

Defending traditional marriage is prophetic, not reactionary, pope says

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CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy -- Defending traditional marriage is not an expression of backward thinking, said Pope Benedict XVI, but of values essential to the future of humanity.

"Marriage and the family are institutions that must be promoted and defended from every possible misrepresentation of their true nature, since whatever is injurious to them is injurious to society itself," he said.

The pope made his remarks Sept. 21 in a talk to French bishops visiting Rome to report on the status of their dioceses and meet with Vatican officials.

Both France's incoming president, Francois Hollande, and Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault have promised to promote the legalization of same-sex marriage and of adoption by same-sex couples. If the measure passes, France would become the ninth European nation to recognize same-sex marriage. France legalized same-sex civil unions in 1999.

The family, which is the foundation of society, "is threatened in many places by a faulty conception of human nature," the pope told the group of 32 bishops.

How an individual is raised and the well-being of society are interdependent, he said.

"Defending life and the family in society isn't retrograde, rather it's prophetic," he said, because it helps "promote those values that permit the full development of the human person."

The pope also noted France's celebration this year of the sixth centenary of the birth of St. Joan of Arc, whom he has suggested as a model for Christian politicians.

"One of the most original features of this young woman's holiness is precisely the link between mystical experience and political mission," the pope said, calling St. Joan a "model of secular holiness in the service of the common good."

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