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The incoming Vatican secretary of state

by John L. Allen Jr.

All Things Catholic

Giovanni Cardinale of the Italian journal *30 Giorni* is the reigning master of the Q&A format with senior church leaders. The latest case in point comes in his interview with Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone of Genoa, the incoming Secretary of State, in the July/August issue of *30 Giorni*.

We learn that Bertone's mother Pierina was a follower of Don Luigi Sturzo and the Partito Popolare, the forerunner of the Christian Democratic Party. During the pontificate of Pius IX, Sturzo's desire to build a Christian presence in civil society was sometimes viewed as disloyal to the pope's rejection of a secular Italian state on principle. For Italians, the name "Sturzo" became synonymous with moderate reconciliation with modernity.

When Cardinale points out that the only other Secretary of State who belonged to a religious order was Cardinal Luigi Emmanuele Nicolò Lambruschini, from 1836-1846, Bertone brushes off the parallel.

"For goodness' sake, don't compare me with Lambruschini," Bertone responds. "He was a holy man, but politically he was a complete reactionary!"

Bertone is an expert in canon law who worked on the revision of the Code of Canon Law in 1983. In 1989, while serving as rector of the Salesian University, Bertone chaired a working group of rectors that prepared John Paul II's apostolic constitution on Catholic education, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. He was also asked to be part of the negotiations with traditionalist followers of the late French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, which ultimately failed to avoid a schism in 1988 when Lefebvre consecrated bishops without the pope's approval.

"If there's a sincere desire to reenter into full communion with the Holy See on the part of the Lefebvrites, it won't be difficult to find adequate means of obtaining this result," he said.

Bertone has a well-known sense of humor; he once quipped that perhaps the Catholic Church should make an exception to its opposition to cloning in the case of Italian beauty Sophia Loren. It shines through in the *30 Giorni* interview; when Cardinale notes that Bertone's appointment breaks the tradition of picking the Secretary of State from the Vatican diplomatic corps. Bertone quips that Benedict XVI does not feel bound by "traditions with a small 't'."

Yet Bertone can also be quite serious, as with his outspoken opposition to the war in Iraq.

"I repeated with conviction the judgment on the war formulated by John Paul II and the Holy See," Bertone said. "The current situation in Iraq manifests how prophetic that judgment was."

Bertone also said, however, that he's opposed to an immediate pull-out, worrying that it would leave the civilian population in greater danger.

Bertone is blistering in his criticism of international economic systems.

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"I've repeated many times the judgment of experts and entire bodies of bishops: the international loans made by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as bilateral loans, are by now a form of usury and should be declared illegal," Bertone said.

"Debt becomes usury when it undercuts the inalienable right to life and to all the other rights which are not conceded to human beings, but belong to them by nature," he said.

"Based on the social doctrine of the church, we need a popular democratic capitalism, as well as a system of economic liberty which does not amount to an oligopoly, which makes room for the greatest number of participants possible, giving them a chance to engage in enterprise and creativity, favoring a healthy competition within a clear legal framework," he said.

Bertone was also critical of social practices he alleged are sometimes required as a condition of financial assistance.

"Some technocrats, especially those of the multinationals, of the World Bank and the IMF, have imposed unacceptable conditions on the poor, including forced sterilization and the closing of Catholic schools," he said.

Bertone calls Islam a "delicate question." He said he's not opposed to the construction of mosques in Italy, although he would wish for a reciprocal form of religious liberty for Christians in majority Islamic states. He also said that in principle he's not opposed to teaching Islam to Muslim students in Italian schools, though both teachers and curriculum should be subject to control to ensure that schools aren't inadvertently fostering extremist positions.

One challenge Bertone will face as the Vatican's voice on global affairs: he doesn't speak English, which today is the common language of diplomacy and the global press.

"I said this to the pope when he asked me to serve as Secretary of State," Bertone told Cardinale. "He encouraged me, saying that other important personalities, such as the great Chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany, also didn't know English. Anyway, the Holy See has excellent interpreters at its service."

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Speaking of *vaticanisti*, there has been concern in the tribe since July 23, when colleague and friend Orazio Petrosillo, who covers the Vatican for the Italian daily *Il Messaggero*, suffered a heart attack while covering Benedict XVI's vacation in northern Italy. After two weeks in the hospital there, Petrosillo was transferred to the Gemelli in Rome.

Luigi Accattoli, the distinguished Vatican writer for *Corriere della Sera*, has used his blog to collect messages for Petrosillo, which Accattoli prints and takes to him in the hospital. For those who read Italian and know Petrosillo's work, the messages can be found here:
www.luigiaccattoli.it/blog/?p=148#comments

On Aug. 10, Accattoli told me that there's been little change in Petrosillo's condition since July 23. He's under the care of Dr. Rodolfo Proietti, director of the Gemelli's emergency and admissions department, and the physician who headed the medical team that cared for Pope John Paul II when he was hospitalized at the Gemelli Feb. 1-10, and again Feb. 24 to March 13, 2005.

Proietti, Accattoli said, believes it will still be "a few weeks" before he can make an evaluation of Petrosillo's long-term condition. Petrosillo is still not completely alert, but the doctors are relatively optimistic based on his partial responses to stimuli they have administered.

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