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Archbp. Burke warns Democrats becoming 'party of death'

by Cindy Wooden by Catholic News Service

ROME -- The Democratic Party in the United States "risks transforming itself definitively into a 'party of death,'" said U.S. Archbishop Raymond L. Burke, prefect of the Vatican's highest court.

An interview with the former archbishop of St. Louis was published in the Sept. 27 edition of *Avvenire*, a daily Catholic newspaper sponsored by the Italian bishops' conference.

The newspaper asked the archbishop, the new head of the Supreme Court of the Apostolic Signature, for his reaction to reports that his Vatican job was designed to get him away from St. Louis.

"I have too much respect for the pope to believe that in order to move someone away from a diocese he would nominate him to a very sensitive dicastery like this one," said the archbishop, whose office is in charge of ensuring that lower church courts correctly administer justice in accordance with canon law.

Burke was asked if he knew that the August Democratic National Convention in Denver featured a guest appearance by Sheryl Crow, a musician whose performance at a 2007 benefit for a Catholic children's hospital the archbishop had opposed because of her support for abortion and embryonic stem-cell research.

"That does not surprise me much," the archbishop said. "At this point the Democratic Party risks transforming itself definitely into a 'party of death' because of its choices on bioethical questions as Ramesh Ponnuru wrote in his book, *The Party of Death: The Democrats, the Media, the Courts and the Disregard for Human Life*."

Burke said the Democratic Party once was "the party that helped our immigrant parents and grandparents better integrate and prosper in American society. But it is not the same anymore."

Pro-life Democrats are "rare, unfortunately," he said.

Burke also was asked about being one of a few U.S. bishops to publicly ban Catholic politicians who hold positions contrary to church teaching from receiving Communion.

"Mine was not an isolated position," the archbishop said. "It was shared by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput of Denver, by Bishop Peter J. Jugis of Charlotte (N.C.) and by others."

"But it is true that the bishops' conference has not taken this position, leaving each bishop free to act as he believes best. For my part, I always have maintained that there must be a united position in order to demonstrate the unity of the church in facing this serious question," he said.

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"Recently, I have noticed that other bishops are coming to this position," he said, especially after Sen. Joseph Biden of Delaware, the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., "while presenting themselves as good Catholics, have represented church teaching on abortion in a false and tendentious manner."

Burke said he is convinced that a 2004 letter from then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the U.S. bishops and canon law say "it is not licit to give holy Communion to one who is publicly and obstinately a sinner. And it is logical that one who publicly and obstinately acts in favor of procured abortion enters into this category."

The newspaper asked Burke if he ever wondered why the issue of Communion for Catholic politicians was almost unheard of in Europe, where abortion is legal in most countries.

"I don't know if Catholic politicians in Europe are more coherent, although I would have some doubts," he said.

However, he said, "I am convinced that the church must always be very clear on this point."

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