

Obama-Benedict meeting 'no mere photo-op'

Dennis Coday | Jul. 9, 2009 NCR Today

Just off the phone with a teleconference called by the Catholic Democrats. They had Congresswoman Rosa L. DeLauro of Connecticut and Congressman Jim McGovern of Massachusetts speaking about Pope Benedict XVI's encyclical *Caritas in Veritate* and about tomorrow's meeting between the pope and President Obama.

The big question (asked by Michael Paulson of *The Boston Globe*) was about tomorrow's meeting. Is it symbolism or is it significant?

The representatives were both adamant that this was no mere photo-op.

McGovern said, "In the past there have been symbolic meetings that amounted to no more than photo-ops and nice press releases. But my sense of President Obama is that he doesn't do symbolism. He is not going through the motions. This is man who ran for president with a deep desire to change the world for the better. He is a man with a mission."

"I believe that [Obama] really wants to change things," McGovern said. "And I think this pope, with the encyclical that he has issued has put forward a framework not just for the United States to follow but for the rest of the world to follow. ?

"I have high expectations for this meeting. ? I believe this meeting has the potential to have a lasting impact, to help not only inspire but to provide -- quite frankly -- the political cover in some cases to move forward in some of these areas that up to this point have been difficult for politicians to deal with." The difficult issues he cited were peace in the Middle East, extreme poverty and hunger.

"My expectation and my hope for this meeting tomorrow is that it will be about real things and about results," he said.

DeLauro agreed with this sentiment and with the idea that Benedict has given the world a road map for the global economy. Benedict, she said, "is very clear about what are the moral consequences and the economic consequences of what we do and how that affects people. He is trying, in a very thoughtful way, to address very serious issues. ? President Obama has demonstrated this equal kind of deep thinking on these very, very serious issues, and he isn't afraid to take on these very serious deep issues which cause tension in our society."

"He has taken on issues that not too many political figures want to take on," she said. He did this during his campaign on the issue of race, at Notre Dame on abortion and in Cairo on Islam.

"This is not a photo op. This is not, excuse me, posing for holy pictures. There is a reality and a difficulty about the serious issues that face all of our societies." The issues are complex with no easy answers, DeLauro' said, but Obama and Benedict are saying, "let's find the common ground and let's see what we can pull out of this to try and move the dialogue forward."

"That is the kind of leadership that we need in the world," she said.

I'll blog a bit later on DeLauro' and McGovern said about Caritas in Veritate.

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