

Bishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life Interview (Excerpts)

By Joseph A. D'Agostino



. . . PRI obtained an interview with Bishop Sgreccia, who discussed the anti-life challenges threatening the continued existence of Europe.

Joseph D'Agostino: What are the functions of the Pontificia Academia Pro Vita (PAV)?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: The Pontifical Academy for Life, with its seat in the Vatican, was instituted on February 11, 1994, by Pope John Paul II with the aim of studying, in an interdisciplinary perspective, the problems concerning the promotion and the defense of life...

There are 58 permanent members nominated by the Pope and 69 corresponding members, nominated by the Academic Council. These people are both experts in their Field (medicine, biology, law, philosophy) and dedicated to the cause of human life...

Joseph D'Agostino: The results of anti-life government policies and attitudes in Europe now seem to include the destruction of Europe itself. Most European nations have birthrates below replacement. Do Europeans recognize this? Is there a trend toward more pro-life policies and attitudes?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: The fertility rate for the European Union was 1.5 in 2004, compared with 2.85 in India, 2.07 in the United States (1.8 for non-Hispanic whites, 2.2 for black, 2 .9 for Hispanics), 1.69 in China, 1.38 in Japan. It is clear that these below-replacement rates are particular to the developed countries. This situation results, as you know, from the combination of various factors, at work in European society for at least thirty years: massive use of contraceptive means; diffusion of abortion; changes in the family; unfavorable [attitudes] to the welcoming of new lives; changes in the condition of women, who are at work outside of the household; [demands] of the radical feminists with their disdain for marriage, family life and childbearing; delayed matrimony, with parents too old to have children...

Many studies have been devoted to this phenomenon, but few measures have been taken, in practice, at governmental levels, to reverse such dangerous trends. The reality of below-replacement fertility has started to show up in the media very recently, when the question of paying pensions to retired people has become preoccupant. However, people in Europe seem to be still less concerned with the "demographic winter" into which they already entered, than, let's say, with the question of immigration, although this last issue is very much linked with the first...

Joseph D'Agostino: Do people adopt anti-life attitudes and behaviors almost automatically because of modern technology; or are they indoctrinated by governments and the media? What role do the UN, EU, and other international organizations play?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: People don't "adopt anti-life attitudes," they just use what becomes available, and appears convenient to them... People are very good at "self-indoctrination," when it comes to "easy going" means or ways that make life smoother and less responsible. The same is true for international or supranational organizations. What these organizations decide is far above the preoccupations of people, and do not appear in the media. But their decisions, in the end, do arrive at people, when local governments sign proposed treaties and conventions. This is why we have to be attentive about all that is proposed or done in the UN, the UNFPA, UNESCO, the European Union or the Council of Europe...

Joseph D’Agostino: Can most of Europe survive longer than this century considering abortion, family breakdown, the low birthrates and aging populations?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: European countries have been passing throughout many great challenges along centuries and have demonstrated an incredible capacity for rebirth and rebuilding. What we see right now, for example, in France — spontaneously rising birth rates for several years — shows that a reversal of these negative trends is possible... But governments should act quickly in favor of families before it becomes too late.

Joseph D’Agostino: Will Latin America soon be like Europe in this regard?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: Birthrates are down all over Latin America and it is probable that they will continue to decrease in years ahead. It would not be therefore a surprise if these countries, starting with the more affluent, come to join Europe and Japan in their “demographic winter,” a few years from now. But it is too soon to speak about that.

Joseph D’Agostino: Can society survive feminism, that is to say, can any society survive unless a majority of its women view themselves primarily as life-givers, placing family and children first in their lives instead of adopting a work-oriented masculine attitude?

Bishop Elio Sgreccia: I don’t think that radical, anti-family, anti-baby Feminism will prevail in the end because it goes against the nature of woman and the natural trends of women. To be convinced of that, one has only to observe the behavioral changes that occur in a “very modern” girl, as soon as she starts waiting for a baby and then when she becomes a mother. But the governments have to institute the necessary regulations that will facilitate the familial task of the mother while she works out of the home, and that will offer the mother or the father the material possibility to stay home with the new-born baby for one year, which should include a salary and the assurance of getting back one’s job at the end of this period

