

CHURCH

For the Italian Church and the Vatican, Abortion Is a Bit Less Bad

LIFE AND BIOETHICS

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There are disturbing indications coming from the Italian Church and the Vatican of new openings to pro-abortion legislation that deserve to be made known because they indicate that the so-called “paradigm shift” has come to the point of undermining the

defense of the right to life.

The turning point occurred in Italy with reactions to the decision of the government to further facilitate chemical abortions with the RU486, making it an over-the-counter drug. *Avvenire*, the news service of the Italian Bishops' Conference, has run a series of articles that have obviously reopened the debate over Law 194 that legalized abortion in Italy for the first time in 1978.

And here is where we find the turning point: on August 27, 2020, *Avvenire* published an incredible article in defense of the Italian law that regulates the voluntary interruption of pregnancy. The author is Catholic freelance journalist Angelo Moretti, who among other things holds diocesan posts and directs various voluntary associations. He was even the national president of the Young Vincentian Volunteers.

In his article published by *Avvenire*, Moretti goes so far as to declare that "law 194 is not a law against life and can be accepted by Catholics;" that "194 is not a law that questions the ontologically intrinsic dignity of an embryo, but it is a law that has intervened to govern a social phenomenon that does not need laws to exist;" that "a Catholic who asks to apply every part of law 194 is not affirming values different from his faith," but "listens to and helps every woman;" that there is need for a dialog "which does not need to call law 194 into question," but that "causes non-welcoming communities to be questioned."

The article is so sensational that it cannot fail to arouse strong reactions, but not among the bishops. The following day, August 28, *The Daily Compass* published my editorial that was strongly critical with respect to what was published by *Avvenire*, following the article by our editor Riccardo Cascioli who highlights the absolute gravity of the silence of the Italian Bishops' Conference regarding the matter.

The denunciation made by *The Daily Compass* has aroused, as was foreseeable, a wave of indignation in the pro-life world and also in a good part of the clerical world. In fact, there have been some statements by priests and bishops (unfortunately very few) that have been strongly critical with respect to the affirmations published by *Avvenire*. A touching thank-you letter was also sent to the editor of *The Daily Compass* by Bishop Alberto Maria Careggio, Bishop Emeritus of Ventimiglia - San Remo, who recalled, among other things, how he himself was "the son of a mother who, despite a very delicate family situation and her grave illness, courageously refused to abort her child, enduring the overt death-sentence with faith and everything ready for the funeral." We have received news of the fact that several priests decided to publicly read Bishop

Careggio's note during the Sunday Mass homily on August 30, in order to make the faithful aware of its content.

On August 31 the excellent Stefano Fontana contributed an editorial at *The Daily Compass* which points out that on the abortion issue there is not only the "progressive" position of *Avvenire* but also an incredible interview given by Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, to the American news service *Crux*, which went to the point of denying the existence of non-negotiable moral principles and accusing those who use the right to life as a criterion for voting of being guilty of political exploitation. Apparently the intention is to keep a low-profile on abortion here in Italy (even going so far as to justify legislative interventions on the matter) in order to justify support for Biden against Trump in the coming American elections. In any case, one cannot help but see Paglia's statements as steps toward a "global rethinking" of Catholic moral theology.

Driven by the pressure arising from the scandal, *Avvenire* published the appeal of Fr. Gabriele Mangiarotti, director of *CulturaCattolica.it*, entitled *Il genocidio dei nascituri e l'impegno dei cattolici* [*The Genocide of the Unborn and the Catholic Commitment*], in which the cardinal principles of Catholic doctrine on abortion are admirably reaffirmed in 21 points – almost a micro-encyclical.

Someone has already claimed that by granting space to Mangiarotti's article, *Avvenire* has compensated for the damage caused by Moretti's article. But has the Italian Bishops' news service really repaired the error? We think not. *Avvenire* is not a journal that can permit itself to hold a waffling position on a fundamental question like that of abortion. It is not a neutral platform. It cannot limit itself to printing one opinion in favor of Law 194 and another opinion that is opposed. It cannot leave the Catholic reader in doubt. It ought to express, in a clear and unambiguous manner, its editorial judgment in the matter. The Italian Bishops' Conference has the moral duty to publicly declare, through *Avvenire*, whether it stands with Moretti or with Mangiarotti.