



A campaign sign showing support for President-elect Donald Trump sits along a rural highway on Nov. 9 near Belvidere, Illinois. Below, Trump and his campaign manager, Kellyanne Conway, at a Catholic. (Scott Olson/Getty Images; AP Photo/Mary Altaffer)

Cardinal Burke: Trump's Victory a Wake-Up Call to US Political Leaders

Edward Pentin, NATION | NOV. 9, 2016

The patron of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta said Catholics need to continue to make their presence felt in the election process.

VATICAN CITY —
Cardinal Raymond Burke has said Donald Trump's election Tuesday is a sign that the

United States' political leaders need to listen more to the people and return to safeguarding life, marriage, the family and religious liberty.

In an exclusive interview with the Register Nov. 9, the patron of the Sovereign Order of Malta said he was confident Trump would be able to help heal divisions in the country, that he has a "great disposition" to listen to the Church's position on the moral law, and hopes he will "follow the principles and dictates of our Declaration of Independence and the Constitution." However, aware of inevitable areas of divergence with Church teaching, Cardinal Burke stressed the importance of Catholics continuing to make objections known whenever necessary.

Your Eminence, what is your reaction to the news of Donald Trump's election as U.S. president?

I think that it is a clear sign of the will of the people. I understand that the voter turnout was stronger than usual, and I think that the American people have awoken to the really serious situation in which the country finds itself with regard to the common good, the fundamental goods that constitute the common good, whether it be the protection of human life itself, the integrity of marriage and the family or religious liberty. That a candidate like Donald Trump — who was completely out of the normal system of politics — could be elected is an indication that our political leaders need to listen more carefully to the people and, in my judgment, return to those fundamental principles that safeguard the common good that were so clearly enunciated at the foundation of the country in the Declaration of Independence and in the Constitution.

You'd say the silent majority has spoken?

Yes, that's clear.

Some are calling this a golden opportunity for the Church, particularly because of Trump's position on life issues and religious freedom.

Exactly; what he has said about pro-life issues, family issues and also issues regarding religious freedom shows a great disposition to hear the Church on these matters and to understand that these are fundamentally questions of the moral law, not questions of religious confession. They are questions of the moral law, which religion in the country, as the Founding Fathers understood from the start, is meant to support and to sustain. The government needs the help of religious leadership in order to hold to an ethical norm.

Do you think he's authentic when he talks about these issues? Recently, for example, some were concerned that he waved a pro-homosexual rainbow flag at a rally.

Of course, after any election, this is the big question: Will the candidate be true to his word, follow through? We have to hope and pray that he does that. One thing I heard about him is that he tends to associate himself with very sound advisers, and I would trust that he will do that.

He appointed 34 prominent Catholics during the campaign to advise him on Church issues.

Yes, some of them are well-known to me, and they are very fine people. It is a hopeful sign.

His election also means it's practically inevitable that the contraceptive mandate that the Obama administration tried to impose on EWTN and other Catholic organizations will be overturned.

I certainly hope so, because that's certainly a question of a fundamental right of conscience. I trust that he will address the many moral problems with the health care mandate that was pushed during these last eight years.

In the lead-up to the election, 35 prominent Catholics signed an open letter before he was nominated, saying that Trump is "manifestly unfit to be president of the

United States." They said: "His campaign has already driven our politics down to new levels of vulgarity. His appeals to racial and ethnic fears and prejudice are offensive to any genuinely Catholic sensibility. He promised to order U.S. military personnel to torture terrorist suspects and to kill terrorists' families — actions condemned by the Church and policies that would bring shame upon our country." *Should Catholics still be wary of these concerns?*

Certainly, we must be alert to them, as we would be to any U.S. president, and be attentive to insist on what's morally right. But I think a Catholic could, in good conscience, vote for Donald Trump because, in all that he said, at least there was a hope of advancing in some way the common good of the nation. But on these objectionable issues, when one votes in conscience for a candidate with whom one doesn't share all the same moral principles, but certainly very important ones, then one makes clear his or her objections on positions that the candidate may have that are not correct.

But on the key one, the life one, although there were some earlier concerns (he had been pro-abortion rights in the past), he seems to be right?

Yes, on the life issue, he's right on the money.

What about immigration, where his views diverge with the common position taken by U.S. bishops? Pope Francis also said, in comments perceived as criticism of Trump's plan to build a wall on the Mexican-U.S. border to keep out illegal immigrants, that we should build bridges rather than walls.

I don't think the new president will be inspired by hatred in his treatment of the issue of immigration. These are prudential questions — of how much immigration a country can responsibly sustain, also what is the meaning of immigration, and if the immigrants are coming from one country — questions that principally address that country's responsibility for its own citizens. Those are all questions that have to be addressed, and, certainly, the bishops of the United States have addressed them consistently, and I'm sure they will with him, too. He has these Catholic advisers; and at least some of them, I know, are very well aware of these questions, and I can't imagine that they're not speaking up.

A Christian cannot close his heart to a true refugee, this is an absolute principle, there's no question about it, but it should be done with prudence and true charity. Charity is always intelligent; it demands to know: Exactly who are these immigrants? Are they really refugees, and what communities can sustain them?

What is your opinion regarding other accusations of divisiveness and lowering the tone of political debate and culture? Some, particularly in the Clinton campaign, blamed Trump for that.

I don't think that at all. I think the campaign itself, and that means both parties, contributed to that, and I believe, from what I've heard him say, although I didn't hear his acceptance speech, that he will work to unify the country. But it has to be a unity that's on a solid foundation, namely those moral principles that have to guide the life of a nation. So I believe that he will do that. I mean, you have to imagine, he's not a stupid man; he realizes that it's one thing to run for president, but it's another thing to become the president, and that will certainly be in his mind — the heavy responsibility that he has, that's on his shoulders.

Another fear that arose during the campaign, heightened by Trump's opponents, was that giving him the nuclear codes would be dangerous.

I'm not afraid of this. I think the new president, in the long tradition of American presidents, will follow the way of cooperation and communication with foreign powers, and I highly doubt he will be able to take any unilateral action that would endanger the world. I am convinced he will deal with other countries on a wider variety of foreign-policy issues.

Overall, what are your hopes for this new presidency?

I hope that Trump will follow the principles and dictates of our Declaration of Independence and the Constitution — certainly, that he will turn out to be a good president and heal the divisions in the country (in fact, he has already said that it is a time not to be divisive) and that, therefore, there will be unconditional understanding, that is, unity among all American citizens.

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