News



Cardinal Elio Sgreccia, former head of the Pontifical Academy for Life, died June 5 at the age of 90. In his role at the academy Sgreccia helped articulate the Vatican's position on life issues. He is pictured leaving a session of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the family at the Vatican in this Oct. 16, 2014, file photo. (CNS/Paul Haring)

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The former head of the Pontifical Academy for Life, Cardinal Elio Sgreccia, died June 5, just one day shy of his 91st birthday.

A bioethics expert, the president emeritus helped articulate the Vatican's position on many important issues such as embryonic stem-cell research, euthanasia, the definition of brain death, abortion and in vitro fertilization.

In a telegram expressing his prayers and condolences, Pope Francis said he was grateful for the cardinal's "generous service to the church, especially his precious and steadfast work defending the fundamental value of human life."

Sgreccia was the founding leader and "courageous and knowledgeable soul of our institution, supporting and promoting the studies and safeguarding of human life" in the face of all the challenges posed by advancements in the biomedical field, the academy said in a press release.

The academy praised the cardinal's important and precious contribution to the academy and to church teaching.

Sgreccia was born June 6, 1928, in Arcevia, Italy. He was ordained to the priesthood in 1952 and served as rector of the local seminary. St. John Paul II ordained him a bishop in 1993.

The cardinal served as secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Family before St. John Paul named him head of the academy for life in 2005, a position he held until his retirement in 2008. Pope Benedict XVI made him a cardinal in 2010 at the age of 82.

He wrote numerous books on pastoral care in health care, medical ethics and the family, and served as president of the International Federation of Bioethics Centers. At the invitation of Pope Francis, he participated in the Synod of Bishops on the family in 2014 and 2015.

Sgreccia's death leaves the College of Cardinals with 220 members, 120 of whom are under the age of 80 and therefore eligible to vote in a conclave.

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