

Vatican Newspaper's Editor Explains Why Obama Is Not 'Pro-Abortion'

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By Dan Gilgoff, God & Country

The editor-in-chief of the Vatican newspaper, *L' Osservatore Romano*, has drawn fire from some conservative Roman Catholics in the United States for allegedly going too soft on President Obama. "Obama is not a pro-abortion president," the editor, Gian Maria Vian, said in a recent interview.

Of course, many conservative U.S. Catholics say Obama is exactly that.

In a new interview with the National Review Online, Vian explains his bullsh*ness on Obama as part of a plan to influence the president on issues like abortion by giving him the benefit of the doubt. The conciliatory posture represents another challenge to the many conservative American Catholics taking a confrontational tack toward the White House.

Highlights from the interview:

You were quoted as saying, "It is my clear conviction: Obama is not a pro-abortion president." On what basis do you hold this conviction?

I made that statement in an interview to an Italian journalist of Il Riformista who called me on the day the president was at Notre Dame for the controversial ceremony of the conferring of the law degree honoris causa. I was in Barcelona; I gave the interview over the phone and based my observation primarily on the speech President Obama gave on that occasion—a speech which demonstrated openness. In this sense, I said that he didn't seem a pro-abortion president.

What do you mean?

He considered abortion, at least in his speech at Notre Dame, as something to prevent and, above all, he said, we must proceed in the attempt to widen the consensus as much as possible because he realizes that it is a very delicate issue.

Of course, Senator Obama made decisions that certainly cannot be defined as pro-life, to use the American term. He was, rather, pro-choice. Yet I believe that the senator's activity prior to his presidential election is one thing, and the political line he is following as president of the United States is another.

We have noticed that his entire program prior to his election was more radical than it is revealing itself to be now that he is president. So this is what I meant when I said he didn't sound like a pro-abortion president. Besides, he stated that the Freedom of Choice Act is no longer a top priority of the administration.

Naturally, it is also a sort of wishful thinking. Let's hope that my conviction is confirmed by the political actions of the administration. This is basically the same attitude of watching, waiting, and hope of the Catholic bishops of the United States.

Did you hear from the pope or the secretary of state about your comment that Obama is not a pro-abortion president?

No. It was an interview on the fly. As usual, I didn't ask permission from either the secretariat of state or the pope. It was an impression that I communicated based on the speech he had just given. President Obama said we should try to confront this question without too much division, that it is a tragedy, a frightening drama, let's look for common ground—I think his words should be appreciated.

Some would say they are only words and it is his voting record and actions which speak more loudly.

I admit that it is legitimate to be diffident in the face of the words of a president who previously has demonstrated a pro-choice line, but I hope that he changes. I hope that he understands that a politics of pro-life is good politics, not because it

is religious, not because it is Catholic, but because it is human. This is what the Church repeatedly says, and in particular Pope Benedict XVI. The appeal to natural law is important because it is not based on religious principles, it is based on human principles which can be agreed on by all.

So you were fully aware of the record of the senator, the criticisms of the U.S. bishops, and the political situation in the U.S.?

When we published the infamous article on the first 100 days, we wrote that the moderation that President Obama had so far demonstrated compared to what was expected in no way eliminated the reasons for criticism that the U.S. Bishops Conference expressed many times. . . .

Should a reader interpret the editorial line of the newspaper to be also that of the pope and the secretariat of state?

Well, we need to distinguish something here. The paper is not official: It is not the expression, in every single part, of the point of view of the Vatican, that is, of the secretariat of state. But it is obvious that it is an authoritative point of view of the Holy See, because ours is the only newspaper of the Holy See and has a century and a half of history. We were started during the American Civil War. We were started in 1861. It's a paper with a very long history and it has always been rightly interpreted as the expression of the thought of the Holy See, without a doubt, but that is not to say that every word that comes out in the paper is exactly the thought of the pope or the secretary of state.

But the average reader would assume that he will find in the Vatican's newspaper an editorial line that is in agreement with the pope.

Let's say that L ' Osservatore Romano expresses a line generally in agreement with the Holy See. This is obvious because the paper is owned by the Holy See. My editor, in the Italian sense of the owner of the paper, is the pope, via the secretariat of state. I could not possibly create a paper in disagreement with the owner, just as no newspaper director could create a paper in dissension with the owner. If I ran the newspaper like that, I would have already been fired.

<http://www.usnews.com/blogs/god-and-country/2009/06/19/vatican-newspapers-editor-explains-why-obama-is-not-pro-abortion.html>