate irony of faith is that it necessarily admits doubt. It’s the belief in things not seen. It’s beyond our capacity as human beings to know with certainty what God has planned for us, and what He asks of us. And those of us who believe must trust that His wisdom is greater than our own, and this doubt should not push us away from faith, but it should humble us; it should temper our passions, cause us to be wary of too much self-righteousness; it should compel us to remain open and curious and eager to continue the spiritual and moral debate that began for so many of you within the walls of Notre Dame. And within our vast democracy, this doubt should remind us, even as we cling to our faith, to persuade through reason, through an appeal whenever we can to universal rather than parochial principles, and most of all through an abiding example of good works and charity and kindness and service that moves hearts and minds.

This part of his speech at Notre Dame seems again to bode well. Obviously, or perhaps not so obviously, the main concern that we see in a speech like this is exactly the emphasis of doubt. And the reason for this is simple: At a certain point, certainty is necessary to act which leaves one with the question: So, upon what then do we have grounds to act as a nation? And here, the last thing that I’ll quote is his speech when changing the rules about stem cell research:

We will lift the ban on federal funding for promising embryonic stem cell research. We will also vigorously support scientists who pursue this research... In recent years, when it comes to stem cell research, rather than furthering discovery, our government has forced what I believe is a false choice between sound science and moral values... Promoting science isn't

just about providing resources -- it's also about protecting free and open inquiry. It's about letting scientists like those who are here today do their jobs, free from manipulation or coercion, and listening to what they tell us, even when it's inconvenient -- especially when it's inconvenient.

The last thing that I would leave us with is that one of the things that concerns us is that in as much as the administration, in as much as those who are in government consider the best hope for the world to be the state, to be the government itself, and to look for the government to act only according to scientific principles, excluding any free inquiry into issues and human horizons that go beyond scientific reason, this is of great concern to us. It makes us think of the Pope's speech in Regensburg where he begged for a reason that would go beyond just the horizon of scientific research, and this is something that concerns us as well—an administration that doesn't see religion as stifling to science or to reason, but that sees religion as something which broadens reason, giving reason a more ample vision of the world and of human existence. And this is really the concern that I want to end with, because more and more it seems that religion and those of us who are religious people are pegged as being somewhat more or less bias, or more or less unscientific. Rather let's say it in the real way—more or less irrational. We see reason in a way as being broad enough to absolutely embrace every facet of scientific inquiry and go beyond it. And this is something that we want to engage as part of our discussion of politics because this concerns us a great, great deal because assuming science is the only arbiter of human action sooner or later it becomes very, very difficult to defend the entire truth of the human person. And so for this reason, this is our last concern as we evaluate very, very initially this administration.

Thank you.

Ponnuru: Thank you all very much for being here, and thank you for inviting me to speak here. I'm always a little nervous when I do Catholic events because I fear that if I keep doing them one of these days I'm going to actually have to become a good Catholic, which is pretty fearsome.

I'm afraid I'm going to have to apologize in advance for being a little less deep than my predecessor, but I am, after all, a political reporter, so I suppose some of that is just baked in the cake.

James Joyce famously described the Catholic Church as “Here comes everybody.” Politically speaking, that is certainly true. Catholics are not, by and large, single issue voters and when they are, they don't always share the same single issue. Some Catholics vote primarily on health care, many vote primarily on the economy, there are Catholic pacifists, Catholic soldiers, Catholic environmentalists, Catholic small businessmen, on and on. Catholic voters show a lot more political diversity than a lot of other groups of voters such as evangelicals or African Americans. This quality makes Catholic voters particularly prized by politicians, as does our geographic distribution. We are disproportionately in swing states with a lot of electoral votes. Over the last forty years, every presidential candidate who has won the popular vote has also carried a majority of Catholic voters.

My friend Joseph Bottum, the editor of *First Things* suggested a few years ago that this fact proves that Catholics are just like everybody else, that there isn't a distinctive pattern to Catholic political behavior in this country, and Joseph's wrong about that. In fact, most demographic groups don't routinely vote for the winning party, the winning candidate. Union members don't, Protestants don't, and the Catholic vote tends to swing more than the popular vote from election to election. It seems that is to lead rather than to follow public opinion.

If one wanted to make a profile of the median American Catholic voter, remembering as we do so the diversity that I've already mentioned, we'd come up with somebody who is moderately conservative on social issues, and moderately liberal on economic ones. This voter doesn't share the hostility in principle to government activism that animates many conservatives, but wants to make sure that any such activism upholds community values rather than undermining them. Thus she approved of welfare reform, but also wants to protect Social Security

and Medicare against any cutbacks. She favors the death penalty to the likely dismay of many bishops. She opposes same sex marriage, but reacts negatively to political rhetoric that seems to demonize or point fingers at gays. She worries about illegal immigration, and sometimes about legal immigration too, but she wants all of these immigrants to be treated humanely and not as scapegoats. She's not a single issue pro-life voter, but she's troubled by abortion and certainly opposes anything that promotes or encourages it. And she voted for President Barack Obama. She approves of the job he's doing even if she has misgivings about some of his policies.

Well, there is, of course, no set of issues where Catholics, qua-Catholics, have more misgivings about Obama's administration than those concerning the sanctity of human life. Catholics are not, as we all know, the only Americans who share those misgivings. So do most Evangelical Christians, Mormons, Orthodox Christians, so Jews, so adherents of other faiths, and the occasional Agnostic or Atheist.

There is no distinctively Catholic version of biology that informs the Church that conception marks the beginning of an individual human organism's life. It's just plain text book biology, or to be precise, embryology. It is not theology that tells us that we owe these human beings in the embryological and fetal stages of development justice—specifically, that we owe them the elementary protection against being deliberately killed that we owe to all people. It's political philosophy; it is a relatively straightforward deduction from the country's founding principle of equality. The religious content of the Church's teaching is that we are all obligated to do what we can to strive toward justice particularly for the defenseless, the powerless, and the voiceless.

I confess that when controversy erupted this spring over President Obama's invitation to give the commencement address at Notre Dame and receive an honorary degree, I was a little puzzled. I was puzzled when people said it would confuse people about the Church's teaching on life. Surely, I thought, one speech even by a sitting president couldn't compromise the Catholic Church's witness against abortion and related evils. Everybody knows where the Church stands on these matters. But as the debate unfolded, I was quickly reminded about how surprisingly little people, including Catholics and non-Catholics, understand about Catholic teaching on the sanctity of human life. Many Catholic politicians such as the sitting Vice President and the Speaker of the House talk as though the Church regards abortion merely as a sin, when it also regards it as a grave injustice, which is why it regards the legality of abortion as gravely unjust as well. The President of Notre Dame came very close to suggesting that the Church proposes that only Catholics should think this way. Actually it proposes that the injustice of abortion is a moral truth that all people should recognize.

Well the Notre Dame debate suggests at least what I've already said, that the sanctity of life is *the* number one issue that troubles relations between President Obama and American Catholics, and has the potential to trouble it still more. Since there have been many false or incomplete descriptions of where the President stands on this issue, let me take a moment to describe his record and his positions as neutrally as possible (before I savage it). The President favors legal abortion. He believes that any ban on partial-birth abortion should include an exception for the mother's health, including her psychological health, even though many observers on both sides of the issue believe that such an exception would make a ban unenforceable. She supports *Roe vs. Wade*, the Supreme Court decision that together with its following decisions effectively requires that abortion be legal at any stage of pregnancy. He says that his judicial appointees would maintain *Roe*, and his aides have said that his Supreme Court nominee, Sonia Sotomayor, favors doing so.

He also favors the Freedom of Choice Act which would legislatively codify *Roe* including its protection of abortion at any stage of pregnancy. The Freedom of Choice Act would, however, go further than *Roe*, nullifying Pro-Life laws that the Supreme Court has allowed to stand—informed consent laws which typically require that women considering an abortion be told the facts of fetal development and the support available to mothers in their communities, would have to go. Tax payers at all levels of government would have to finance abortions for those who cannot afford them. And I should stress that this is not just the gloss that the opponents of this legislation give it; it is what supporters of the legislation, such as its leading Senate sponsor, Barbara Boxer,

Senator of California, say about it. President Obama has recently said that this legislation is not a priority of his, but he continues to be willing to sign it if it reaches his desk, or pieces of it if they reach his desk.

During the presidential campaign, Obama additionally promised that his health care plan would include abortion funding. As a state senator in Illinois, Obama opposed legislation to clarify that children born in the course of attempted abortions are entitled to legal protection. This legislation would not have required that extraordinary medical interventions be performed to save these infants, merely that they be given the same treatment as other prematurely born infants. Obama opposed these protections on principle, reasoning that any recognition that pre-viable fetuses have rights would undermine *Roe vs. Wade*.

Laws have been on the books for some time that protect the conscience rights of medical personnel including doctors, nurses, and pharmacists with respect to the right to life and other issues. In the waning days of the Bush administration, the government proposed to begin enforcing those protections of conscience rights. The Obama administration has rescinded that plan to enforce those protections although at Notre Dame the President said he was willing to consider some weaker form of protection about which we have not yet heard anything.

When it comes to stem cell research, Obama favors tax payer funding for research that involves the destruction of human embryos obtained from fertility clinics—their so-called “surplus embryos.” He believes, as Christopher noted, that scientists should be free to use cloning to create new human embryos that could then in turn be used to produce stem cells with the desired genetic characteristics. His administration has not yet determined whether this cloning research should receive tax payer funding; it has left the door open on that question.

During the campaign, Obama’s opponents often described him as “the most pro-abortion candidate for president ever.” And it is his record and these positions that they have in mind when they say that. Their claim is arguably true. At the very least, Obama is tied with former president Clinton on these issues.

But there is another side to Obama as well. The President speaks respectfully of pro-lifers and takes care not to demonize us. He says that he wants to work with us to reduce the number of abortions. He says that he is not interested in perpetuating a divisive debate on these issues. These gestures, combined with Obama’s positions on other issues, persuaded even some people who favor legal protection for the unborn to support him last fall. A few went so far as to argue that Obama’s focus on abortion reduction, along with his policies on health care and the economy, would do more for the unborn than a conventionally pro-life president would do.

There are, I think, at least four flaws with this line of reasoning: The first is a logical one. On what grounds do we consider abortion something to be discouraged? We do not regret appendectomies, or seek to reduce their incidence. The only defensible grounds for seeking to discourage abortion that I have ever read about or come across is that it unjustly takes a human life, and that is also a ground for providing legal protection to unborn human beings.

The second flaw is practical. Obama’s approach is unlikely to reduce the number of abortions. If he gets a national health care plan enacted that includes abortion funding, for example, the number of abortions will surely rise. The social science literature confirms what common sense suggests. Subsidizing abortion yields more of it. Wider access to contraception, as President Obama favors, is unlikely to reduce the abortion rate either. Contraception is already easy to come by, and it’s not clear what the government could do to encourage its consistent and effective use even if it were a worthwhile policy for the government to adopt. And if President Obama’s policies lead to the mass production and destruction of cloned embryos on an industrial scale, the death toll will rise much, much further.

The third flaw of Obama’s approach is also practical. Obama’s approach precludes measures that would reduce

the abortion rate. We know that the bans on partial birth abortion, informed consent requirements, and other pro-life laws have reduced the abortion rate. We have some reason to think that parental consent and parental notification laws have reduced the abortion rate among minors. Obama presents himself as seeking policies that work to reduce abortion without having any ideological blinders, but this presentation is at best a self-delusion.

The fourth flaw with this approach, it seems to me, is moral. It ignores the dual nature of the injustice of abortion on demand. What I'm trying to get at here is that a legal right to abortion and other forms of destruction of human life would be unjust even if nobody actually availed herself of it. Just as a law that allowed people to kill redheads with impunity would be gravely unjust even if nobody actually went out and killed redheads, just as a law permitting slavery would be gravely unjust even if nobody actually owned slaves. It is certainly psychologically possible for a voter or for a public official to sincerely hope that nobody exercises the abortion right even while providing for its legality, and even its tax payer subsidization. But anybody who takes that view necessarily wills that some human beings be denied the elementary legal protections that one favors for oneself and for those who one deems qualified to have those protections. One therefore violates the first principle of medical ethics—the golden rule. The good of what one hopes for in this situation does not excuse the evil of what one wills.

And this I think gets to what I think is the tragedy of President Obama. I was in Washington, D.C. for his inaugural, and it was impossible to mistake the degree of enthusiasm, the outpouring of love and fellow feeling and patriotism that attended that event. It was something that was moving even to those of us who felt compelled to vote against him. And I think to look back to an American historical example of a similar outpouring that greeted the inauguration of a new president, you'd have to go all the way back to Andrew Jackson's inaugural in 1829. And the parallel I think is instructive. Jackson's election was seen as opening up a kind of new democratic vista in this country. This was a president whose very identity, to use a phrase that they wouldn't have used back then, symbolized the expansion of American possibilities. You had a president in Andrew Jackson who was a westerner, part of a new and rising demographic group in the country. He wasn't part of the Virginia dynasty. He wasn't a founder. He wasn't the son of a founder. And you see much of that same sort of excitement for much of the same reasons surrounding Obama, although in the case of Obama the celebrations did not turn into a near riot and force the president to have to leave the White House for the night, which I suppose is a good thing.

And the sadness of it is that even as Obama's election and his presidency symbolize and mark a further step in the widening circle of American democracy, his policies on this issue deny the underlying moral principles of democracy in the starkest way possible, for the moral principle that underlies democracy is that of the equality of human beings—the *Declaration of Independence's* principle that "all men are created equal." That comes with a rather large asterisk in the administration's policies and in its politics. Liberals who support the license to abort, who support embryo destructive research will often speak of human rights, but strictly speaking they do not believe in human rights because they do not believe in principle that all human organisms have a right not to be deliberately killed. And if that right is denied to someone, no other rights have meaning.

What I think this leaves us with...let me make a proposal for President Obama's Catholic supporters, President Obama's pro-life supporters of all religious faiths or none. Pro-life Democrats, pro-life Obama supporters can play a crucial role in the coming years. They have played a crucial role already. I would note that not a single pro-life measure has ever passed Congress without the support of pro-life Democrats. Not a single pro-abortion measure has ever been stopped without the help of pro-life Democrats. I think pro-life Democrats who are Obama supporters have a great deal of leverage and need to be encouraged to use it. They need to be encouraged to say that if they support the broad outlines of what the President is doing on health care, as I should say I don't, that support is rescinded the instant that subsidized abortion becomes part of that plan. And they should in every other way possible encourage the administration to pull back of its support for an extreme pro-abortion agenda.

When I wrote a book on the life issues some years ago, one of the things that was surprising to me to discover was that just a few decades ago it was the democratic party that was the more pro-life of the two parties. But when you step back and think about it, that shouldn't be that surprising. It was the Democratic Party in the early 1960s that was the party of working class Catholics, of socially conservative southerners. It was the Republican Party that had the historical ties to Planned Parenthood. The Democratic Party has, for the most part, moved away from that pro-life heritage, but I have hope and I think we should all pray that the right to life will cease to become a partisan issue in the future. We already have the situation in which Americans are becoming more pro-life, in particular young people are becoming more pro-life. The Democratic Party once had a real tradition of standing up for the poor and the weak and the voiceless and those who Hubert Humphrey called were "in the beginnings of life and the twilight of life, not those at the zenith and the summit of life exclusively." And my proposal tonight is let it be so again.

Thank you very much.

Albacete: I am at the present time going through an Augustinian period, and I think before this administration, before all of that, the first impulse, the first responsibility that Catholics have, and then all Christians who hold this is to be a witness to the priority of Grace and show how the gift of Grace which we do not control makes us more human and allows us to defend, see more clearly how to defend justice and the dignity, the sanctity of human life wherever and however, but in order to do that we must pray for this Grace. That's important. And the second point is with respect to Mr. Obama himself, what he called a tragedy, is this contradiction, is this struggle within himself, I think, taking Mr. Ponnuru at his word, imagining you're not lying... The only solution is Grace, and I think my first duty with respect to this president is to pray that he have the experience of Grace.

T.S. Eliot asks, "Has humankind abandoned the Church?" and we have heard many stories tonight saying "yes." But "has the Church abandoned humankind?" Fr. Giussani, the founder of our movement, in an interview was asked, "How has the Church abandoned humankind?" And he said, "The Church abandoned humankind when it became embarrassed to talk about Christ." We see this (I want to make it my closing point to remember) in this dualism in which for some reason we believe that faith in Christ is incompatible with humanism. But it's not only not incompatible, but it is the source of authentic humanism because that is the second point. These theoretical questions that we've been discussing, this has happened before in a situation much worse than the present one. It has happened before. How did it happen? How? Because people who saw a Christian community saw it, were able to taste, to see, to marvel at how human it was. It corresponded to what was in their hearts, to what their hearts were looking for. And that attraction, when they talk about Grace—it's a technical word—grace means gracefulness, attraction. The delicacy of relationships, there's a delicacy. The opposite of grace is cruelty. The cruelty of an empire was overcome by the delicacy of Grace found living the wonder of the encounter with the Risen Christ who had triumphed over death.

This is what occurred. We are talking about historical facts. And yet they are denied again and again and again and it became a question of values versus values versus values. Let me tell you, this value priority, value-talk is exactly what the other side wants. This is exactly the problem. I find myself doing this and thinking this in my own heart—a cultural war, the way to advance it.

Talking about American conservatism, I was reading *The American Conservative*, the article by Rod Dreher. He talks about the question today is not what would Ronald Reagan do, but what would Saint Benedict do? He picks up on Alasdair McIntyre's suggestion. And as far as that goes it's okay, but it still doesn't reach the point made so well, so magnificently by the Pope. Perhaps the most important speech of this Pope's teaching is the address about the origins of monasticism to the men and women of culture in France at the Collège des Bernardins, on September 12, 2008, in which he explained exactly what had progressed, how the culture was changed, was humanized—actually it was replaced by a human culture. And in the end, the first point and the

last point are important. The first one is he did not start as an effort to take a culture, to rescue a culture, to defeat a culture, to reconstruct a culture. The movement that eventually created a more human culture started as an attempt to find out the truth. The truth! The problem is not values. The problem is truth! We should not accept to be engaged in a discussion at the level of values, but a discussion about truth. What is true? What can I know as true today? What really matters? What remains when everything else melts away? These were the questions that these guys of St. Benedict and the monastic movement asked themselves. They were seeking God, first of all. His point of beginning is crucial and so is the point of departure which is of course the person of Christ. But not of the Christ separated from this desire...but Christ integral to it, a triumphant Christ.

I always remember the words of Peguy: "Faith has never been stronger than it is today because it had never before been submitted to such relentless criticism and it has survived it."