"Lines from a Rocking Chair"
Archbishop Anthony Meagher
February 2005

You probably wish that I would move my "Lines from a rocking chair" to some other topic. I am sure that we have all heard more than enough about the issue of "same-sex marriage". I will be as happy as you when June arrives, this issue is resolved, and our politicians head back home. However, I believe that it may be helpful for me to comment on a few issues related to this very important topic.

First of all, I wish to refer to the statement recently attributed to the Honourable Pierre Pettigrew, Minister of External Affairs. He is reported to have said that the Church has no right to enter the debate on "same-sex marriage". Taken to its logical conclusion, this would seem to mean that only an elite few should express their opinion on government matters. Would our country then become either an oligarchy or a dictatorship? Does Mr. Pettigrew really prefer to hear only the opinion of secular atheists?

I would contend that more people, not fewer people, should participate in this dialogue. Until now, I have heard only lawyers and politicians discuss these matters. I have heard no reasoned examination of the long-term effects of equating "same-sex marriage" with traditional marriage from sociologists, psychologists, or others who might be able to enlighten us. Scientific knowledge about the effects of same-sex relationships is in its infancy. The Government is preparing to enact legislation which will encourage these relationships – the law does indeed act as a teacher – when we have no idea if they are good for society.

Commentators continually tell us that no one has produced a reasoned argument demonstrating how extending rights and benefits to same-sex couples could in any way jeopardize traditional marriage. Here I will repeat what I have said elsewhere – in my own letter to the people of the Archdiocese and in interviews on CBC radio, on Kingston's CKWS TV, and on a Belleville radio station. My principal point has been that, if the Government's primary concern were the issue of rights and benefits, it could develop legislation which would provide them without changing the traditional definition of marriage. For example, take the case in which two men or two women have lived together for thirty years and one dies. Legislation could be enacted which ensures a fair distribution of what they have worked together to acquire over the years. Matters such as these can surely be addressed without equating a same-sex relationship with marriage.

This is much more than simply an issue of rights and benefits. Societies have always given marriage a special place and surrounded it with ritual, with the understanding that good marriages contribute to the common good. They produce children for society and, with considerable sacrifice, parents nourish these children for the good of all. The Government is proposing that a different relationship, one which will never produce children, should be equated with that of marriage. Have we really considered what the effects of this would be on the family and children? I believe not.

Moreover, if a same-sex relationship is equated to marriage, such a couple may well want to adopt children. Again I ask: Do we really know what the effects of this will be? I believe not. Research on this is still in its infancy. On a personal level, I have watched the interaction of my niece and her husband with their five-year old son, Nathaniel. Both Deb and Rob have a loving relationship with their son, yet a very different relationship in each case, enriching him in different ways. If this issue is about rights, what about the rights of a child to be brought up by a mother and a father?

There is another issue here about which I have heard little discussion. Basically, I see it as a common-sense political issue, and I will simply raise the question: Does the way the Government is handling this issue run the risk of needlessly dividing Canadians and families?

As Roman Catholics, we need to be aware of our rich heritage. From the early fathers of the Church, to St. Thomas Aquinas, to Cardinal Newman, to the present day, the Church has rightly claimed its place within the culture. It does this precisely because faith and reason, or faith and science, are not two contradictory entities. Scientists have felt at home in the Catholic Church, and scientific evidence is accepted with all the respect it deserves – and also with an awareness of the limitations of the ability of science to understand the totality of the human person. As Catholics, we can feel perfectly free to use our God-given power of reason and not fear having to choose between faith and reason. Pope John Paul II is a good example of a Christian who is able to speak authoritatively and clearly using the tools of science and reason.

If we examine closely what Church leaders – such as Cardinal Ambrozic of Toronto and Archbishop Weisgerber of Winnipeg – have written on the issue of equating same-sex relationships with marriage, we find that they have not tried to speak to a pluralistic society by quoting scripture (even though they believe it) or by saying, “Do this because the Pope says so,” (even though the Pope’s directions are sound). Their statements – and my own letter on the issue – have spoken to Canadians out of a love for Canada and a concern for the good of all its people. As such, they deserve consideration – a respectful consideration – by all. It seems reckless to rush into this, when there is absolutely no need, especially if other legislation could address the issue of rights and benefits without equating same-sex relationships to marriage.

As Canadian citizens, we have a duty to involve ourselves constructively in the political process. I urge you to make your own views known to your representative in Parliament. Do you feel that such legislation runs the risk of jeopardizing families and children, or do you feel that the long-term effects of such legislation are sufficiently known and that it will do no harm? Also, do you think that the issue is only about rights and benefits, or is it about more than this?

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p.s. As I write this, Pope John Paul II is dangerously ill. Let us all keep this wonderful man in our prayers.