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Italy's Catholic bishops try to put brakes on speedy divorce law

by Josephine McKenna by Religion News Service

Rome — Italy's Catholic bishops have condemned a proposed law that is set to speed up divorce and do away with a three-year separation waiting period.

Legislation to allow consensual divorce after six months and 12 months in contested cases was passed overwhelmingly in the lower house of Parliament May 29. It now heads to the Senate, where it is expected to be approved.

"I do not believe you can call this an achievement, much less define it as historic," said Msgr. Nunzio Galantino, the secretary-general of the Italian Bishops' Conference. "Speedy divorce will not help anyone."

The Catholic bishops' daily, *Avvenire*, also criticized the move in a scathing editorial that accused politicians of sending "a bad political message."

"You have to wonder what foundation you can give the family when a marriage can be dissolved after a few months," wrote Carlo Cardia.

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He warned the law was a further "delegitimization of marriage" and would create a "psychological and cultural void" among the young who will feel that marriage no longer requires a sense of commitment.

Members of Italy's ruling coalition were jubilant when lawmakers from across the political spectrum

endorsed the bill by a margin of 381 to 30, with 14 abstentions.

“The approval of divorce in the lower house represents a decisive step,” said Ivan Salfarotto, government undersecretary for reforms.

“We have taken 11 years to reach an agreement which has come 40 years after the referendum on divorce,” said MP Alessia Morani, a member of the center-left Democratic Party, led by current Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

“Now the fast-track divorce is virtually a reality. It is only missing the seal of the Senate,” said Gian Ettore Gassani, president of the Association of Italian Matrimony Lawyers.

Gassani called for further legal reforms for unmarried and gay couples. Italy does not allow same-sex marriage.

“Italy remains the only one among major European countries to maintain an absolutely conservative family law, which is often in contempt of fundamental human rights,” he said.

Divorce was legalized in Italy in 1970 but the country has what is considered one of the slowest procedures in Europe.

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