

On life issue, Cardinal George says Obama on 'wrong side of history'

KENNER, La. - President Barack Obama is a "very gracious and obviously a very smart man" but he is on the "wrong side of history" when it comes to his fervent support of abortion rights, Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George told the 2009 Louisiana Priests Convention April 21.

Cardinal George, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, told 200 priests from the seven dioceses of Louisiana that, while he wants Obama to succeed in his efforts to right the economy, enhance world peace and help the poor, the president needs to understand that the Catholic Church will not allow the life issue to be abandoned.

In a question-and-answer session that followed his keynote speech to priests on offering compassionate ministry to people who are hurting, Cardinal George offered a candid assessment of his 30-minute meeting with the president at the White House March 18.

"I think on the life issue he's on the wrong side of history," the cardinal said. "I think he has his political debts to pay, and so he's paying them."

Cardinal George said his conversation with the president was polite but substantive.

"It's hard to disagree with him because he'll always tell you he agrees with you," he said. "Maybe that's political. I think he sincerely wants to agree with you. You have to say, again and again, 'No, Mr. President, we don't agree (on abortion).' But we can agree on a lot, and we do, and that's why there is so much hope. I think we have to pray for him every day."

Cardinal George said he told the president he was concerned about his decision to rescind the Mexico City policy, which resulted in providing taxpayer money to fund abortion overseas.

"He said we weren't exporting abortion," the cardinal said. "I said, 'Yes we are.' He

would say, 'I know I have to do certain things here. ... But be patient and you'll see the pattern will change.' I said, 'Mr. President, you've given us nothing but the wrong signals on this issue.' So, we'll see, but I'm not as hopeful now as I was when he was first elected."

The church and the president find common ground on supporting social programs that lift up the poor, but Cardinal George said on the issue of abortion, "I think we're up against something a little bit like slavery."

"These are members of the human family, genetically individuated, (with) a human father and a human mother," he said. "What their legal status is, of course, you can debate, and we have. ... John Paul II says you cannot simply live comfortably with an immoral legal system, any more than you could live comfortably with slavery, and therefore you have to work to change the law."

"It's a society-dividing issue, and on this issue, we're with Abraham Lincoln and he's with Stephen Douglas, and he doesn't like to hear that, but that's where he is."

The cardinal was referring to the seven debates held in 1858 between Lincoln and his opponent for an Illinois seat in the U.S. Senate. Slavery was the main issue discussed in all of the debates.

If even the incremental restrictions on abortion - such as the ban on partial-birth abortion or parental notification laws - are rolled back, Cardinal George said pro-life advocates could feel desperate because they fear "abortion will be a human right, and of course, if it's a human right, it can't be qualified."

Cardinal George said Pope John Paul II, with the help of Muslim and Latin American countries, successfully fought the Clinton administration's efforts to declare abortion a fundamental "human right" at the 1994 U.N. population conference in Cairo, Egypt.

"Whether or not the present pope will be able to do this a generation later, I don't know, because we're going to be faced with it again," the cardinal said. "But you can't go on indefinitely. For 80 years we were a slave republic, and it took a terrible war to end that. And now for 40 years we're in an abortion regime, and I'm not sure

how that's going to end."