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CARDINAL SCHÖNBORN ON HUMANAE VITAE

Based on an article in The Record Online which reports news of the parish, the nation and the world on a weekly basis with a special focus on the life of the Catholic Church in Western Australia.

Vienna's Cardinal Archbishop Christoph Schönborn accuses a number of his predecessors of lacking the courage to speak out against birth control and blames them in part for the declining birth rate in Europe, he said this to a Neocatechumenate meeting in Jerusalem on March 27, but it only appeared late in 2008 on the website of the Viennese archdiocese. From there, journalist Christa Pongratz-Lippitt picked up the story, reporting on it on November 8 in The Tablet of London.

Schönborn said that, after the publication of the 1968 encyclical *Humanae Vitae* which reiterated traditional Church teaching condemning as immoral the use of birth control, many bishops' conferences around the world - including those of Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the US and later Australia - issued statements assuring the faithfully that the issue was a matter of conscience. These bishops, Schönborn said, "frightened of the press and of being misunderstood by the faithful," distanced themselves from the Church's teaching. Now, Europe is "about to die out," and part of the reason is the lack of commitment by the bishops to the Church's true, fruitful, loving and beautiful pro-life teaching. He has told *Inside the Vatican* in the past that he is "very worried" about the plummeting population in Austria. In the talk he said "I think that it is also our sin as bishops, even if none of us were bishops in 1968, we have not had, or did not have, the courage to 'swim against the tide' and say yes to *Humanae Vitae*."

The Cardinal, who is close to Pope Benedict XVI, particularly criticised two of the many 1968 bishops' conference declaration on *Humanae Vitae*, which all stressed the importance of the individual conscience. He singled out the Maria Trost Declaration, whose signatories included Cardinal Franz Koenig, the late archbishop of Vienna, president of the Austrian bishops' conference and a Father of the Second Vatican Council, and Konigstein Declaration, whose signatories included Cardinal Julius Doepfner, the late archbishop of Munich, president of the German bishops' conference and another Council Father. Cardinal Schönborn accused the signatories of "weakening the People of God's sense for life so that when 'the wave of abortions' and increasing acceptance of homosexuality followed, the Church lacked the courage to oppose them".

There were a few memorable exceptions in 1968, the cardinal said, one of which was Krakow, where a group of theologians led by the archbishop and cardinal of Krakow, the future Pope John Paul II, drew up a memorandum which was sent to Pope Paul VI, urging him to write *Humanae Vitae*. "I think this witness by a martyr-bishop of the so-called Silent Church carried more weight than all the expertise Pope Paul VI had drawn up on this subject," Cardinal Schönborn said. "It led him to make this courageous decision. I am convinced in my inner being, even if I have no historical evidence, that this text from Krakow helped to give Pope Paul VI the courage to write *Humanae Vitae*."

Schönborn thanked the Neocatechumenate families for having large families which produce many vocations, and he thanked Popes Paul VI, John Paul II and Benedict XVI for discerning between the different charisms and, following the example of St Paul in 1 Corinthians 14, saying which are of God. He asked God to forgive all bishops and give them courage to say "yes" to life.

Speaking from Melbourne, Bishop Peter Elliott told The Record Cardinal Schönborn comments were

correct."What Cardinal Schönborn said is true - and it's time it was stated openly 40 years down the track."