

Fr Brian Lucas
General Secretary
Australian Catholic Bishops Conference
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August 17, 2015

Dear Members of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference,

I am writing to you as a concerned Catholic and man of faith. In addition, I am the father of 3 school-age children born from a loving heterosexual conjugal union. I have read carefully the Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops of Australia to all Australians on the 'Same-sex Marriage' debate, *'Don't Mess With Marriage'*. Since then, I have reflected deeply on it, and my conscience has been demanding a response to your missive on what has become a matter of significant gravity in our community.

I have come up with a basic definition of marriage that you may wish to ponder and maybe to find useful. I include some of the thinking that has led to it.

Marriage is a declaration of the dedicated and loyal, loving commitment of two freely consenting adults who are uniting in this relationship as equal participants.

Mention of 'loyal' covers fidelity, while 'commitment' implies something long-lasting. The use of 'equal' negates any idea of polyamory or polygamy.

There is no reference to sexual orientation or gender. In regard to these two issues, as well as human relations and sexuality overall, I have considered for many years that society in general, and that the Catholic Church in particular, has displayed significant immaturity and ignorance. In the Church's case, this unenlightenment has contained an additional unhealthy and unhelpful prurience. It is only within the last 3 decades that even the medical profession has desisted from regarding homosexuality as a psychiatric condition. The gift of sex is one of many bestowed upon mankind by God, and is something for each person to use responsibly. With this in mind, it is to be enjoyed ethically and is to be not necessarily denied or suppressed.

Also there is no allusion in the above pronouncement to procreation. Of course I agree that a marital coupling should be open to the possibility of offspring and sexual intimacy, but it should not be have to be defined by these desirable elements. The Second Vatican Council during the 1960's removed the distinction between the primary and secondary ends of marriage, respectively the begetting of children and the cultivation of mutual devotion between the couple. Prior to this, the Church had instructed that the former objective took precedence over the latter. The Council's learned deliberation interpreted both intentions as being equivalent. The main aim of this marital bond is the relationship, and love is at its core. This basic tenet cannot be disparaged and dismissed as being an 'emotional tie'.

For the supporters of same-sex marriage, as exemplified in the recent Irish referendum, a crucial consideration seemed to be centred on the concepts of equality and discrimination. These notions are

highlighted in the Bishops' Pastoral Letter. With respect, I disagree with the Bishops' argument regarding discrimination when they cite examples of women, children, Aborigines, refugees, athletes, and those with disabilities or reading difficulties. These are all minority groups in terms of some single component or combination of integral constituents such as power, privilege, finance or number. There are references to places, institutions or programs. In the instances specified, these particular groupings are the beneficiaries of a positive form of partisanship or policies, and most importantly inclusion.

On the other hand, homosexual people, whose prevalence worldwide is extremely difficult to ascertain accurately, but possibly is somewhere in the range of 1 to 10 per cent, have suffered negative prejudice and bigotry worldwide for centuries. They encompass a hitherto disadvantaged class and have been the recipients of customs and conventions of exclusion. As a medical practitioner, from all the scientific evidence that I have discerned, and from what I have learned through study and life experience, I believe that each human being is born with a certain innate sexual orientation which does not involve personal voluntary choice. This inalienable trait is intrinsic to everyone, as is a physical characteristic such as eye colour, or else handedness. As people of conviction, we only can assume that God intentionally created humanity in such a way, and that the existence of same-sex attraction is not a mistake.

The 'Gay Marriage' debate is complex and potentially very divisive, and those on either side of this divide need to be aware of the delicacy of the dialogue and maintain a tolerance and a respect for the rights of others to hold a view that is contrary to theirs. I refer you to a sensible and articulate opinion piece written by Fr John Dobson from the Sunshine Coast. Fr Dobson is a veteran priest who happens to be also Chancellor of the University of the Sunshine Coast.

<http://m.sunshinecoastdaily.com.au/news/churches-not-moral-police-same-sex-marriage-priest/2667331>

I suspect that a merger between 2 individuals of identical gender probably never could attain full sacramental status within the Catholic Church, but hopefully one day this same Church might not only countenance and recognise such an alliance, but also actually might sanction it and bless it. Possibly I possess a more optimistic view of humankind in an increasingly secular world, but I would suggest that rather than pose a threat to the institution of matrimony, or to the societal unit of the family including the nurturing of children, it will strengthen both wedlock and kinship.

Yours sincerely,

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