

World & Nation

Archbishop visits with Bush but offers no endorsement



Vice president George Bush talks with Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, during a morning meeting September 29.

By Joseph Kenny
St. Louis (NC) — Archbishop John L. May of St. Louis, president of the U.S. bishops' conference, and Vice President George Bush met privately for 20 minutes September 29 and discussed several points in the U.S. bishops' statement on political responsibility for the 1988 elections.

Topics that the Republican presidential candidate and the archbishop discussed included abortion, arms control, capital punishment, education and family life.

Archbishop May made it clear that he and the U.S. Catholic Conference, the bishops' national public policy agency, do not endorse candidates.

"We're non-partisan, but we do have a clear position on the issues. He (Bush) did not ask for an endorsement and wouldn't get one," the archbishop said.

He said Bush had requested the meeting. The archbishop speculated that one reason Bush was meeting with him was because they had become acquainted in the past when the vice president spoke at a graduation ceremony for Jesuit-operated St. Louis University.

A spokeswoman for Bush's campaign described the meeting as a "courtesy call." She said Bush would be meeting with other members of the Church hierarchy at various other stops during the campaign.

The archbishop said that during the meeting, in Bush's hotel suite in suburban St. Louis, he handed the vice president a copy of the bishops' statement, "Political Responsibility: Choices for the Future." They discussed Bush's stand on the right to life of the unborn and also Bush's view favoring capital punishment, he said.

The archbishop said Bush told him that he favors protection of "innocent life."

"But we differ with him on capital punishment. We have opposed it for years," the archbishop said, noting that Bush read through that section in the political responsibility statement without comment.

Also discussed were statements arising from the debate September 25 between Bush and the Democratic presidential candidate, Michael S. Dukakis, on possible penalties for women getting abortions if it is again outlawed.

Dukakis favors keeping abortion legal. Bush backs a constitutional amendment to ban most abortions.

When Bush was asked during the debate whether he favored criminal penalties for women who have abortions, he originally said he had not sorted out the question of what penalties should be imposed. The next day his campaign issued a clarification saying he did not favor penalties for the women because he considered them victims in abortion.

Archbishop May expressed basic agreement with Bush on that question. "Our position is there should be no penalties for women. Women are the victims," he said.

Regarding arms control Archbishop May said, "I told him we support the INF (Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces) Treaty fully and are for the test ban and all cooperative elimination of arms. But we did not have time to go into it in detail."

Also present for the meeting were Monsignor Edward J. Sudekum, editor of the St. Louis Review, archdiocesan newspaper; Father Richard E. Hanneke, director of the archdiocesan radio and television office; and William Bush.

As for how he is voting, the archbishop said, "I'm waiting for the next debate."

Brazilian resists Vatican pressure

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (NC) — Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga Pla of the Prelature of Sao Felix, Brazil, an advocate of liberation theology, said he has been pressured by the Vatican to restrict his statements and activities, but said he would resist the Vatican's efforts.

Responding to press reports in Brazil that the Vatican was trying to silence him, the Spanish-born bishop told reporters September 25 that he had received "informal warnings" from the Vatican, which he called part of a strategy of "world reaction" against progressives in the Catholic Church.

At the Vatican, press spokesman Father Giovanni D'Ercole said reports in the Brazilian press that Bishop Casaldaliga "might have been silenced or punished are inexact."

In a statement issued September 24, Father D'Ercole said that during the bishop's June "ad limina" visit to the Vatican he was told by Vatican officials "to be always faithful to the teachings of the church's magisterium and not to interfere in the affairs of other local churches by going to dioceses in other countries without the permission of the local bishop."

Bishop Casaldaliga said in his statement he had received a document in which the

Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the Congregation for Bishops asked him to accept restrictions on his writing and on his spoken views relating to liberation theology. He also was asked to keep politics out of religious processions and to refrain from traveling to other countries to celebrate Mass or preach without permission of the local bishops.

"The document asked for my signature so that in this way I would accept certain prohibitions or restrictions," he said in the statement. "I did not sign the document."

The Spanish-born bishop said his refusal to sign the document did not mean he was adopting a position of "rebellion or lack of communion with Rome."

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