

Will This Church Ever Bless Gay Marriage?

A leading Vatican cardinal said on Thursday the **Roman Catholic Church** will never bless gay marriage, wading into a controversy over the issue in Italy and other countries.

On Tuesday, Italian Interior Minister Angelino Alfano ordered mayors to stop recognizing the validity of gay marriages performed outside the country, prompting protests from rights groups and local officials.

"We have to be honest," Cardinal Francesco Coccopalmerio, the Vatican's highest ranking expert on Church law, said on Thursday when asked if he could foresee the Church ever granting "some sort of blessing" for gay couples.

"For us, and not just for us but for human culture in general, marriage is between a man and a woman," he told a briefing on a synod, or assembly, of some 200 Roman Catholic bishops discussing family matters.

The cardinal said the Church did not judge homosexual couples, regarding them as people of good faith.

"But to bless this type of union ... to say that they are like (heterosexual) marriages, never. This is simply for reasons of logic and identity. To bless them is not part of the way we see Christian doctrine," he said.

Pope Francis has said the church must be more compassionate with homosexuals, saying last year: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge."

But he also reaffirmed church teaching that while gays should be treated with respect and homosexual tendencies are not sinful, homosexual acts are.

Participants at this week's synod, a preparatory session for a larger meeting next year, have said the Church should tone down its condemnatory language when referring to gay couples.

But Coccopalmerio drew a line. "There can be exquisite people in these conditions [of homosexuality] but that's not the same as saying that this is a good union and should be blessed. That is something else."

Italian mayors have allowed gay couples legally wed abroad to register their unions in city halls when they return, just as heterosexual couples who marry outside Italy can do.

The local recognition, which effectively skirted Italian national law that does not allow **gay marriage**, is significant because it can help a partner inherit the other's estate and affects health benefits, insurance and pensions.

A poll taken last year showed that gay marriage was supported by just a quarter of the population in Italy, where the Roman Catholic Church holds considerable sway over politics.

But the poll's findings indicated that this number would probably grow and that an overwhelming number of Italians now favored "civil unions" giving gay couples more rights.

Father Tom Rosica, one of the **Vatican** officials briefing reporters on the closed-door meetings, said a number of bishops said Church officials should stop using phrases such as "intrinsically disordered" when speaking of homosexuals.

That was the phrase used by former Pope Benedict in a document written before his election, when he was still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, head of the Vatican's doctrinal department.

Editing by Mark Heinrich

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