

# OBAMA'S CATHOLIC PROBLEM

In the beginning of June, we noticed that any mention of Sen. Barack Obama's Catholic National Advisory Council was gone. We searched the Internet to see if there were any signs that the Council was still active. The best we could find was Beliefnet's report that it had spoken to one of the Council's members, an unemployed liberal, and that she speaks with the members over the phone.

When we found out that the Council had been removed from Sen. Obama's campaign website, we did the responsible thing and called his campaign directly. We placed three phone calls: two to media relations and one to Mark Linton, Sen. Obama's National Catholic Outreach Coordinator. We were told that someone would get back to us, but no one did. Then, on June 6, Bill Donohue personally e-mailed Linton informing him of the three phone calls and requested a response to the following question: "I would like to know whether the Catholic National Advisory Council for Sen. Obama is still operative." Linton did not reply.

So what was really going on behind the scenes in Obama's camp? A member of the Catholic Advisory claimed that the group was still active, but we never received any response from the head of Obama's Catholic outreach. If the Council was still active, why didn't they flag it as they had done before?

Of course, if Sen. Obama's campaign decided to dissolve the Catholic National Advisory Council it wouldn't have been a surprise: after all, most of the public officials on it had glowing scores from NARAL. Also, one of the members of the group, Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius, came under media attention when she was asked not to present herself for Holy Communion by Kansas City Archbishop Joseph Naumann.

Sebelius, who is on Obama's shortlist of potential running

mates, has not only supported abortion-on-demand throughout her public career, she has also been featured at a Planned Parenthood event and has received funding from Dr. George Tiller of Wichita; he is nationally known for performing late-term abortions.

Although Sebelius received attention, Archbishop Naumann received the brunt of the criticism. He was accused of using the Eucharist as a political tool and attempting to knock down the church-state wall.

A *National Catholic Reporter* editorial labeled Naumann "rigid" for using "political tactics." Tim Rutten of the *Los Angeles Times* condemned him for setting in motion "about as nasty and as utterly avoidable a church-state confrontation as you're likely to see." *Kansas City Community News* opinion page editor Bob Sigman agreed saying, Naumann's decision "has serious consequences for those who believe in the firm line between church and state." And Barbara Shelley, who sits on the editorial board of the *Kansas City Star*, took the same line, branding Naumann's request "harsh."

Where are these voices crying "separation of church and state" when Democratic candidates receive endorsements, and in some cases contributions, from African American churches? Archbishop Naumann said it best when he met with Sebelius: "I challenged the governor to produce a single instance in her legislative or executive career [which spans over 30 years] where she has supported any effort to limit abortions." She could not. Perhaps Sebelius and Obama would make an excellent ticket: she supports partial-birth abortions and he supports selective infanticide.

Naumann wasn't the only archbishop that was used by Obama supporters. Denver Archbishop Charles Chaput was quoted by "Roman Catholics for Obama '08" on whether Catholics can vote in good conscience for a pro-choice politician. Although they quote Archbishop Chaput as saying, "I can't, and I won't," the

group also quoted him saying: "Catholics can vote for pro-choice candidates if they vote for them despite—not because of—their pro-choice views."

Archbishop Chaput responded by saying that the quote was "accurate but incomplete." He noted that "Roman Catholics for Obama" left out very important wording that immediately followed the quote they handpicked: "But [Catholics who support pro-choice candidates] also need to find a compelling proportionate reason to justify it....It's the kind of reason we will be able to explain, with a clean heart, to the victims of abortion when we meet them face to face in the next life....If we're confident that these victims will accept our motives as something more than an alibi, then we can proceed."

"Roman Catholics for Obama '08'" conveniently left off these few lines from Chaput because they made their argument more difficult. But they couldn't ignore the advice that Chaput gave them at the end of his column: "Changing the views of 'pro-choice' candidates takes a lot more than verbal gymnastics, good alibis and pious talk about 'personal opposition' to killing unborn children. I'm sure Roman Catholics for Obama know that, and I wish them good luck. They'll need it."

Obama's Catholic problems came full circle when Rev. Michael Pfleger lashed out against Hillary Clinton at Obama's former church in Chicago. Because of Pfleger's remarks Obama had to distance himself from Pfleger and the priest was dropped from Obama's Catholic Advisory. This couldn't have been easy for Obama; in 2001 he arranged for Pfleger's St. Sabina Church to receive over \$200,000 in grants.

Now that Sen. Obama has all but wrapped up the Democratic Party's nomination, it will be interesting to see if his Catholic problems continue.