



## Gay Marriage: Reason Gone Wild

In the last 50 years, the modern landscape of sexual mores has shifted in dramatic ways. The acceptance of unilateral divorce, cohabitation, alternate lifestyles and birthing by means of technology and without sexual intercourse have contributed to a loss of appreciation for the special and unique role of marriage. In today's struggle between a secularist morality and a morality based on human reason, the sacred institution of marriage is the battlefield.

Until recently, same-sex couples did not marry anywhere in the world. Now they do in the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Canada, South Africa and two states in our country. On May 15, the California Supreme Court overturned a ban on gay marriage. Unlike courts in New York, Maryland and Washington, this court extended the name of marriage and the benefits of marriage to same-sex unions.

While 26 states have approved constitutional amendments banning same-sex marriage, California has moved in the opposite direction. It now joins Massachusetts in sanctioning same-sex unions with the legal status of marriage. In its 4-3 ruling, the California high court struck down state laws against same-sex marriage. Once again the court has abrogated to itself the right to redefine marriage against the will of the people. The will of the majority has fallen to the tyranny of the court.

Individuals steeped in the Judaeo-Christian heritage have a deep respect for marriage as an institution coming from the hands of the Creator who gave Eve to Adam and Adam to Eve (Gn 1:27 and 2:18-24). For Catholics, marriage has a most special dignity. Christ raised the union of a man and a woman in marriage to a sacrament. He made it the sign of his own love for the Church (cf. Eph 5: 21-33).

Seventy-three percent of people who attend religious services weekly oppose same-sex unions. However, the issue is more fundamental than a particular religious doctrine. The issue of same-sex marriages is about the very structure of the human person as male and female and the right ordering of nature.

In the natural design of creation, there is a complementarity of man and woman as male and female. "Precisely because man and woman are different, yet complementary, they can come together in a union that is open to the possibility of new life" (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care*, Nov. 14, 2006).

Marriage is not a private relationship between two individuals. It is a public act. Marriage is not just a way of expressing human affection between two individuals. Marriage has a primary purpose. It is oriented to the common good, not just the good of the individuals. For this reason, marriage has always been something more than a private arrangement.

In our society, the desire to overcome prejudice and to guarantee equal rights for all is something good and worthy of praise. A society that promotes hatred and relegates certain individuals to a second-class status violates both charity and justice. However, the arguments that would place same-sex unions on the same level of marriage on the basis of equality are simply not rational.

Entering marriage is something much more than the exchange of love and sexual intimacy. When a man and woman marry, they begin something new. The gift of sexuality draws a man and a woman so that they form a stable, loving union that welcomes children.

By nature, sexual intimacy is ordered to marriage. The inclination to sexual activity between same-sex individuals is disordered. In fact, "any tendency toward sexual pleasure that is not subordinated to the greater goods of love and marriage is disordered..." (*ibid.*). Some individuals do experience an inclination to same-sex attraction. The inclination itself does not make what is disordered morally permissible; any more than the inclination to impatience or anger confer on these tendencies the imprimatur of good.

Today's tolerance of any type of sexual activity outside of marriage has seriously impaired this proper understanding of the very purpose of human sexuality. Certainly, law should recognize the equality of every individual. But laws that frame the question of same-sex unions in terms of equality ignore the logical distinction between the individual with his or her basic human dignity and marriage with its fundamental nature and purpose. Good law recognizes the purpose of marriage.

If marriage is simply a matter of expressing sexual affection between individuals, why stop at two individuals? Why not three or four or more? "By socially defining and supporting a particular kind of sexual union, the society defines for its young what the preferred relationship is and what purposes it serves. Successful societies do this first of all because children need and deserve fathers as well as mothers" (Maggie Gallagher, "[What is Marriage For? The Public Purposes of Marriage Law](#)," Louisiana Law Review, 2002).

We cannot be indifferent to the question of law and same-sex marriage. Nor can we delude ourselves into thinking it is merely a personal issue for those who enter such unions. When legislatures pass laws and courts make decisions, they are actually "structuring principles of man's life in society, for good or for ill. They 'play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behavior'" (Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 90).

Laws externally shape the way we live. They also influence the next generation's understanding not only of behavior but of morality as well. Laws that equate same-sex unions with marriage devalue marriage itself and darken the moral

vision of a people.

"The future of humanity passes by way of the family" (Pope John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86). Therefore, in our private views and public actions as Catholics committed to the common good, we have a moral obligation to defend marriage as a union between a man and a woman that is open to life. Our society refuses to allow the wisdom of its religious heritage to influence public discussion. In the public forum, we suffer a loss of faith. When our courts pass decisions contrary to the truth of the human person, we also suffer the loss of logic and reason gone wild.

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