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Vatican notes Obamaís search for 'common ground'

Francis X. Rocca Religion News Service | May. 19, 2009

VATICAN CITY -- The Vatican's official newspaper called President Obama's commencement speech at the University of Notre Dame May 17 part of his "search for common ground" with opponents of legalized abortion.

"The search for common ground: this seems to be the path chosen by the president of the United States, Barack Obama, to face the delicate question of abortion," said an unsigned article in the May 18 edition of *L'Osservatore Romano*.

The paper said that Obama's Notre Dame speech "confirmed what he expressed at the press conference marking his first 100 days in the White House," when he said that the Freedom of Choice Act, which would remove restrictions on abortion, was "not my highest legislative priority."

L'Osservatore noted the "heated polemics" that had greeted the decision by Notre Dame, which it described as "the most prestigious Catholic university in the United States," to invite Obama and award him an honorary degree.

However, the article did not mention that about one fifth of America's 350 retired and active Catholic bishops, as well as a senior Vatican official, Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, had publicly protested the invitation, because of Obama's support for legalized abortion.

Nor did the article mention that Mary Ann Glendon, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, had declined Notre Dame's prestigious Laetare Medal to protest the Obama invitation. Glendon also served as U.S. ambassador to the Vatican under former President George W. Bush.

Known as the "pope's newspaper," *L'Osservatore* is under the direct authority of the Secretariat of State, which directs the Vatican's diplomatic relations, and reportedly vets articles on sensitive topics before publication.

The paper's coverage of Obama has been consistently friendly, and at times openly enthusiastic, since his election in November. Until Monday, the paper had published no reference to the controversy over Obama's appearance at Notre Dame.

Monday's edition did contain a separate article about a campaign by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to **generate online protests** [1] against the Obama administration's policies in favor of embryonic stem cell research.

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