

Ash Wednesday, 9 February 2005

Pastoral letter to Catholics in Canada on Redefining Marriage

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

The Catholic Bishops of Canada are united in their belief that marriage is the unique, essential and fundamental relationship of a man and a woman. This has been the teaching of the Church since its beginnings, and reflects human history.

For this reason, the Bishops of Canada reaffirm their opposition to the proposed redefinition of marriage, as they have already declared on a number of occasions, including statements by individual Canadian Cardinals and bishops, in addition to those of many other Canadian citizens.

The conjugal partnership of a man and a woman constitutes a particular benefit for the couple and a unique good for society, as evident in their mutual love as well as in the procreation of children. Marriage provides a stable and positive environment for children and thus for future generations. The right to marriage is more than the rights of two individuals; it involves the common good.

The proposed redefinition of marriage not only clashes with the faith and practice of Catholics and other Canadians, but also has enormous civil and social implications for everyone.

- The committed relationship of a man and a woman in marriage is basic to the family and thus for all society.
- Marriage and family life already are undergoing enormous pressures; the proposed changes risk disrupting the very nature and meaning of the institution of marriage.
- Government and society will contribute to the erosion of marriage and family by decreasing the importance of the union of a woman and man as wife and husband, mother and father. Society should do all it can so that children have a mother and father living in a stable and loving relationship.
- Instead of uniting Canadians in respect for the dignity of homosexual persons, the proposed redefinition of marriage is divisive in its attempt to impose uniformity in pursuit of equality.

- The proposed redefinition is not a step in evolution but a radical break with human history and with the meaning and nature of marriage.
- The Supreme Court of Canada did not say that the proposed legislation of the government to redefine marriage is necessary to conform with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, nor did it suggest that the traditional definition of marriage is contrary to the Charter.
- As recently as 9 June 1999, the House of Commons reaffirmed the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Why rush into a radically different definition when the long-term consequences are of such potential importance but have not yet been studied?

The Bishops of Canada encourage all Catholics to express their social concerns by writing to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Justice, members of Parliament and other elected officials.

As Canadian citizens, you not only have the right but the responsibility to inform your political representatives and government leaders of your convictions about marriage and the social issues that are involved in its definition and nature.

May this Lent be a time of serious reflection on this matter and an opportunity for us to pray for the guidance of our political leaders.

Sincerely in Our Lord,

+ Brendan M. O'Brien
Archbishop of St. John's
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops