Vatican
Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna, pictured in a 2013 file photo (CNS/Paul Haring)



by Joshua J. McElwee

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Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna, pictured in a 2013 file photo (CNS/Paul Haring)

Austrian Cardinal Christoph Schönborn has expressed unhappiness with the Vatican's recent decree banning Catholic priests from blessing same-sex couples, in what appears to be the first example of a cardinal openly disagreeing with the measure.

Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna and a theologian who has been praised often by Pope Francis, said in an interview published March 24 that he believes gay couples who ask God for a blessing "will not be denied."

"The question of whether same-sex couples can be blessed belongs to the same category as the question of whether this is possible for remarried persons or unions contracted without a marriage license," the cardinal told 'Der Sonntag,' a weekly

magazine of the Vienna Archdiocese.

"If the request for a blessing is not a show, so not just a kind of a superficial rite, if the request for the blessing is honest, if it is truly the request for God's blessing for the life path that these two people, in whatever condition they find themselves in, are trying to make, then this blessing will not be denied them," said Schönborn, according to an Italian translation by the Swiss Catholic portal catt.ch.

The March 15 decree from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which was approved by Francis, banned priests from blessing same-sex unions on the grounds that God "does not and cannot bless sin."

The decree was criticized by gay Catholics and allies across the world. Many noted that it appeared contrary to the pope's frequent promotion of a "culture of encounter" and his numerous meetings with gay individuals and couples throughout his papacy.

While a few bishops have criticized the measure, no cardinals had yet been known to do so. Some others, including Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley and Vatican official Cardinal Peter Turkson, had defended the move as necessary for the church to be clear in its teaching that marriage is between a man and a woman.

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Schönborn said the Vatican has a "legitimate concern" that blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples could "create the impression" that such couples are able to enter into sacramental marriages, like heterosexual couples, who are able to give birth to children.

"This 'yes' to the family must not be said as a 'no' to all other forms," said the cardinal. "The church has become used to the fact — it was a long and painful process — that it is not the only voice that has something to say about relationships."

Schönborn has been praised particularly by Francis in the past for the way the cardinal has explained and promoted the pope's 2016 apostolic exhortation on family life, *Amoris Laetitia.*

The cardinal noted that the church is traditionally called *Mater et Magistra*, mother and teacher.

"She must teach, but before everything else she is a mother," said Schönborn.

"Many homosexual people are particularly sensitive to this question: 'Is the church a mother for us?' " said the cardinal. "They also want to see the church as a mother and that is why this declaration has struck many in a particularly painful way, because they have the feeling of being rejected by the church."

Schönborn suggested that as a priest he would tell a same-sex couple seeking a blessing: "You have not fulfilled the whole ideal. But it is important that you live your journey on the basis of human virtues, without which no relationship can succeed."

"This deserves a blessing," said the cardinal. "If the right form of expression for this is a church blessing ceremony, we must think about that carefully."

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