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Vatican backtracks on support for gay couples

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A top Vatican official blamed the media for "derailing" his recent remarks [1] on possible legal protections for unmarried couples, while reaffirming his support for British and French bishops who have been vocal opponents of same-sex marriage.

Speaking at a Vatican press conference Monday, Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, head of the Pontifical Council for the Family, had acknowledged that nations could find "private law solutions" to protect the rights of unmarried couples -- including, potentially, gay and lesbian couples.

Paglia also said the church should support the repeal of laws that criminalize homosexuality in various countries.

His remarks were widely repeated, with some interpreting it as a softening of the Vatican's stance just as bishops in France and Britain are furiously opposing the legalization of same-sex marriage.

In an interview Wednesday on Vatican Radio, Paglia said he had been "very surprised" by the way his words had been reported by "some media."

"Not only were the words not understood ... but in truth, and perhaps knowingly, they were, as it were, derailed," he said.

For the archbishop, recognizing that "norms that protect individual rights" can find their place in "existing (legal) systems" is "completely different" from approving same-sex marriage.

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, a lay group for gay Catholics, called Paglia's apparent backtracking "disheartening."

However, she emphasized that "real hope on this front comes from the people, not the hierarchy," as Catholics "continue to grow increasingly supportive of civil recognition of same-sex couples' relationships."

In his original remarks, Paglia had been careful to stress that the protection of the rights for unmarried couples shouldn't be confused with the reaffirmation of the unique value of traditional marriage.

But his words came on the eve of a key vote by the British Parliament on legalizing gay marriage, which passed Tuesday 400-175 with the support of Prime Minister David Cameron.

In his Vatican Radio interview, Paglia said he was "totally supportive" of British bishops, and that he had been equally sympathetic to initiatives by French bishops to attempt to stop the legalization of gay marriage.

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