

Top Vatican ethicist says abortion saved life of nine-year-old rape victim: Says doctors do not merit excommunication

News in the [April 21, 2009](#) issue

The Vatican's top bioethics official said the two Brazilian doctors who performed an abortion on a nine-year-old rape victim do not merit excommunication, since they acted to save her life. The statement by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, appeared as the lead article in the March 15 issue of the official Vatican newspaper *L'Osservatore Romano*.

"There are others who deserve excommunication and our forgiveness," Fisichella wrote in addressing the unidentified rape victim, "not those who permitted you to live and who will help you to regain hope and faith."

The case drew international attention in early March after the local Catholic archbishop excommunicated the girl's mother as well as the two doctors who aborted the girl's twin fetuses. The child was 15 weeks pregnant, allegedly after being raped by her stepfather. Weighing only 80 pounds, she might have died if forced to carry the pregnancy to term, the doctors said.

While reiterating Catholic teaching that abortion is an "intrinsically wicked act," Fisichella suggested that under the circumstances it may have been the lesser evil.

An extraordinary aspect of Fisichella's article was its frank rebuke of José Cardoso Sobrinho, archbishop of Olinda and Recife, whom Fisichella accused of having "rushed" to declare the excommunications—"a judgment as heavy as a meat cleaver"—when his first task should have been pastoral care of the victim. *-Religion News Service*