

# Obama Promises Conscience Protection

## Meets With Representatives of Catholic Press

WASHINGTON, D.C., JULY 2, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- In a meeting with representatives of the Catholic press today, U.S. President Barack Obama assured his intentions to protect the conscience rights of health care providers.

Legionary of Christ Father Owen Kearns, editor and publisher of the National Catholic Register, was one of the eight members of the press invited to the 41-minute meeting.

According to Father Kearns, "The most noteworthy thing during the meeting was his dispelling of what you might call the expectation of the worst regarding conscience clauses."

On National Catholic Register's Web site, the priest revealed Obama's analysis that there has been confusion regarding his intentions to legislate freedom of conscience.

Obama said: "I think that the only reason that my position may appear unclear is because it came in the wake of a last-minute, 11th-hour change in conscience clause provisions that were pushed forward by the previous administration that we chose to reverse. [...]"

"I'm a believer in conscience clauses. I was a supporter of a robust conscience clause in Illinois for Catholic hospitals and health care providers. I discussed this with Cardinal George when he was here in the Oval Office, and I reiterated my support for an effective conscience clause in my speech at Notre Dame. [...]"

"I can assure all of your readers that when this review is complete there will be a robust conscience clause in place. It may not meet the criteria of every possible critic of our approach, but it certainly will not be weaker than what existed before the changes were made."

In addition to Father Kearns, those attending were representatives from America, Avvenire/Vatican Radio, Catholic News Service, Catholic Digest, Commonweal, National Catholic Reporter and The Washington Post.

The meeting began with remarks from Obama and then each representative asked one question.

## Visiting the Pope

The president spoke about his upcoming meeting with Benedict XVI, which he will have when he is in Italy for the Group of Eight conference.

According to the Register, the president "said that he sees his visit with the Holy See in some ways like any other government in that there will be areas of agreement and disagreement. [...] He said that it would be a great honor to meet the Pope and was looking forward to talking about the Middle East, climate change and immigration."

Obama spoke twice of his relationship with the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin, who was the archbishop of Chicago from 1982 until his death in 1996.

Father Kearns summarized the president's words: "Cardinal Bernardin was pro-life and never hesitated to make his views known, but he had a consistent 'seamless garment' approach that emphasized the other issues, as well. The president said that that part of the Catholic tradition continues to inspire him. Those issues, he said, seemed to have gotten buried by the abortion debate."

Common ground?

Paul Baumann of Commonweal Magazine asked the president about the forthcoming report on efforts to seek common ground on abortion, asking him what he hopes from the group.

"I've never been under the illusion that there are going to be ... that we were going to simply talk all our differences away on these issues," said the president. "[...] I can tell you, though, that on the idea of helping young people make smart choices so that they are not engaging in casual sexual activity that can lead to unwanted pregnancies, on the importance of adoption as an option, an alternative to abortion, on caring for pregnant women so that it is easier for them to support children, those are immediately three areas where I would be surprised if we don't have some pretty significant areas of agreement."

Obama expressed his personal view that "good sex and moral education" needs to be combined with contraception to reduce unwanted pregnancies.

"I recognize that contradicts Catholic Church doctrine, so I would not expect someone who feels very strongly about this issue as a matter of religious faith to be able to agree with me on that, but that's my personal view," he added. "We may not be able to arrive at perfectly compatible language on that front."

"I would be surprised if those who believe abortion should be legal would object to language that says we should try to reduce the circumstances in which women feel compelled to obtain an abortion. If they took that position, I would disagree with them. I don't know any circumstances in which abortion is a happy circumstance or decision, and to the extent that we can help women avoid being confronted with a circumstance in which that's even a consideration, I think that's a good thing."

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