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Cardinal Schönborn says Church cannot refuse blessing for gay couples

Austrian cardinal is the latest of more than a dozen German-speaking bishops who have criticized the Vatican for trying to stop priests from blessing same-sex unions



Cardinal Christoph Schönborn

By [Christa Pongratz-Lippitt](#) | [Austria](#)

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna -- the universal Church's second-most senior active cardinal -- has voiced displeasure with the Vatican's recent effort to reinforce a ban on blessing same-sex couples, saying the move has deeply wounded many people.

"If the request for a blessing is not a show... if the request is honest and is really a plea for God's blessing of a way of life that two people want to embark on together, then such a blessing will not be refused," the 76-year-old cardinal said in the latest issue of his archdiocesan weekly paper, *Der Sonntag*.

Congregation e Doctrine of the Faith issued on March 15 to prevent such blessings.

He said many homosexuals wanted to see "the Church as their mother", adding: "That is why the Vatican declaration was especially painful for so many, as they felt that they had been rejected by the Church."

Seven out of ten Austrian bishops have criticized the CDF

Schönborn's criticism is seen as extremely significant. Not only is he a member of the CDF, he is also the Church's second most senior cardinal still in active ministry.

Having received his red hat in 1998, he is outranked only by 75-year-old Vinko Puljic of Sarajevo, who became a cardinal four years earlier.

"A blessing is not a reward for good behavior, but a plea for help from above," said the Austrian Church leader.

Schönborn is the most notable of more than a dozen German-speaking bishops who have publicly criticized the CDF text.

That includes seven of the ten bishops who lead dioceses in Austria.

Those who have joined him in raising objections include Bishops Hermann Glettler of Innsbruck, Manfred Scheuer of Linz, Benno Elbbs of Feldkirch, Wilhelm Krautwaschl of Graz and Josef Marketz of Gurk, as well as Salzburg's Archbishop Franz Lackner who is also president of the Austrian Bishops' Conference.

Theologians, parish priests and leading lay Catholics speak out

In addition, some 200 German-speaking theologians and more than 2000 priests in Germany and Austria have issued a statement protesting the Vatican's doctrinal congregation, publicly stating that they will continue to bless homosexual couples.

Catholic lay leaders have also expressed disappointment with the CDF.

The Central Committee of German Catholics (ZdK) pointed out that the issue of blessing gay couples was not only being discussed in Germany, but also "in many countries in the world Church".

The present version in the Catholic Catechism was insufficient, the influential lay organization said in a statement issued on March 16.

In fact, Catholic bishops and leading laity have already begun discussing this and other issues pertaining to sexual morality as part of Germany's ongoing "binding synodal procedure" for ecclesial renewal.

The series of synodal gatherings was triggered by the Church's shattered credibility as a consequence of the abuse crisis.

Calls to re-formulate Church teaching on human sexuality

"In our forum we want to embark on further developing the Church's teaching on sexuality," said Bishop Helmut Dieser of Aachen and Birgit Mock of the ZdK, co-chairs of the synodal procedure's forum on sexuality and partnership.

"Our forum will discuss this latest interjection from Rome in detail," they said.

Bishop Dieser, whom Pope Francis appointed to Aachen in 2016, said he's aware that priests in Germany are currently blessing homosexual couples.

"All this takes place in a sort of grey zone," the 58-year-old prelate said.

He pointed out that there was a high level of suffering around the issue and objections from Rome would not put an end to the discussion.

"That kind of thinking is naïve and moreover destructive. It does a great deal of harm," he insisted.

The bishop said that "in order to signal that we must move forward on this issue", the Church in Germany should enter into dialogue with the pope and the Vatican's doctrinal office.

He was adamant that Church teaching on sexuality needs to be reevaluated in light of scientific insights, saying this was a pressing challenge for the German synodal procedure.

More "Francis bishops" in favor of blessing same-sex couples

"Same sex couples are not second-class Christians," Bishop Joseph Marketz of Gurk said in a March 24 interview with *Die Kleine Zeitung*, Austria's largest regional newspaper.

He said he was prepared to bless same-sex couples any time.

"I ask forgiveness from all those who yet once again feel that the Church has rejected them," said Innsbruck's Bishop Hermann Glettler during a newscast broadcast late Wednesday night throughout Austria.

The 56-year-old bishop, whom Francis promoted to the episcopate in 2017, told *Kathpress* that the CDF *responsum* and note came as a "disappointment for all those who were hoping for a clearer sign of the acceptance of gay couples".

Glettler, who is responsible for marriage and family affairs in the Austrian bishops' conference, said the Church must now do more to offer homosexuals a spiritual home and strengthen everything that is good in their relationships.

"Gays and lesbians are welcome, whether or not they are chaste"

"We still have a lot to learn (about homosexuality). The history of malicious and superficial judgements will continue to have an effect for a long time to come," he pointed out.

"Same-sex relationships can be based on faithfulness and mutual devotion," he insisted.

Bishop Glettler said this could lead to the personal happiness of those concerned and also contribute to social coexistence in society.

He said that's why Pope Francis had recently (Oct 2020) indicated support for same-sex civil unions.

At the same time, he noted that the pope, in his 2016 apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, said there's no reason "to establish analogies between homosexual partnerships and God's plan for marriage and the family".

"We, as the Church, would like to welcome all gays and lesbians and offer them a spiritual home in the Church – and we do so whether they live chaste lives or not," Glettler emphasized.

Meanwhile, Cardinal Rainer Maria Woelki of Cologne and three other bishops in Germany have emerged as the German-speaking Church's strongest defenders the CDF's statement against blessing same-sex unions.



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