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# CATHOLIC FAMILY

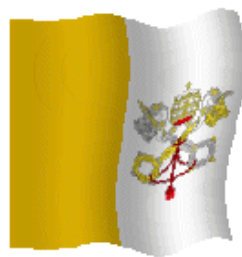


NEWS SERVICE OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILIES

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## Interview with H.E. Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo : Radio Cadena Nacional Colombia (RNC) August 29, 2006



*Q. Your Eminence, Cardinal Alfonso López Trujillo, President of the Pontifical Council for the Family, today we would like to ask you about a specific situation that came up in Colombia that received great media coverage: an abortion was performed on an 11 year-old girl who had been raped by her stepfather who took advantage of her. This is said to be the first legal abortion in Colombia. How does the Catholic Church interpret this situation?*

*A. I have read the statement of the Colombian Bishops' Conference, which I hope is known by public opinion because it is a clear, in-depth and serious communiqué. I would also like to say that I think it is a highly successful document. I*

have just received information about what happened because I was not in Rome but in other countries around the world for various commitments related to my position. However, one thing in particular calls my attention: the great compassion that was shown, all of which, I must say, is little for a girl assaulted in this way. A careful study will have to be made of the family problems, the submission, the silence and so on, because it is necessary to go to the heart of the problem. The press says something about this, and there must be no impunity for this crime. Moreover, it must be said that in view of that girl's suffering, public opinion, and why not say it, the Church will have to know how to accompany that family and that girl in such a dramatic, hopeless situation.

All the sense of help and protection that should have been given to those who underwent this moral, carnal and psychological violence is little.

In 1992, in a World Meeting, as our book on the rights of children records, ( *Cf. Pontifical Council for the Family, La Dignità dei Bambini e i loro Diritti, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 2000, p. 48*). we appealed for the first time to what is called "a crime against humanity" with regard to rapists and pornographers, and we did this in Thailand, no less. I am talking about the year 1992, 14 years ago. The document is known and was the first of its kind. It represents the great effort made by the Holy See so that crimes against humanity, like those mentioned above, could fall within the sphere of law and be liable to prosecution by the different countries that could in any case put those who committed this kind of crime in jail.

This is very important and the Church has had a clear line in this regard. But allow me to insist on something that is equally important about which the communications media, the press and opinion makers do not speak enough. This has to do with something that is even more sorrowful: namely, the fact that a human person, a human being who is not a "thing", an "object" or an "instrument", who is not worthless and lacking all rights, is condemned to capital punishment. Yes, I am talking about a death sentence for a human person, a human being!

Whether it is an embryo or a fetus, it is a person worthy of complete compassion and respect. Many will ask why. The answer is clear: because that person, whom many around the world recognize as a holder of rights, is the most innocent and, at the same time, the most vulnerable person. For this reason the Church is "harsh" and firm so that Christians will not fall into a similar temptation, the temptation to not respect it, and so that they will abhor an abominable crime-as the Council calls it as well as law. For what can be more abominable than to condemn the most innocent and helpless being to death? Someone who is even more innocent and helpless than a girl of 10 or 11.

*Q. In this case, then, Your Eminence, there is a death sentence for the embryo. Thinking about the life of the girl which was said to be in danger, who has precedence here, the baby or the girl?*

A. Certainly the one who has committed no crime of any kind and is the most vulnerable. This is the one who must be protected by society and the family. It is precisely the child, the unborn child, because if others do not protect it, it cannot protect itself. This is what some communicators and sectors of public opinion have failed to see because compassion, as I said, must be great for the girls, but it must not be excluded precisely for the most innocent one.

The Church rises up to defend the most innocent one who is a person, and not as a woman lawyer said in these days that "an embryo cannot have greater protection than a human being". An embryo is a human being! An embryo is a human person! We know the theses of biology, science, philosophy and authentic anthropology in this regard. I would like to suggest reading an article entitled, "The Dignity of the Child", which demonstrates with absolute clarity the status and supreme dignity of the child. The author is Leo Scheffczyk, a well-known German professor who was the Pope's teaching colleague in Tübingen. I would also like to call attention to the work of the German philosopher Robert Spaemann who published an article in these days about the problem of abortion and the horrors to which it leads.

There is abundant literature around the world on the protection of life, the embryo and the fetus, as well as regarding abortion. While in many countries they are talking about these matters, discussing and presenting arguments, in Colombia the theme goes unnoticed. In Italy, for example, it is known what could lead to a change in mentality and a new juridical proposal. The same is happening in the United States, the great Empire. Moreover, in various countries of Latin America the right to life from the beginning is protected by the Constitution. Moreover, the possibility always remains of establishing whether or not there is coherence between what the Constitution teaches and what a court may eventually rule by interpreting the Constitution at times against the spirit and letter of the same Constitution.

With regard to the courts, it is necessary to analyze in depth and study decisions that are surprising because our Council of State has also decriminalized euthanasia, and this is a very rare case because there are barely five countries in the whole world that have accepted it. Euthanasia is a crime in the United Nations, in the European Community and in almost all the nations of the world. Only in Colombia the Council of State has accepted it by decriminalizing it. Now I read in some articles that they are thinking of bringing these themes to Congress, and I invite my fellow citizens to study them seriously and be open to dialogue. To dialogue is not to impose. It means to propose, to show the "splendor of the truth". No one can take refuge in total skepticism or in statements like the one that one newspaper made: "We will never accept one of her theses". From that perspective, none of the Church's theses will ever be acceptable for them. I am gathering together a catalogue of more than 25 themes in relation to which these groups of skeptics are not willing to accept any reason or contribution from the Church. It would be worthwhile to ask: What point from the Church's moral doctrine and theology do they accept? None! As a rule they state that in all these matters they exercise neutrality. Neutrality, in the Diccionario de la Real Academia, means not taking one side or

another. But the neutrality they are talking about is what creates a vacuum in order to not accept or consider the Church's teaching. It can truly be said in this case that for them, neutrality means to shield oneself from the truth.

*Q. Your Eminence, returning to the theme of the abortion of the girl in Colombia, Canon 1398 speaks about excommunication latae sententiae. In this case, to whom does the excommunication latae sententiae apply?*

A. This theme has been discussed in different places around the world, including Italy. The canon itself certainly focuses on the protagonists in the conspiracy to commit an abominable crime. The doctors, nurses or even family members could be subject to this excommunication. In this case, lawmakers, politicians and so on are not considered, but it cannot be said that with time, once the matter is studied, that there may not be a certain degree of culpability. For as I stated in the Synod of Bishops, the politicians and lawmakers who are Catholics and do not share the Church's opinion cannot "share the Eucharist" either, because there must be complete, total coherency.

We have to reiterate that if we have before us no less than the problem of capital punishment for the "greatest innocent", for the "most vulnerable", then it is society that must come out to protect him. This protection is expressed in very different ways in many countries that seek to preserve that life. For this reason, those who are caught up in this problem have to go through consultations, medical registries and analyses in different entities before arriving at a kind of "permission". This is something that does not exist in Colombia because, among other things, as one woman lawyer was right to protest, the Court has still not produced the sentence. I have been asking what the sentence is in order to have it studied and to read it. No, no one knows it. So, I ask, before a sentence is known, can a Minister of Health or a press group or the Council itself exert a kind of psychological pressure so that this girl will come out with something that did not come entirely from her own wishes and will? We have to consider if there has been a kind of new and surely exaggerated violence here, an interested manipulation of things and feelings. Once again I must say that in this matter, one must always think of the rights of the one who is most oppressed and poorest: the unborn child.

*Q. It is said that to subject an 11 year-old girl to a situation like this, an abortion, can have grave consequences. What is your opinion about this?*

A. In a conference I stated this. First of all, it must be seen what is necessary from the medical, psychological, etc. viewpoints and the child must be accepted in order to keep it in a place that will provide it perfectly well with a family environment, an environment of affection and welcome. But the child, who is totally guiltless, totally innocent, is not an extreme aggressor I can shoot. My question in this case is: What aggression is the child committing? What is happening is that a man, a human person today, is falling into a net, a spider web armed by many, and it is necessary to get used to the task of defending the innocent one who is getting ready to be born as is done in various countries around the world that require an intermediate institution to study matters before proceeding in these very delicate cases.

Among other things, in the case of the pregnant girl, she should be helped with all medical resources so that she can give birth and give the child up for adoption. This is what Mother Teresa of Calcutta proposed to the great ones of the world, to empires and to kings: Why don't they give the Church this possibility to protect life? The Church loves and wants to share poverty, suffering, and compassion, and she also wants to take part one day in helping to rebuild the life of that girl who fell into the nets of delinquents who should really feel all the weight of the law.

*Q. Continuing with these cases in which there are surely many situations of minors who get pregnant, don't you think it could be argued on their behalf or that of their mentors that they were raped in order to have legal access to abortion?*

A. This danger exists, but the danger also exists that what is important is to spread fear so as to not prepare and help children and youth in the task of learning to defend themselves and acquiring awareness that will help them to overcome an extremely degraded environment, such as we often see in different places around the world.

Once again I wish to point out that our position is not one of rigor or intolerance. It is a choice of love for the "most vulnerable", love for the "poorest". It cannot be denied that the Church has always been the one that has protested in favor of children and helped vulnerable children over the ages in history. For this reason the Church is historically coherent when she states that for no reason, for no cause should the path be opened to the possibility that a child can become an instrument in order to terminate it and to save another life.

This theme should be discussed, and the Church has a right to be heard, and to be heard without any manipulation by the news. She has a right to let her intention, action, procedure and proposals be seen. This should not harm anyone; on the contrary, it means to open the conscience to the proposal of a Church that is the supreme protector of human dignity.

On this point of human dignity I must tell you that I have received some information about a publication of a Colombian Review in which a pornographic mockery was made of the Last Supper. They said that there was nothing censurable about it because freedom of the press is protected. How can one speak about protecting "freedom of the press" over the sentiment of an entire people and against an entire Church? We are against people who take justice into their own hands and for this reason we insistently call for a juridical conscience that is noble and delicate.

As you will recall, a few months ago, in the context of one of the other great religions, there was a reaction to a

caricature of the prophet Mohammed. At the time a battle and a series of conflicts broke out that could have had the worst consequences.

Among us, instead, in Colombia, Christ is mocked. He is presented as a nude woman in pornographic positions and they call this "journalistic talent". It is not important of this offends an entire society, and to give the matter impunity, it is said that freedom of the press is first and foremost. This only happens in Colombia, in the Catholic country we all know and love.

On the other hand, I also have information regarding the intention of groups inimical to Christian morality to tyrannize the Congress of the Republic with one project or another aimed at undermining the morality of our Christian civilization. Fortunately, the Bishops are very careful-and they have to be, always--to encourage a national awareness campaign that will reassert the depth of moral strength and reaffirm what Christians must believe.

One cannot be a Catholic without accepting what the Pope teaches. And the Pope teaches this: there are some very serious, grave and important matters that are not negotiable, and one cannot negotiate regarding abortion, euthanasia, and de facto couples, marriages that have no juridical basis.

I congratulate my Brothers in the Episcopate because they have declared the lawfulness and timeliness of "conscientiousness objection". As I have seen in an article, now it is said that its legitimate exercise must be recognized. However, the reasons would have to be studied why the exercise of "conscientious objection" is denied to moral institutions and bodies. For this reason, it seemed to me to be a fine gesture by the Company of Jesus when it stated, "In the San Ignacio Hospital in Bogotá we will not allow the abominable crime of abortion to be perpetrated".

I invite the Catholic Universities of Colombia to offer their thoughts on this case to scientific institutions, physicians and psychologists, as is being done all over the world in science, philosophy and anthropology. It is necessary to be clear. This is not a discussion between persons to harm or upset them with a kind of cold intolerance or impossible neutrality. No! The Church knows the most painful dramas. The Church is hurt by these dramatic situations that are very similar to one that is taking place in Argentina, and to others in many parts of our Continent. However, we must not theorize the position of the Church, but above all you Catholic brothers who are called to rise to the dignity of Christians, defend the rights that pertain to the Church!

*Q. Lastly, Your Eminence, and taking advantage of this moment you have given to R.C.N., what do you think about what is happening in the country, the situation of fighting to keep death from reigning in Colombia, and the search for an approach to some of these groups committed to death? What reading do you give to what is happening in the country?*

A. Colombia is a country with enormous possibilities. This is a moment that can be even more positive. I could not go to the inauguration of the President whom I would have liked to accompany, and to whom I would also like to express my admiration for the witness he gives to his Catholic background of which he is not ashamed, on the contrary, of which he is proud.

Colombia, however, is a strange country, descuadernado ["disorderly"], as Lleras Restrepo said years ago. In fact, everything that is being achieved for peace is wonderful, even though this is not the only problem we have.

Peace of spirit is also necessary, peace of conscience, peace in dialogue, moral values, and the family. What is Colombia without the family, without life, etc.? Oddly, however, there are some positions that manifest their intransigency before these challenges, as well as positions of "other powers" that we know very well. I was one of the victims and underwent many assaults--about which I will write soon--both by drug dealers and guerrillas. I suffered this for years because I did not give in to that law of inevitable violence. This is very well known, but it will be known even better in due time.

I hope that this peace will be strengthened. I understand that it is being offered "generously" so there is no harsh, rigid imposition, but I know very well that there is a need for interlocutors. We are very tired of violence, evil, the country being torn and bloodshed. This is the physical violence we know, the violence of terrorism, but there is also the moral violence that is unleashed against persons, against institutions, with despicable and vile forms of calumny. All these forms of violence are not good for Colombia!

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GRANT US, Father a spirit of wisdom and insight, so that we may know the great hope to which we have been called.

Let peace and harmony reign among all the dwellers on the earth.

To those who exercise the ministry of authority in the service of their brothers, send a spirit of wisdom and humility.

Grant us, O God, to fill up in our own flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for his Church.

To our families and benefactors grant the blessing of everlasting life.

Be ever mindful of your mercy, exalt the lowly; fill the hungry with good things.

Both in life and death, let us be yours, O Lord.

Free the world from its slavery to corruption, to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.

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