

Pro-lifers went wrong in pitting child against mother, says John Paul's favorite politician

John L. Allen Jr. | Jul. 17, 2009 NCR Today

Perhaps the most prominent pro-life politician in Europe has said that he won't support efforts to make abortion illegal, because "God entrusts a child to its mother in such a special way, that to defend the child against the mother is just, but impossible."

"We have to support the mother, making her more free," said Italian politician Rocco Buttiglione. "The more free she is, the more difficult it will be for her to renounce the child."

On the heels of the July 10 meeting between Pope Benedict XVI and U.S. President Barack Obama, Buttiglione has announced plans to form an international network in favor of reducing the actual number of abortions, beginning with a global moratorium on compulsory abortions in nations such as China.

Buttiglione made the comments in a July 17 interview with *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's leading daily newspaper.

A member of the Communion and Liberation movement and a close friend of the late Pope John Paul II, Buttiglione has long been seen as a leading voice for Catholic teaching in European politics. In 2004, Buttiglione was rejected as a minister in the European Commission because he refused to recant his traditional Catholic beliefs on homosexuality, abortion and the family.

In today's interview, Buttiglione said that "we've all changed" since the initial 1970s-era debates over the legalization of abortion.

"Those who wanted [legalization] today recognize, thanks in part to scientific discoveries about the embryo and DNA, that the fetus is not a lump of blood in the body of a woman; the fetus is a life." He quoted Italy's current Minister of Health, a center-left politician and advocate for women's rights named Livia Turco, who has defined abortion as "not a right, but a frightening necessity."

Meanwhile, Buttiglione said, "those who, like me, fought against [legalization] recognize that we too were wrong on one point."

That point, Buttiglione said, was trying to defend the unborn child against its own mother. As a result, he said, today he's no longer interested in trying to make abortion illegal, but rather in trying to make it unnecessary.

Buttiglione argued that changing global demographics are reshaping the abortion debate.

In the 1970s, abortion was accepted in part because the world felt itself tightening, a demographic explosion had been announced, and the priority was offering a dignified life to newborns," he said. "Today the problem is the opposite: with a few decades the population will no longer be growing, and in many countries it's already in decline. The challenge is to offer a dignified life to the elderly, who are already beginning to lack support from

the young.?

In recent days, Buttiglione successfully guided a motion through the Italian parliament calling for a UN resolution against compulsory abortions in nations such as China, seeing it as a way to bridge the gap between pro-life and pro-choice forces.

“We can all come together to change things in countries in which there’s neither choice nor life,” he said. “That includes countries where abortion is obligatory, such as China, where millions of children are missing; and other countries, such as parts of India, Latin America and Africa, where there’s pressure to have abortions, because they’ll give you bread for the children you already have if you agree to renounce the one on its way.”

Buttiglione said that Obama should be eager to support such a moratorium.

“The president promised the pope that he would work to diminish the number of abortions, but he doesn’t want to contradict his own policies. The moratorium could be a way of getting out of this bind,” he said.

Buttiglione said he’d discussed the idea with Italian Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and that he would also raise it with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.

Buttiglione has announced plans to form an international network in support of reducing the number of abortions. He said he plans to travel to the United States to meet both with pro-life activists and Obama administration officials. Buttiglione said that Harvard law professor Mary Ann Glendon, a former U.S. Ambassador to the Holy See, will show him around.

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