

Vatican newspaper compares marriage equality to communism

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Faced with recent setbacks in the United States and in Europe, the Catholic church has intensified its increasingly uphill battle against gay marriage.

The latest salvos came in December with a front-page article in the Vatican's semiofficial newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, by historian Lucetta Scaraffia and with the release of the pope's annual New Year's Day peace message.

In her Dec. 17 newspaper article, Scaraffia compared proponents of gay marriage, with their championing of "marriage equality," to 20th-century communists who wooed millions with their promise of perfect social and economic equality.

Scaraffia, a 64-year-old former feminist activist who later became a fervent Catholic, has often written in the Vatican newspaper on the issue.

For her, the idea of gay marriage is a product of the same "egalitarian utopia that did so much damage during the 20th century ... deceiving humanity as socialism did in the past."

In November, voters approved gay marriage in three U.S. states, while Spain's Constitutional Court rejected a bid to repeal the country's same-sex marriage law. France and Britain are in the process of legalizing gay marriage.

The church has lobbied hard in all these countries. But it has also tried to present its position in a nonreligious way, as a defense of traditional family that can be embraced by believers and nonbelievers alike.

Particularly in France, church leaders say that their opposition to gay marriage is winning favor outside Catholic circles.

Last month, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to protest the government's planned introduction of gay marriage. "Our demonstration was declaredly nonconfessional," said Paris Archbishop André Vingt-Trois, who noted the participation of Jewish and Muslim groups.

In Pope Benedict XVI's yearly message on peace, released Dec. 14, he said that protecting traditional marriage from "attempts to make it juridically equivalent to radically different types of unions" is not a faith issue.

Marriage's "indispensable role in society" is "inscribed in human nature itself" and "common to all humanity," he wrote. Therefore, the church's efforts to protect it are not "confessional in character, but addressed to all people, whatever their religious affiliation."

In her *L'Osservatore Romano* article, Scaraffia echoed and developed Benedict's argument. To equate a traditional marriage between a man and a woman with a union between homosexuals amounts to a "negation of truth," which would undermine "one of the basic structures of human society, family," she wrote. In the long run, she concluded, societies will end up paying "a very high price" for destroying family, "as it happened in the past with the attempts to create a complete social and economical equality."

One Catholic supporter of gay marriage rejected Scaraffia's argument as "cruel."

Marianne Duddy-Burke, executive director of DignityUSA, agreed that "marriage and family are sacred institutions that deserve the support of both civil and religious communities." But, she added, "these institutions are not limited by the sexual orientations of their members. Love and commitment transcend gender."

The Vatican's arguments against gay marriage, she said, are based on "patently false beliefs about human nature" and represent "a cruel and un-Christian attempt to incite fear and division."

In a recent interview, Scaraffia held her ground.

"The idea that men have to be equal to enjoy the fullness of their rights and be happy dates back to French Revolution, when they demolished church bell towers because they were taller than other buildings," she said.

While socialism tried to realize this utopia through the abolition of private property and social differences, Scaraffia is convinced that today another "difference that defines humanity" is under threat -- the one between man and woman.

Benedict returned to the theme of marriage under attack in his annual Christmas address to officials of the Roman Curia Dec. 21.

He said that the family in Western society is undergoing a "crisis that threatens it to its foundations," owing to false ideas of human nature that equate freedom with selfishness and present God-given sexual identities as a matter of individual choice to the profound detriment of humanity dignity.

"The question of the family is not just about a particular social construct, but about man himself -- about what he is and what it takes to be authentically human," Benedict said.

As a consequence of an "increasingly widespread" refusal to make lifelong commitments to the family, the pope said, "man remains closed in on himself" and "essential elements of the experience of being human are lost."

Citing a study of same-sex marriage and parenting by Rabbi Gilles Bernheim, the chief rabbi of France, Benedict deplored what he called a "new philosophy of sexuality," epitomized by the word "gender," which teaches that "sex is no longer a given element of nature," but a "social role we choose for ourselves."

"Man and woman as created realities, as the nature of the human being, no longer exist," he said. "Man calls his nature into question. From now on he is merely spirit and will."

To reject the "pre-ordained duality of man and woman" is also to reject the family as a "reality established by creation," he said, with particularly degrading consequences for children: "The child has become an object to which people have a right and which they have a right to obtain."

Equally Blessed, a coalition of U.S. Catholic groups working for marriage equality, issued a press release Dec.

21 criticizing "these harsh statements" from the Vatican.

"What we see when we look around us are heterosexual parents loving their LGBT [lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender] children and advocating for their dignity and equality; same-gender couples creating safe and happy homes for their children; and transgender people like those whom the pope criticizes living healthy, mature, and generous lives.

"Increasingly Catholics in the United States and around the world see what we see. Catholics, following their own well-formed consciences, are voting to support equal rights for LGBT people because in their churches and communities they see a far healthier, godly and realistic vision of the human family than the one offered by the pope. We commend it to him for his consideration," the statement said.

[Catholic News Service and *NCR* staff contributed to this report.]

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