

**From the *US News & World Report*, the following report by Dan Gilgoff appeared on the “God & Country, On Faith, Politics, and Culture” Web site, on July 6.**

## **6 Surprises From Obama's Sit-Down With the Catholic Press**

President Obama's 45-minute sit-down with reporters from the Roman Catholic news media came just as the Fourth of July weekend was about to open, the only reason I can see that it hasn't gotten a lot more attention. I counted a half-dozen surprises from the interview, occasioned by the president's first meeting with Pope Benedict XVI this week.

1. Obama appeared to buck the White House line on abortion.

As they've met with abortion-rights supporters and opponents in crafting a "common ground" plan on reproductive issues, Obama aides have been careful to say that the administration is not trying to influence a pregnant woman's decision about whether or not to have an abortion. They insist they're aiming to help only pregnant women who've *already decided they want to carry their pregnancies to term*.

That's been key to reassuring the abortion-rights movement, which doesn't want the administration to stigmatize abortion as an option for pregnant women.

And yet on Thursday, Obama cast the decision to have an abortion in a decidedly negative light. "I don't know any circumstance in which abortion is a happy circumstance or decision," Obama said, "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."

It will be interesting to see how abortion-rights advocates react to this.

2. Obama said he's struggling to reconcile his religious faith with his acceptance of gays and lesbians:

For the gay and lesbian community in this country, I think it's clear that they feel victimized in fairly powerful ways and they're often hurt by not just certain teachings of the Catholic Church, but the Christian faith generally. And as a Christian, I'm constantly wrestling with my faith and my solicitude and regard and concern for gays and lesbians. This is trademark Obama, seeming to effortlessly appeal to cultural conservatives and social liberals in the same breath. Religious folks, cultural conservatives included, will appreciate that Obama takes his faith seriously enough that he's struggling with how to reconcile it with his commitment to gays and lesbians. Social liberals and the LGBT community will appreciate that he's unequivocal about that commitment.

3. Obama revealed that he gets a daily devotional reading on his BlackBerry:

Joshua [DuBois, head of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships] does a wonderful service for me and he actually sends me a devotional on my BlackBerry every morning, which is actually something that he started doing I think when I was really having a tough time during the campaign. And it was just such a wonderful practice that we've continued it ever since. So every morning I get something to reflect on, which I very much appreciate.

There are a fair number of conservative Christians who question Obama's personal religious commitment. There are a fair number of secular liberals who think Obama's secretly one of them. But these kinds of personal details of Obama's daily faith life help establish him as a genuinely religious person.

4. Obama suggested that he shared some social conservative notions about what makes good and bad policy.

Reaffirming his support for a conscience clause for medical workers who object to abortion or other procedures, the president knocked critics who alleged that he'd undo such a clause:

There have been some who keep on anticipating the worst from us, and it's not based on anything I've said or done, but is rather just a perception somehow that we have some hard-line agenda that we're seeking to push.

Of course, what social conservatives fear will be "the worst" from the Obama administration is what many liberals would consider "the best." The president suggests that enacting liberal policies around abortion would constitute a "hard-line agenda." Abortion-rights groups aren't going to be happy with that kind of framing.

5. Obama denied a press report that he'd given up looking for a church in Washington but laid out a couple of alternatives to joining a congregation:

How we handle church when we're here in D.C. is something that we're still figuring out. And I think that in the second half of the year we will have made a decision. We may choose, rather than to join just one church, to rotate and attend a number of different churches.

„, throughout the campaign we had a collection of pastors who were close friends and supporters who pray for us, a pretty eclectic group of people from the Catholic Church, people from mainstream Protestant, Evangelical. And so having some of those friends come in and pray with us is something that we're potentially looking forward to.

6. Obama showed a strong grasp of recent Catholic Church history—and of the ambivalence many American Catholics feel about how the abortion issue should affect their politics:

When I was first becoming interested in social justice issues, the American bishops were talking about nuclear freezes and sanctuary for illegal immigrants, and protesting U.S. policy in Latin America. And there was, I think, a very different set of perspectives that were represented, arising out of the Second Vatican. And then there was a decided shift that I think took place within—among church officials. And in some ways, that tracked changes in American society at large, or at least American politics.

So there's no doubt that I think responses to my administration mirror tensions within the church as a whole . . .

Cardinal [Joseph] Bernardin [former archbishop of Chicago] was strongly pro-life, never shrank away from talking about that issue, but was very consistent in talking about a seamless garment and a range of issues that were part and parcel of what he

considered to be pro-life, that meant that he was concerned about poverty, he was concerned about how children were treated, he was concerned about the death penalty, he was concerned about foreign policy.

And that part of the Catholic tradition is something that continues to inspire me. And I think that there have been times over the last decade or two where that more holistic tradition feels like it's gotten buried under the abortion debate.

More trademark Obama. He manages to criticize his conservative Catholic opponents by lifting up a cardinal as a model for Catholic political engagement. What in the hands of a lesser politician would have been an insult to the Catholic Church comes off instead as a high compliment.

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**After a year of editing in order to address the changing world economic situation, Pope Benedict's encyclical on the economy is promulgated.**

### **Papal Message Seeks 'Global Authority' for Economy**

VATICAN CITY, July 7 (Reuters) - Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday called for a "world political authority" to manage the global economy and for more government regulation of national economies to pull the world out of the current crisis and avoid a repeat. The pope's call for a re-think of the way the world economy is run came in new encyclical which touched on a number of social issues but whose main connecting thread was how the current crisis has affected both rich and poor nations.

Called "Charity in Truth", parts of the encyclical appeared bound to upset conservatives because of its underlying rejection of unbridled capitalism and unregulated market forces, which he said had led to "thoroughly destructive" abuse of the system. The pope said every economic decision has a moral consequence and called for "forms of redistribution" of wealth overseen by governments to help those most affected by crises.

Benedict said "there is an urgent need of a true world political authority" whose task would be "to manage the global economy; to revive economies hit by the crisis; to avoid any deterioration of the present crisis and the greater imbalances that would result". Such an authority would have to be "regulated by law" and "would need to be universally recognized and to be vested with the effective power to ensure security for all, regard for justice, and respect for rights".

"Obviously it would have to have the authority to ensure compliance with its decisions from all parties, and also with the coordinated measures adopted in various international forums," he said.

The United Nations, economic institutions and international finance all had to be reformed "even in the midst of a global recession", he said in the encyclical, a booklet of 141 pages.

An encyclical is the highest form of papal writing and gives the clearest indication to the world's 1.1 billion Catholics as well as non-Catholics of what the pope and the Vatican think about specific social and moral issues.

It was addressed to all Catholics as well as "all people of good will" and was released on the eve of the start of the G8 Summit in Italy and three days before the pope is due to discuss the global downturn with U.S. President Barack Obama.

In several sections of the encyclical, Benedict made it clear he had great reservations about a totally free market.

"The conviction that the economy must be autonomous, that it must be shielded from 'influences' of a moral character, has led man to abuse the economic process in a thoroughly destructive way," he said.

"In the long term, these convictions have led to economic, social and political systems that trample upon personal and social freedom, and are therefore unable to deliver the justice that they promise," he added.

Profit was useful only if it served as a means to a brighter future for all humanity. "Once profit becomes the exclusive goal, if it is produced by improper means and without the risks destroying wealth and creating poverty," he said.

He said the current economic crisis was "clear proof" of what he branded as "pernicious effects of sin" in the economy.

"The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly -- not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people-centered," he said.

"Financiers must rediscover the genuinely ethical foundation of their activity ... right intention, transparency, and the search for positive results are mutually compatible and must never be detached from one another," he said.

The pope appeared to back government intervention "in correcting errors and malfunctions" in the economy, saying "one could foresee an increase in the new forms of political participation, nationally and internationally".

"Today's international economic scene, marked by grave deviations and failures, requires a profoundly new way of understanding business enterprise," he said. In other sections of the encyclical, his first on social issues since his 2005 election, he addressed topics such as development, migration, union rights, terrorism, sexual tourism, population issues, the environment, bioethics, and energy.

The encyclical's release was delayed by nearly a year so the pope could address aspects of the current economic crisis.

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