

## Keeping It Together



### Progressive and conservative Catholics need unity

Earlier this month, more than a hundred Catholic parishes in Germany carried out priestly blessings of same-sex couples in defiance of the Vatican and the German bishops. The ceremonies were, in part, a response to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's recent instruction forbidding such blessings and reiterating the Church's traditional teaching regarding marriage and homosexual acts. Evidently, the ceremonies were performed mostly in more liberal German parishes and shunned in more conservative areas, an indication of a deepening disunity. Conservative Catholic commentators praised the CDF's actions and characterized the blessings as schismatic. But then the prefect of the CDF turned his attention to the United States. A number of American bishops want the U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to issue a statement urging that President Joe Biden be denied Communion because of his support for legal abortion and same-sex marriage. Much to the outrage of many of the same conservative Catholics who praised the Vatican for holding firm on sexual morality, Rome threw cold water on the wisdom of such a statement. Presumably such a confrontational step would, like the blessing of same-sex marriages, undermine the unity of the bishops' conference and the larger Church. It would also require approval from the pope, who has cautioned that an obsession with abortion politics divides and distracts the Church. Conservative commentators deplored the Vatican's interference, denouncing Rome's supposed heavy hand in language one is more used to hearing from liberals. During the papacies of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, conservative Catholics demanded complete fealty to the papacy and repeatedly urged the pope to rein in those they considered unorthodox. The removal of the editor of America magazine, Thomas Reese, SJ, was one of the more notorious Vatican actions during those years. But now that there's a pope with a very different style and message, conservatives have decided that many of the decisions coming from Rome warrant skepticism and resistance, not obedience. You can call this intellectual inconsistency or hypocrisy, which in many instances it is. But it is as common among so-called progressive Catholics as it is among conservative ones. Predictably, there has been little criticism from progressives of the same-sex marriage blessings in Germany, even though those actions threaten the unity of the Church in the same way that the efforts of some American bishops to bar Biden from Communion do. Whatever one's views on same-sex marriage, Catholics should be concerned that, while some find such gestures pastoral and compassionate, many others perceive them as signs of further fragmentation in the Church. Those who work for change should recognize that how change comes about can be just as important as the change itself.

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