

VATICAN AND U.S. DIFFER ON GAY RIGHTS

In Geneva, representatives from the Holy See and the U.S. recently differed on the need for a declaration protecting homosexual rights. The Obama administration introduced a declaration that pledged to end discrimination against homosexuals around the world. But a Vatican spokesman noted that the language of the statement is problematic.

In December 2008, the outgoing Bush administration opposed a French resolution at the U.N. General Assembly on the issue of homosexual rights because it feared that the loosely worded document might make it difficult for American states to reject gay marriage. The Holy See concurred saying that terms like "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" were contentious because they "find no recognition or clear and agreed definition in international law." Thus, they would ineluctably create "uncertainty in the law." Now the Obama administration has chosen to adopt the identical terms in its declaration.

The Holy See said in 2008 that it welcomed attempts "to condemn all forms of violence against homosexual persons as well as urge States to take necessary measures to put an end to all criminal penalties against them." And just recently, a Vatican official said that "A state should never punish a person or deprive a person of the enjoyment of any human right based on the person's feelings." But he hastened to add that behavior is different, meaning that "certain kinds of sexual behaviors must be forbidden by law." He offered by way of example pedophilia and incest.

The main difference between the Obama administration and the Vatican lay in their respective approaches to homosexual marriage: the American government has repeatedly shown no interest supporting efforts to maintain the traditional understanding of marriage. At stake is the right of nations which reject homosexual marriage to maintain their standards without undue pressure from those which embrace it. And that is exactly what will happen if overly broad language is adopted.