

Irish Gay Marriage Vote Is a 'Defeat for Humanity,' Says Vatican Official

The Irish vote to allow same-sex marriage was a "defeat for humanity," a senior Vatican official has said in the first high-level reaction from the Holy See to last week's landmark referendum.

"Not a defeat for Christian principles, it was a defeat for humanity," Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said in comments quoted by Vatican Radio late on Tuesday. "I was very saddened by this result."

Parolin, Pope Francis' most senior Vatican official, added that the referendum result showed the Church needed to improve the ways it preached the Christian message.

"The Church must take account of this reality, but in the sense of reinforcing its commitment to evangelization," he said.

The comments by the Italian-born cardinal, a veteran Vatican diplomat, underlined the shock created by the landslide vote in traditionally Catholic Ireland to allow homosexuals to marry.

After the vote, Dublin Archbishop Diarmuid Martin told Ireland's RTE radio that "the Church needs to do a reality check."

Pope Francis has struck a more sympathetic tone towards homosexuals than many conservative Catholics, famously commenting soon after taking office: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge him?".

But the Argentine-born pontiff has shown no sign of easing his

firm disapproval of gay marriage or shifting Church doctrine that homosexual acts are intrinsically sinful even if homosexuality itself is not.

In Italy, the government of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is preparing to present legislation that would allow civil unions between gay couples although there are no plans to allow full marriage.

The Irish referendum has boosted calls in Germany, which allow same-sex civil unions, to go further and legalize gay marriage. Pressure has started to grow in Chancellor Angela Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), which opposes any change.

"One would think that what the Catholic Irish can do, we can do too," CDU parliamentarian Jens Spahn, a member of the party's presidium, told the daily Die Welt.

© 2015 Thomson Reuters. All rights reserved.