

Bishop who spoke about girl's abortion resigns

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Jul. 2, 2009

VATICAN CITY -- Pope Benedict XVI has accepted the resignation of the Brazilian archbishop at the center of a controversy over excommunications related to the case of an abortion performed on a 9-year-old rape victim.

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tThe pope accepted the resignation of Archbishop Jose Cardoso Sobrinho of Olinda and Recife July 1, the day after the archbishop's 76th birthday. Under canon law, bishops must submit their resignations when they turn 75.

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tAt the same time, 62-year-old Bishop Fernando Saburido of Sobral, Brazil, was named as his replacement. With the appointment, he automatically becomes an archbishop.

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tIn early March doctors at a hospital in Recife performed an abortion on the girl, who was pregnant with twins, weighed a little more than 66 pounds and reportedly had been raped repeatedly by her stepfather from the time she was 6 years old. Abortion in Brazil is illegal except in cases of rape or if the mother's life is in danger.

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tInterviewed by the media after the abortion, Archbishop Sobrinho noted that abortion always was a sin and that, according to canon law, anyone participating in the abortion -- including the girl's mother and her doctors -- would automatically incur excommunication.

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tHe told a newspaper that while it was true the child ran health risks if she continued the pregnancy, "the end does not justify the means. The good aim of saving her life cannot justify the killing of two other lives."

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tIn the midst of expressions of outrage from around the world over what appeared to be a lack of pastoral concern and compassion for the girl, the head of the Pontifical Academy for Life said the church's first reaction should have been to minister to the girl.

tThe girl "should have been defended, hugged and held tenderly to help her feel that we were all on her side," said Archbishop Rino Fisichella, head of the academy.

tThe Archdiocese of Olinda and Recife then issued a statement saying, "All of us ... treated the pregnant girl and her family with extreme charity and tenderness. ... All efforts were focused on saving all three lives."