

Pope Sixtus V

Known for dropping a long-held distinction in the Catholic Church between the animated and unanimated fetus, Felice Peretti was born in Grottamare, Italy, in 1521, son of a Dalmatian gardener. In his early years, Peretti worked as a swineherd, but soon became involved in the local Minorite convent in Montalto, where he served as a novice at the age of twelve. He went on to study in Montalto, Ferrara, and Bologna, continuing his devotion to religious life, and in 1547 Peretti was ordained as priest in the city of Siena.

Peretti quickly gained a reputation as a great preacher and served as a director of three separate convents in Siena, Naples, and Venice until his appointment as a general counselor to the Inquisition in Venice in 1557. Quickly removed from the post due to his heavy-handed approach, Peretti later served in various church positions, including a professorship at La Sapienza Papal University in Rome. Peretti's success in his posts earned him the appointment of bishop of Sant'Agata dei Goti in Naples by Pope Pius V. Shortly thereafter he was appointed cardinal-priest at the Church of S. Simeone, and was popularly referred to as "Cardinal di Montalto" for as long as he held the post.

In the 15 years before he would be elected Pope, Peretti spent most of his time out of the eyes of the public, devoting himself to study and editing the works of St. Ambrose. Upon the death of Pope Gregory XIII in 1585, Peretti was elected Pope on 24 April and crowned on 1 May 1585, choosing Sixtus V as his papal name. The papacy of Sixtus V is known for restoring energy and safety to the Papal States, relieving the Church from debt, and beginning a frenzy of architectural novelties, including the Vatican Library. He also founded the Collegio Montalto in Bologna and used aqueducts to supply Rome with water. In addition, Sixtus V organized ecclesiastical affairs by establishing fifteen permanent congregations with a fixed number of cardinals dedicated to discussing the Church's approach to spiritual and worldly matters in a more concerted manner.

Pope Sixtus V's contribution to embryology and related matters came with the publication of the papal bull "Effraenatam" in 1588. This document strongly condemns those who knowingly seek and succeed at procuring or aiding in procuring an abortion (via medicines, poisons, violence, overbearing physical stress or labor, or "unknown" and "researched procedures"). Punishments for such people were made equivalent to those who had intentionally committed murder in the Papal States at the time: the death penalty and excommunication from the Church. These punishments were also extended to anyone who made the potions or directed the women in consuming them. Though it is commonly written that this bull was issued in response to high rates of prostitution in the Papal States, there is little reference to sexual conduct in the document other than a warning against the criminality of contraception.

This controversial bull was later revoked in full by Pope Gregory XIV in 1591, who reinstated the Church's previous position based on the level of fetal development. This action returned to punishing with excommunication only those abortions procured after the 80th day of development, with lesser punishments for abortions intentionally obtained earlier in the pregnancy.

Sources

1. Ott, Michael T. "Pope Sixtus V." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume XIV. Transcribed by Thomas M. Barrett. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912. <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14033a.htm> (Accessed April 24, 2007).

2. Trimakas, Antonio, trans. "Effraenatam." The Apostolic Constitution "Effraenatam" of Pope Sixtus V against abortionists. <http://iteadjmj.com/aborto/eng-prn.html> (Accessed April 24, 2007).