

Same-Sex Marriage

Last month, when the California State Supreme Court legitimized the constitutionality of same-sex marriage, I did not want to make a “knee-jerk” response, either in preaching or writing. In last Wednesday’s Claremont Courier, however, a [notice](#) appeared of a same-sex wedding allegedly performed by a Catholic priest. Several people questioned me about it, and I wrote this letter to the Courier to address the issue.

Dear Editor:

The announcement in the Wednesday, June 20, edition of The Claremont Courier concerning the recent wedding of a homosexual couple “in a Catholic ceremony” has raised a number of questions among Catholic readers, as well as those who do not share the Catholic faith. Has the Catholic Church changed?

The Roman Catholic Church cannot change the nature of marriage to accommodate the desires of individuals or the whims of civil society. The policy and practice of the Church cannot do other than uphold the meaning of marriage as it is, rather than as some would like it to be. Therefore, no Catholic priest in good standing can perform a “same-sex marriage” -- it simply is not a marriage. The reality of marriage is independent of how it may be legally defined.

Whatever the event at the San Diego Zoo may have been, it was not a “Catholic ceremony” with a “full wedding Mass,” as described in the article. The unnamed “priest” was not officiating at a wedding that could be recognized by the Catholic Church.

Confusion arises because the word “Catholic” cannot be copyrighted--nor should it be. But that means most anyone can use it to describe pretty much what they want.

There are a number of former Catholic priests (“defrocked” is the word the media often likes to use), who make themselves available for services that are not legitimately Catholic, as well as some who simply trade on the word “Catholic” to engage in a profit-making business. This understandably gives rise to confusion, but one would hope that conscientious reporting would at least probe a little more deeply before printing an assertion that is clearly contrary to both the common perception of the Catholic Church as well as its actual teaching and practice.

While the Catholic Church cannot agree to redefining a same-sex union as “marriage,” gay Catholics in whatever situation continue to be welcome in the Catholic Church and are invited to full participation.

In itself, sexual orientation has little bearing on how one hears the call of Christ and lives in union with Christ in the Catholic Christian community. We are all flawed human beings, and our sexuality--gay or straight--often poses both ambiguities and challenges to authentic Christian living, and deserves understanding and mutual support, not criticism and condemnation.

An individual’s sexual orientation should never be an occasion for discrimination, hatred or violence. Whatever moral issues may surround sexuality, they are always appropriately dealt with in the private forum of spiritual counseling and sacramental confession, leading to reconciliation and healing, never in the public arena, which so often occasions hatred, polarization, and violence. These latter are greater sins than anything having to do with sexuality!

Rev. Msgr. Thomas Welbers, Pastor,
Our Lady of the Assumption Church, Claremont
June 26, 2008

(Archdiocese of L.A. Bishops statement on reverse side.)

THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Statement of the Bishops of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

June 16, 2008

The Catholic Bishops of the United States have affirmed repeatedly that persons with a homosexual orientation “must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity.”¹ Accordingly the Bishops condemn all forms of violence, scorn, and hatred—whether subtle or overt—against men and women who are homosexual. All people, regardless of sexual inclination, are called to holiness; and “should be encouraged to take an active role in the faith community” and to live according to its teachings.²

Nonetheless, the Church cannot approve of redefining marriage, which has a unique place in God’s creation, joining a man and a woman in a committed relationship in order to nurture and support the new life for which marriage is intended. The meaning of marriage is deeply rooted in history and culture, and has been shaped considerably by Christian tradition. Its meaning is given, not constructed. “When marriage is redefined so as to make other relationships equivalent to it, the institution of marriage is devalued and further weakened.”³

The state has a primary and fundamental obligation to protect and promote the family, which is rooted in marriage and sustained by it.

Some benefits currently sought by same sex partners can already be obtained without regard to marital status. For example, individuals can agree to own property jointly with another, and they can generally designate anyone they choose to be a beneficiary of their will or to make health care decisions in case they become incompetent.⁴ Other desired benefits such as sharing in a partner’s health insurance could be made available without the drastic step of a cultural or legal redefinition of marriage.

Let us strengthen our resolve to respect the dignity of each human being and to protect the sanctity of marriage, asking God’s guidance in our efforts to promote the common good central to a free and democratic society.

1 Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2358

2 United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ministry to Persons with a Homosexual Inclination: Guidelines for Pastoral Care* (November 14, 2006), 16.

3 *Ibid.*, 15.

4 See USCCB, *Between Man and Woman: Questions and Answers about Marriage and Same-Sex Unions*, (November 12, 2003).

Statement issued by Los Angeles Archbishop, Cardinal Roger Mahony, together with Auxiliary Bishops, Thomas J. Curry, Gabino Zavala, Gerald Wilkerson, Edward Wm. Clark, Alexander Salazar, and Oscar A. Solis.

More information regarding Catholic Teaching on Marriage can be found on the website of the California Catholic Conference:

<http://www.cacatholic.org/bishops-statements/what-is-marriage.html>

(Msgr. Tom Welbers’ letter in response to Claremont Courier article on reverse side.)