

Confraternity of Catholic Clergy

British Province of Pope Saint Gregory the Great

www.confraternityccb.org.uk



BRIEFING PAPER ON 'SAME-SEX MARRIAGE'

What are the reasons for this paper?

The Government proposes legislation to allow for same-sex marriage. The Catholic Church, with many others, strongly and unequivocally opposes such plans both for religious reasons (based on Scripture and Tradition) and because they are against the natural law which applies to everyone regardless of their faith commitment. Marriage, as the lifelong union of one man and one woman ordered for the procreation and upbringing of children, is rooted in human nature itself. Put simply, no government has the authority to change that. Any attempt to do so is harmful to society and constitutes a threat to freedom of conscience and the Church's ability to function within civil society.

Why does it matter that marriage is between a man and a woman?

Marriage is as old as humanity itself. Men and women are complementary, equal in dignity but different. The very reason for this sexual distinction is to bring new life into the world. Since the beginning of humanity, marriage has been viewed as the proper environment for this, providing children with the context of permanent, committed love in which they can best flourish. Studies consistently highlight the importance of a stable family, of a mother and a father, for the best results for raising the next generation. But marriage concerns more than parents and children. It is the basis of a stable society and of civilisation itself and, therefore, requires legal recognition and protection.

But the Prime Minister says marriage is so important that everyone who wishes should be allowed to marry. Shouldn't we be supporting him?

The basis of the Prime Minister's argument seems to be that, if two adults in a committed loving relationship wish to enter marriage, then they should be allowed to do so, regardless of the fact they are of the same gender. With respect, the Prime Minister is misrepresenting the nature of marriage. It is not, nor ever has been, about just any loving, committed relationship. We might have a loving committed relationship with our parents or our best friends, but marriage with them would be neither possible nor appropriate. Only the natural complementarity between a man and a woman can lead to marriage. Only this loving union, by definition, is open to bringing forth and nurturing children. Even in old age and infertility a husband and wife still preserve, like no other relationship, the elements of complementarity. That is why marriage is only possible between a man and a woman.

So isn't the Church just discriminating against gay people?

Absolutely, not. The Church holds that every human being is created equal by God and is to be respected accordingly. The Church strongly opposes unjust discrimination against people with homosexual inclinations. In fact, the proposed legislation is not directly linked to the issue of same-sex attraction. The issue is about the meaning of marriage. Being pro-equality does not mean that everything is the same, nor that distinctions between things are unjustified. To say that everyone is equal is not the equivalent of saying they are the same. To say that a man cannot be a mother, and a woman cannot be a father is not against equality. To state this is simply to recognise an obvious fact of nature. It is in no way discriminatory. The same is true of marriage. Marriage is intrinsically linked to the procreation of children and makes no sense apart from this.

OK so same-sex marriage isn't possible according to Christian belief, but the Prime Minister has given you assurances that you won't have to marry same-sex couples in church if you don't want to. Why can't you accept they can marry elsewhere?

This is not merely a matter of religious belief and practice. It regards the future of society as a whole. It is called a matter of natural law which is something common to all regardless of personal religious belief. Tampering with such a fundamental natural institution as marriage is fraught with danger. Society ceases to flourish when it fails to cherish the family and the authentic understanding of marriage which makes the family possible. The experience of other countries where same-sex marriage has been introduced clearly indicates that the proposed change is only the beginning of a process of social engineering with tragic consequences. In Canada, since same-sex marriage was legalised, the courts have ruled that a child can legally have three parents. In the Netherlands also three-way relationships are now given a measure of legal recognition. Do we really want the UK to go down this route with all the consequent harm to children? Furthermore, with good cause, we have no confidence in the assurances offered by the Prime Minister. We recall how Catholic adoption agencies were closed because they refused to participate in a state permission for same-sex couples adopting children. If exclusion of same-sex couples from marriage is defined by equality law as discriminatory, toleration of such exclusion will not last long. Any attempted safeguard would be vulnerable to a future government, to a British court giving precedence to equality considerations and to the European Court of Human Rights.

Isn't this a matter primarily for priests and other professionals in the Church?

Sadly, not. There is a real possibility that the Catholic Church will not be allowed for much longer to perform state recognised marriage registration in church because of its opposition to same-sex marriage. But leading human rights lawyer Aidan O'Neill QC has given his legal opinion that NHS Chaplains, teachers and foster parents could all be vulnerable. The rights of parents over their children's education is also at threat. Mr O'Neill's legal opinion is that any school, including a faith school, could legally dismiss a teacher for refusing to use educational material promoting same-sex marriage. Catholics must be aware of this threat to schools and teachers, and resist it with every means at their disposal. Similarly, if an institution is deemed discriminatory, can its charitable status be maintained? Legal cases would inevitably follow the passing of such legislation as in Canada.

So what are you encouraging us to do?

The Confraternity of Catholic Clergy is united in defending marriage and joins wholeheartedly the campaign of the Catholic Archbishops. *We urge everyone who cares about upholding the meaning of marriage in civil law to make their views known to their MPs clearly, calmly and forcefully, and without impugning the motives of others. We urge all parties to ensure their Members have a free vote. It is not too late to stop this Bill.* The Church calls on every Catholic, in conscience, to a clear and emphatic opposition to such proposals, and a refusal of any formal co-operation should such laws be passed. All this must be conducted in a spirit of charity. The Church defends the absolute dignity of every human being in the same way that she defends marriage and the family, that is, in proclaiming the truth with love. In this Christmas season, under the patronage of the Holy Family, let us all pray and work to ensure that the centrality of marriage and freedom of conscience which we have so long enjoyed continue to be defended by the laws of our country.

1st January 2013

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God