

## **On Falsehoods and Corrections.**

In the Catholic Leader (July 19<sup>th</sup>), Archbishop Coleridge offered his views on what he called “the 10 falsehoods relating to same-sex marriage”. He said that he was doing this “as a service to the truth in this complex and important matter”.

The Archbishop is to be commended for being concise – each of the 10 falsehoods are addressed in about 6-12 lines. His views are essentially the long established views of the hierarchy. It is tempting to reply to each statement with different views, as one might expect to find in a matter that is “complex and important”. Rarely is it possible to be simple and just in dealing with complexity.

At the heart of the Archbishop’s article, are three inter-related issues, which underpin the rest of the article. These issues are : love; homosexuality; and marriage. If you accept the “correction to each “ falsehood” in these three issues, then the other seven corrections fall into place. I wish to shine a different light on each of the Archbishop’s key points.

Firstly, his statement about the falsehood of love. He says there is only one kind of love that is nuptial – that between a man and a woman , that is free lifelong and open to children. The falsehood is to say that such a form of love between two men or two women is nuptial. This has been traditional Church teaching, but simply asserting it does not necessarily make it true. The Church discovered this when it erred about Galileo and his theory that the earth revolved around the sun (not the opposite, as the Church then taught.) Homosexual people in seeking marriage also want to make a commitment based on a love that is free, lifelong and open to children . In this way they also want to commit to marriage as a stable form of relationship that is good for society as well as for themselves, and for any children they may seek to raise. It seems premature and somewhat unjust to say that homosexual couples could not possibly share in the “nuptial” kind of love of heterosexual couples. Given appropriate support by State and Church, it is highly likely that

homosexual couples could share and contribute to the building up of the institution we call marriage.

Secondly, the Archbishop's correction about homosexuality and heterosexuality. He says that "heterosexuality has been privileged because it alone can secure the future by producing children". Most of modern society would not accept this as true, except if the word "producing" is interpreted as "by sexual intercourse". We all know that couples may produce children through adoption, through IVF and other forms of assisted reproductive technology, and surrogacy. This is not to deny the very special status of intercourse, but again it seems somewhat limiting to ignore the other ways for any married couple to produce children, and on that basis to deny that the couple's relationship is that of marriage. There are a number of research studies that show that homosexual couples can raise healthy well-adjusted children. The secret is not to be found in gender, but in the love of the couple which they share with their children as they build a sense of family.

Thirdly is the falsehood of marriage . The Archbishop expresses this as : "Humanity has got marriage wrong until recently." He argues that the time-tested cross cultural wisdom can't be disregarded. This explanation condemns us to always doing what we always did, so that we always get what we always got. It denies us the chance to consider if there might be merit in looking at new insights; the chance to examine if changes in other conditions might suggest a broadening of our understandings would be good; the chance to compassionately listen to the other's views. It would seem that homosexual couples do not want to take anything away from marriage, but rather to contribute their unique experiences. We should not be so dogmatic in arguing that society could not or should not adopt a more inclusive view of an institution which society values and supports.

The Archbishop concludes his article by saying: "This debate is about the meaning of marriage." Let us all try to play our part, so that it is a genuine debate and not simply a restatement of past positions. Debate, as a form of conversation, is one way that we humans think together.