NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (https://www.ncronline.org)

'The days of cover-up are over,' Sch?nborn

John L. Allen Jr. | May. 10, 2010

Cardinal Christoph Sch?nborn of Vienna (CNS photo/Heinz-Peter Bader, Reuters)

Rome -- In a rare breach of normal etiquette at senior levels of the church, Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna has directly accused another cardinal of complicity in the cover-up of sexual abuse allegations against his predecessor as the most important figure in the Austrian church.

In a session with Austrian journalists in late April, as summarized by the Austrian Catholic news agency Kathpress, Schönborn said that Italian Cardinal Angelo Sodano, at the time the Secretary of State under Pope John Paul II, blocked an investigation of sexual abuse claims against the late Cardinal Hans Hermann Groër of Vienna.

Groër, who died in 2003, had been accused of abuse by several former novice monks at the Benedictine abbey in Austria where he once served as abbot. The charges against Groër became public in 1995, producing a major crisis in the Austrian church. Three years later, Schönborn led a group of Austrian bishops who announced they were ?morally certain? of Groër?s guilt.

Groër stepped down in 1995, and by 1998 he took refuge in a monastery in Germany. Critics have long pointed to the Vatican?s failure to take action against Groër as an example of a general atmosphere of denial on the sexual abuse crisis, though Groër himself never admitted guilt.

In his comments in late April, Schönborn also said that comments by Sodano during the Vatican?s Easter Sunday Mass, in which Sodano said that attacks on Pope Benedict XVI for his handling of the sexual abuse crisis were tantamount to ?petty gossip,? had done ?massive harm? to victims of sex abuse by Catholic clergy.

?The days of cover-up are over,? Kathpress quoted Schönborn as saying.

Schönborn, 65, had earlier said in mid-March that unnamed officials in the Vatican blocked efforts by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, to launch an investigation of Groër, but without naming names. His comments in late April to Austrian journalists represent the most direct charges from a senior church officials assigning blame to Sodano, now 82, who served as Secretary of State from 1991 to 2006, and who still holds the position of dean of the College of Cardinals.

More broadly, Schönborn?s charges against Sodano are also the most explicit example of date of an emerging pattern among senior church officials who wish to exonerate Pope Benedict XVI of complicity in the sexual abuse crisis, which is to suggest that Ratzinger, while still a cardinal, pressed for an aggressive response to the crisis against the opposition of other senior aides to Pope John Paul II.

According to the report from Kathpress, Schönborn said that Ratzinger wanted to a process under canon law against Groër, but Sodano and other top Vatican officials favored a ?diplomatic track? that would allow Groër to retire quietly without any formal finding of guilt.

Not only is Schönborn?s willingness to cite a senior Vatican official by name unusual, but his comments also come at a time when the possible beatification of Pope John Paul is under active consideration. Some Vatican observers speculate that mounting criticism of John Paul?s record on the sexual abuse crisis could slow down, or even derail, the sainthood process for the late pope.

Sodano has also been implicated in the Vatican?s reluctance to pursue sexual abuse charges against Fr. Marcial Maciel Degollado, founder of the Legionaries of Christ. Even after the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith re-opened an investigation of Maciel in 2004, Sodano issued a statement in the name of the Secretariat of State asserting that there was no ?canonical process? against Maciel ? a claim that seemed hollow when the new pope, Benedict XVI, ordered Maciel to observe a life of ?prayer and penance? in early 2006.

The Legionaries of Christ have acknowledged that the charges of sexual abuse against Maciel, who died in 2008, were justified. Pope Benedict recently announced his intention to appoint an apostolic delegate for the Legionaries to lead the order through a period of ?profound reform.?

Schönborn is a longtime intimate of Pope Benedict. He did post-doctoral work under Ratzinger at the University of Regensburg in Bavaria in the late 1970s, and was later appointed by Ratzinger as the general editor of the Catechism of the Catholic Church issued by Ratzinger?s Vatican office in 1992.

Throughout the 1990s, Schönborn was mentioned so often as a possible successor to Ratzinger at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith that at one point Schönborn denied being his mentor?s ?crown prince.? During the conclave of April 2005, Schönborn was an outspoken advocate for the election of Pope Benedict XVI, so much so that some insiders referred to him as the ?campaign manager? of the new pope.

In the same interview as summarized by Kathpress, Schönborn said it?s ?no secret? that the Roman Curia under Pope Benedict XVI is in ?urgent need? of reform.

[John Allen is *NCR* senior correspondent. His e-mail address is jallen@ncronline.org.]

Benedict's Trip to Portugal

- O'Malley on the crisis, the visitation of women's orders, and Fatima [2], Allen's May 14 column
- It's dialogue or death, pope says in Portugal [3]
- A Tale of Two Fatimas [4]
- Pope lauds 'maternity of God' as counter-sign to egoism [5]
- Pope consecrates world's priests to Mary [6]
- An ?Affirmative Orthodoxy? tour de force in Portugal [7]
- Pope?s antidote to secularism: saints, not structures [8]
- On the crisis, Benedict XVI changes the tone [9]
- Pope on secularism: Seek dialogue, but be ready for martyrdom [10]
- Sex abuse crisis 'terrifying,' pope says [11]
- Benedict in Portugal: A different crisis, secularism, and 'Marian Cool' [12] Allen's column for May 7

John Allen's recent reporting from Rome

- Pope's defenders push back [13]
- Benedict?s defense may mean tainting John Paul II [14]
- 'The days of cover-up are over,' Schönborn [15]
- Naming Pell to Bishops would be a landmark move [16]

Support independent Catholic journalism.

Support independent Catholic journalis

Image not found http://ncronline.org/files/images/donate_ncr.gif [1]

Source URL (retrieved on *12/09/2016 - 09:45*): https://www.ncronline.org/news/accountability/days-cover-are-over-sch%CB%86nborn

Links:
[1] http://openx.ncronline.org/www/delivery/ck.php?oaparams=2__bannerid=30__zoneid=56__cb=a2fbd2d8b1__oadest=ht
[2] http://ncronline.org/node/18304
[3] http://ncronline.org/node/18302
[4] http://ncronline.org/node/18300
[5] http://ncronline.org/node/18287
[6] http://ncronline.org/node/18280
[7] http://ncronline.org/node/18271
[8] http://ncronline.org/node/18260
[9] http://ncronline.org/node/18259
[10] http://ncronline.org/node/18254
[11] http://ncronline.org/node/18252
[12] http://ncronline.org/node/18190
[13] http://ncronline.org/node/18332
[14] http://ncronline.org/node/18228

[15] http://ncronline.org/node/18247
[16] http://ncronline.org/node/18217