



NEW YORK STATE CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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June 9, 2008, Statement on “Same-Sex Marriage”

By the Catholic Bishops of New York State

Recently, proposals have been put forth in our state to recognize so-called “same-sex marriage,” a radical step that would remove from marriage its most basic, fundamental characteristic, thereby altering its very essence. Our Governor has ordered recognition of such unions from other states as “marriages” in New York. This redefinition defies reason. Additionally, the state Assembly last year approved a measure to permit such “marriages” here, though to date the Senate has not.

Such actions, whether the legal union is called “marriage” or “civil union,” represent a destructive development for our state.

The joining of man and woman in the bond of marriage is a constant and visible reminder of God’s goodness and the beauty of the Divine plan for humankind. The Catholic Church teaches that Jesus Christ himself raised marriage to the dignity of a sacrament. And, indeed, all of the world’s great religions rightfully recognize marriage as a holy union of a man and a woman.

Numerous theological and religious arguments could be advanced as to why same-sex unions should be rejected. However, this is not simply a matter of theology, and religious values are not the sole source of opposition to this plan.

Marriage always has been, is now and always will be a union of one man and one woman in an enduring bond. This is consistent with biology and natural law, and should be obvious to all, no matter what their religion, or even if they have no religion at all. It is a mutual personal gift between the two that serves the individual couple in many ways, allowing them to grow in love and, through that love, to bring forth children.

Just as importantly, this union also serves the larger society. Marriage provides a stable family structure for the rearing of children and is the

ultimate safeguard so that civil society can exist and flourish. That is why civil society through the ages has recognized its duty to foster and respect marriage between a man and a woman.

To be clear, the state’s historic recognition of marriage is based on the biological fact that the physical union of a man and a woman tends to lead to children. Common sense and empirical evidence tell us that children’s welfare is best served in most cases by their being reared in a stable home with their mother and father. This fact has been recognized and intuited by societies for millennia. Encouraging marriage between a man and a woman, therefore, serves the state’s interests, as well-reared children who live with their mother and father are much more likely to grow to be good citizens, thereby, creating wealth, stability and security for the members of the society.

On the other hand, there is no compelling state interest in granting legal recognition to same-sex relationships. The simple fact that two people have a committed relationship is not a reason for the state to confer upon it the status of marriage. If affection and commitment were the only prerequisites for a marital relationship, then it is conceivable that any two or more individuals could claim the right to a civil union, no matter what their relationship.

Recognizing same sex unions will only serve to devalue marriage even more than what has already occurred in recent years. Numerous scholars have written extensively of the negative impact on children and society resulting from our nation’s growing rates of divorce and out-of-wedlock births over the last four decades.

Societal acceptance of casual divorce and single parenting was initially viewed by many as the natural progression of an enlightened society, just as “same-sex marriage” is viewed by some today.

Warnings from leaders such as the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of the consequences of family breakdown were once considered alarmist. Today they are seen as truly prophetic, as there is largely consensus among sociologists that children often suffer from divorce and single parenting. Research tells us that such children, in general, are not as well educated and earn less money as adults than children who live with a married mother and father and are more likely to engage in undesirable behaviors in their youth that may have long-term implications on their lives.

Marriage and family have worked well throughout history to promote the common good. “Same-sex marriage” furthers a societal disconnect between procreation and marriage while promoting the notion that a nontraditional family structure serves a child as well as a traditional one. We are confident that history will judge this notion harshly.

But what about the argument of proponents of “same-sex marriage” that traditional marriage is a form of unjust discrimination against homosexual persons? This is not the case, as marriage by definition is a union of physically and emotionally complementary male and female partners. However, it is true that homosexual persons sometimes face unjust discrimination in certain areas. This is wrong and must be opposed by everyone. But the state need not ignore the realities of natural law or discard thousands of years of human tradition to address such issues.

Clearly, the state can review whatever benefits or privileges that it has through the years conferred on married couples and, in cases where true discrimination may be at play, fashion legislative remedies. In reality, many benefits sometimes considered unique to married persons are open to all already. For example, New York State allows an

individual to designate whomever he or she chooses as a health-care proxy. Homes may be owned jointly by unmarried persons and a person can bequeath property to survivors in a will as he or she sees fit.

The question of such benefits should not be allowed to cloud the discussion because, in truth, the movement for “same-sex marriage” is less about such benefits as it is about societal acceptance and approval of homosexual relationships. But it is not the business of the state to attempt to legislate such approval.

While sensitive to the pastoral needs of homosexual persons in our communities, families and churches, our role is to speak the truth in charity. As Catholic bishops, we want to make absolutely clear that our firm beliefs about marriage and against the governor’s proposal must not be misconstrued to be in any way a condemnation of homosexual people or an attack on their human dignity. Our Church teaches, and we affirm, that we must treat our homosexual sisters and brothers with dignity and love, as we would all God’s children. Indeed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church warns that any form of prejudice and hatred – “every sign of unjust discrimination” – against homosexual people should be avoided. (CCC 2358)

But we must state that the most elementary study of history, sociology, biology or theology points to the certain truth that marriage is the union of one man and one woman, which the state should not and must not attempt to alter.

We call on our state government to reject attempts to alter the sacred institution of marriage. We strongly encourage all Catholic New Yorkers and everyone who believes in the sanctity of marriage to make their voices heard on this compelling moral and social issue.

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