

Pope Benedict's Final Address to the Roman Curia and the Decline of Western Civilization

Denny Burk

Editor, Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood

Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

Boyce College

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

Louisville, Kentucky

The Pope's annual address to the Roman Curia has been dubbed "The State of the Union" for the Roman Catholic Church. These speeches are not necessarily big media events, but Pope Benedict XVI's final address turned out to be a headline-grabbing speech—for all the right reasons.

News reports and punditry focused most of their attention on the speech's implications for gay marriage—namely that the Pope opposes same-sex unions of any kind. Nevertheless, the focus on the legal question of gay marriage is a rather shallow analysis of the speech. Make no mistake. The Pope's words are nothing less than a broadside against any notion of same-sex marriage. But what he said actually goes much deeper than that.

He argues that there is a "crisis" threatening the very foundations of the family in the western world. The crisis is not merely about a particular social construct, but about what it means to be "authentically human." The family is in crisis

because mankind in the Western world has forgotten what it means to be created in the image of God as male and female. The Pope takes on not merely homosexual marriage, but the entire foundation of modern gender theory—the idea that gender is something that you choose, not something that you are. I think it's worth quoting him at length on this point:

The very notion of being—of what being human really means—is being called into question... According to this philosophy, sex is no longer a given element of nature, that man has to accept and personally make sense of: it is a social role that we choose for ourselves, while in the past it was chosen for us by society. The profound falsehood of this theory and of the anthropological revolution contained within it is obvious. People dispute the idea that they have a nature,

COUNCIL MEMBERS	Daniel Heimbach	Dorothy Patterson	Nancy Leigh DeMoss	Charles S. & Rhonda H. Kelley	J. Stanley Oakes	Joseph M. Stowell III
Daniel L. Akin	H. Wayne House	John Piper	Lane T. Dennis	Beverly LaHaye	Raymond C. Ortlund Jr.	Larry Walker
Donald Balasa	Susan Hunt	James Stahr	Thomas R. Edgar	Gordon R. Lewis	J. I. Packer	Stu Weber
James Borland	Elliott Johnson	K. Erik Thoennes	John Frame	Robert Lewis	Paige Patterson	William Weinrich
Austin Chapman	Peter Jones	Bruce A. Ware	Paul Gardner	Crawford & Karen Loritts	Dennis & Barbara Rainey	Luder Whitlock
Jack Cottrell	Rebecca Jones		W. Robert Godfrey	Erwin Lutzer	Robert Saucy	Peter Williamson
J. Ligon Duncan III	Mary Kassian		Bill H. Haynes	John F. MacArthur Jr.	James Sauer	
Steve Farrar	George W. Knight III	BOARD OF REFERENCE	David M. Howard Sr.	Connie Marshner	Siegfried Schatzmann	
Mary Farrar	C. J. Mahaney	S. M. Baugh	R. Kent Hughes	Richard L. Mayhue	Thomas R. Schreiner	
Wayne A. Grudem	R. Albert Mohler Jr.	Wallace Benn	James B. Hurley	Marty Minton	F. LaGard Smith	
Joshua Harris	Heather Moore	Tal Brooke	Paul Karleen	J. P. Moreland	R. C. Sproul	

given by their bodily identity, that serves as a defining element of the human being. They deny their nature and decide that it is not something previously given to them, but that they make it for themselves. According to the biblical creation account, being created by God as male and female pertains to the essence of the human creature. This duality is an essential aspect of what being human is all about, as ordained by God. This very duality as something previously given is what is now disputed. The words of the creation account: “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27) no longer apply.¹

Amen. Few people—and I fear far too few Christians—realize that what the Pope is talking about here is at the leading edge of the conflict between the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light. The secular West has given up on God as the maker in whose image man is created. Our culture has given up on the idea that men and women are different and that they are so by God’s design. In the West, male and female are not creation categories. They are simply identities that we learn from culture or that we choose to inhabit.

It would be easy to blame this devolution on feminism or queer theory,² but that would be too superficial. For both modern feminism and queer theory derive from the secular spirit of the age which denies that we are as God has made us. It is not the Spirit of God, but another spirit altogether that says that male and female are completely interchangeable, not only at the level of social roles but also at the level of sexual practice. The feminists and the queer theorists hold such basic assumptions in common, and that is why their alliance in the larger culture has been so unbreakable.³

Many secular responses to the Pope’s speech focused almost entirely on the question of gay marriage and the perception that the Pope is against “gay rights.” This secular narrative defines this discussion exclusively in terms of the march of human progress and equality. It is able to do that because it has already accepted—perhaps uncritically—the notion that gender is something you learn, not something that you are. If those assumptions about gender turn

out to be false—and Scripture tells us that they are indeed false—then the narrative of equality that is built upon them crumbles. Those advancing the “equality” narrative may not realize this, but they have built their entire house on shifting sand. That house will be washed away in due time.

As a Protestant and a Baptist, I have many serious differences with the former Pope. But when it comes to the ethics of gender and sexuality and the rot that is eating away at Western culture, I find that we have much in common. Pope Benedict rings true on this because he is agreeing with Gen 1:27: “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” God did in fact make us male and female. To deny this is to deny what it means to be human. On this, the Pope Benedict was profoundly right.

ENDNOTES

¹Pope Benedict XVI, “Pope: Address to the Roman Curia” [December 21, 2012], accessed online, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-address-to-the-roman-curia>.

²Queer theory is the cross-disciplinary intellectual movement that questions the validity of sexual identity categories. Queer theorists typically hold that not only are gender roles socially constructed, but so is biological gender. Categories such as male, female, gay, lesbian, transgender, etc., are purely conventional and have no stable definition. As we shall see, Judith Butler is one of the crucial progenitors of this movement. For an introduction to queer theory, see Gust A. Yep, Karen E. Lovaas, and John P. Elia, “Introduction: Queering Communication: Starting the Conversation,” in *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)* (ed. Gust A. Yep, Karen E. Lovaas, and John P. Elia; Binghamton, NY: Harrington Park, 2003), 2ff.

³Laurel C. Schneider, “Homosexuality, Queer Theory, and Christian Theology,” *Religious Studies Review* 26, no. 1 (2000): 5-6: “Whether queer theory is something really separate from feminism is not at all clear.... Where queer theory diverges from feminism is ... only where feminist theory is falsely limited to essentialist, even ontological claims about women, nature, and sexuality.”