



SHOULD GOOD CATHOLICS TAKE A SERIOUS LOOK AT SENATOR BROWNBAC IN THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE?

Now that my bags are all packed and I am ready to head out of town today for a month, I thought it would be a good time to introduce some politics into my weekly column.

As a Catholic, I am always looking for the candidate in *either* party who best reflects Catholic beliefs when it comes to life issues (not just abortion, but also capital punishment and stem cell research), social justice issues and the environment. It seems to me that Senator Brownback, a Presidential candidate in the Republican Party, embraces many if not most of the issues that are important to good Catholics. Senator Casey, a recently elected Democratic Senator from Pennsylvania (not a Presidential candidate) is another good example of a politician who also seems to embrace most Catholic values.

An article in May 11th edition of *National Catholic Reporter* on Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas is titled: *The Conscience—and ambition—of a conservative Catholic*. The following are some excerpts from the article:

Sam Brownback, the two-term conservative Kansas senator and recent Catholic convert who wants to be president, is unconventional enough to be interesting, senior enough to be considered seriously, and substantive enough to have a message that could resonate in the Iowa presidential caucuses.

He is trying to convince the electorate that a social conservative, shaped and tempered by a decidedly Catholic ethos, can be a political winner.

The “protection of innocent human life,” he told NCR late last month from his Senate office, “is a moral absolute. It is not one of those issues that falls to prudential judgment.” Here Brownback is not talking just about abortion, where his is the leading pro-life voice in the Senate. That’s an easy one. Applying the principle to other issues is the tricky part.

“The best way to draw people into the pro-life message is to be ‘whole life,’” said Brownback. “I can go to the media, even the most liberal media, and talk about Darfur, about the specialness of that child in Darfur, and they’ll agree and see it,” he explains.

“I can go and talk about the flaws in our penal

institutions, recidivism rates of two-thirds and the specialness of a person in prison, and they’ll agree with that. And then I’m going to talk to them about how that applies to the child in the womb.”

At which point, he acknowledges, some of his interlocutors stop and say, “Wait a minute.” Still, said Brownback, even those who balk at equating a gestating American fetus with a starving African child acknowledge and appreciate the consistency of the message. Promoting the idea that all human life is sacred and worthy of dignity “is the key way to grow the Republican Party,” said Brownback.

In the ‘90’s, Pope John Paul II was a key influence on the then-evangelical Protestant.

“He’d say a lot of things I really agreed with as a conservative Republican—[such as on] life issues, marriage” said Brownback. “But then he would push me on death penalty issues or caring for the poor and I’m kind of going, ‘I wish you wouldn’t go quite that far.’ But the more I studied it and thought [about it] I saw the point: All life is sacred and we should work for all of it.”

Brownback’s Record

Brownback, by many estimates the most conservative candidate for president in 2008:

- Opposes the death penalty (except in cases— he mentions Osama bin Laden—where society needs to protect itself);
- Urges college students to make prison reform a personal cause (he has spent several overnights in prisons and embraces the Christian-based prison reform movement led by Charles Colson);
- Has been a key player in securing funds to stem the spread of AIDS in Africa;
- Argues for including Iraq’s Arab and Persian neighbors in discussion about the future of that country;
- Cosponsored the 2006 McCain-Kennedy immigration reform bill (leading to an award from the nation’s largest Hispanic advocacy group, the National Council of La Raza);
- Lends rhetorical support to the “seamless garment of life ethic” articulated by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of Chicago;
- Teamed with Illinois Democrat Barak Obama (and such celebrities as George Clooney) to urge sanctions against those committing genocide in

Darfur;

- Warns affluent Americans, that wealth warps their culture and by extension, threatens their souls.

“The parable of Lazarus,” the poor man denied even the scraps from the rich man’s table, “haunts me,” Brownback told a Boston College audience, where he discussed faith and politics with Democratic contender Christopher Dodd. Upon death, Lazarus enters heaven, while the rich man suffers the fires of hell. “We are the rich guy,” Brownback tells the audience, “and I don’t like how this story ends.”

Make no mistake, however, Brownback’s conservative credentials are in fine order. He’s a fiscal conservative who bemoans much government spending, supports an “optional flat tax,” and speaks favorably of changes to the Social Security system that Democrats equate with privatization. He is the Senate’s leading champion of “traditional marriage,” led the fight against federal funding for embryonic stem cell research, cheered when the Supreme Court ruled in favor of restrictions on partial-birth abortion, and receives 100 percent ratings from the National Right to Life Committee and Concerned Women for America. A hallmark of his first race for the House of Representatives was a call for welfare reform.

Brownback supported the resolution granting President Bush authority to launch the Iraq war. Of late, he’s voiced tepid support for the effort. Asked at Boston College if he considered the war “just,” Brownback ducked the question. He told the audience, “You make the call on what information and facts you have at the time, and I don’t think it’s fair to the troops on the ground to second-guess it four years later with the information you have at this point in time.”

Brownback met in April with Vice President Cheney and National Security Advisor Steven Hadley and urged a “three-state one-nation” solution in Iraq, with Kurds, Shiites and Sunnis having jurisdiction over separate territories and Baghdad acting as the seat of a decentralized federal government.

Raised on a farm near Parker, Kansas (population not quite 300), Brownback grew up Methodist because, he said at Boston College, it was the only church in town. Subsequently he and wife Mary and their five children joined an evangelical congregation, the Topeka Bible Church. His admiration for John Paul II and the church’s intellectual tradition drew him to Catholicism, leading to his becoming Catholic four years ago.

“I felt a deep calling to join the church and I spent three or four years thinking about it, reading about it, praying about it,” Brownback told *NCR*.

Brownback’s family remains non-denomination

evangelicals, which leads him to spend a little more time in church than the average senator. On a typical Sunday, he will attend Mass early and then join his family at Topeka Bible Church. “I feel like I get the best of both worlds: the Mass, the Eucharist, the teaching and depth of thought over 2,000 years and then I get the preaching, passion and singing of an evangelical church,” said Brownback. “It’s a great mix.”

St. Thomas More—Patron Saint of Politicians

Pope John Paul made St. Thomas More the patron saint of politicians. He was indeed a good choice. He was a wonderful example of a man who did not leave his conscience at home when it came to political issues. Rather than deny his Catholic faith, More was willing to be executed as “the King’s good subject, but God’s first.

In the June issue of *Columbo*, the Knights of Columbus magazine, the following litany to St. Thomas More appeared:

- V. St. Thomas More, Saint and Martyr.
- R. Pray for us (repeat after each invocation).
- V. St. Thomas More, Patron of Statesmen, Politicians and Lawyers. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Patron of Justices, Judges and Magistrates. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Model of Integrity and Virtue in Public and Private Life. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Servant of the Word of God and the Body and Blood of Christ. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Model of Holiness in the Sacrament of Marriage. R.
- V. St. Thomas More, Teacher of His children in the Catholic Faith. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Defender of the Weak and the Poor. R
- V. St. Thomas More, Promoter of Human Life and Dignity. R.

Let us pray: O Glorious St. Thomas More, patron of statesmen, politicians, judges and lawyers, your life of prayer and penance, and your zeal for justice, integrity and firm principle in public and family life led you to the path of martyrdom and sainthood. Intercede for our statesmen, politicians, judges and lawyers, that they may be courageous and effective in their defense and promotion of the sanctity of human life—the foundation of all other human rights. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Have a good summer,



