Vatican
Vatican News
People hold posters with anti-Fernández messages, such as "Fernández must go"

Representatives of international victims' initiatives demonstrate in Rome Sept. 28, 2023, holding protest posters, including one that reads, "Fernández must go!" and another that says, "Fernández: No friend to victims." Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández is prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith. (OSV News photo/Anita Hirschbeck, KNA)



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After authorizing blessings for homosexual couples, the head of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, is facing backlash from multiple national churches and certain clerics across the globe.

The newest reaction came from the former bishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Joseph Zen, who said that Fernández has attributed an "intrinsic goodness" to what is "a grave sin" and thus is committing "heresy," the cardinal wrote, asking in a Jan. 20 statement: "Shouldn't he then resign or be dismissed?"

The Hong Kong cardinal was referring in particular to the blessing of same-sex couples, which the Vatican gave a green light to for the first time in the declaration published by the Holy See Dec. 18.

The declaration "Fiducia Supplicans" ("Supplicating Trust") -- subtitled "On the pastoral meaning of blessings" -- says a Catholic priest can bless a same-sex or other unmarried couple as long as it is not a formal liturgical blessing and does not give the impression that the Catholic Church is blessing the union as if it were a marriage. Church doctrine on marriage and sexuality is not to be changed, the declaration emphasized.

The document suggests that such relationships also could have something good, Zen explained, indicating that "this is an absolutely subjective error. According to the objective truth, this behavior is a grave sin and can never be good."

Zen had previously accused Pope Francis of unsettling the faithful with unclear answers on questions of sexual morality, in particular on the blessing of same-sex couples.

As the new prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, Fernández drafted "Fiducia Supplicans," which was approved by Francis.

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The reaction to the declaration by several bishops' conferences around the world prompted the dicastery to issue a clarification Jan. 4 signed by Fernández and Msgr. Armando Matteo, secretary of the dicastery's doctrinal section.

Calling the negative statements by some bishops' conferences as "understandable," the dicastery said the statements "cannot be interpreted as doctrinal opposition, because the document is clear and definitive" on the church's teaching on marriage and sexuality.

The dicastery also said that cultural considerations must be made when applying the declaration's proposal, especially in countries where homosexuality is outlawed, which is the case of many African countries.

"If there are laws that condemn the mere act of declaring oneself as a homosexual with prison and in some cases with torture and even death, it goes without saying that a blessing would be imprudent," the DDF statement said.

In his Jan. 20 statement, Zen warned that the blessings would cause confusion among the faithful. In this context, he called on the Vatican also to urge German priests to follow certain rules.

Since 2022, several priests in Germany have been officially offering blessings for homosexual couples. The ceremonies violate current Vatican regulations as the priests give the blessing in church services. However, sanctions are not imposed in many places.

Zen also stressed that it is the task of pastors to remind people of the teachings and will of God. "Blessing sin is contrary to this," he said.