



DIOCESE OF LONDON

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

It is with sadness that I am informing you of a decision that it is my duty to make. This decision is prompted by a public statement made by Mr. Joe Comartin, Member of Parliament for Windsor – Tecumseh, which may cause confusion and scandal in the minds of some Catholics.

On June 28, during parliamentary debate on Bill C-38, Mr. Comartin not only spoke in favour of Bill C-38's passage but also mentioned that he teaches in the marriage preparation program at his parish. He then stated, "One of my visions is that some day my church will allow those couples [in marriage preparation] to not only be heterosexual but also to be homosexual. My vision says to me that some day this will happen. The Roman Catholic Church in this country and across the globe will follow the precedents that the United Church, the Quakers, the Metropolitan Church and any other number of Christian denominations have taken. This is about love; we will guarantee within our religious services that all couples will be treated equally."

I have decided that Mr. Comartin is not to give marriage preparation sessions within this diocese, and that he is not to engage in any liturgical ministries, for example, minister of the Eucharist or reader. This decision is by no means a judgment on Mr. Comartin's sincerity. I have no doubt that Mr. Comartin sincerely believes that he is speaking the truth. The issue, rather, is that a person who does not accept Catholic teaching on fundamental matters is disqualified from acting on behalf of the Church in a public capacity. Marriage is, beyond doubt, a fundamental matter.

My decision will remain in effect until Mr. Comartin has a change of mind with regard to the moral status of homosexual activity and the use of the word 'marriage' with reference to some homosexual unions. In the meantime, I would urge Mr. Comartin, other Catholic politicians, and other Catholics who share his views to take the necessary steps to form their consciences correctly on these issues according to the teachings of our Church.

In making this decision, I am aware that there is much confusion in our present culture about marriage and homosexual unions. Some would claim, for example, that the passage of Bill C-38 is necessary as a remedy for the historical oppression and abuse suffered by homosexual persons. Homosexuals have indeed suffered, and they continue to suffer to some degree. There is need to repeat, time and time again, that all human persons, as the image and likeness of God, ought to be treated with love and respect. This entails freedom from abuse, persecution, and unjust discrimination.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that using the word 'marriage' only of

heterosexual unions constitutes unjust discrimination. By virtue of nature itself, marriage is a union of man and woman. As a natural institution, marriage predates any state, parliament, or court of law. No public institution has the authority to claim that marriage is something other than what it is. The issue is not one of rights; rather, it is a question of what the word ‘marriage’ means. The Supreme Court implicitly recognized its limits, at least somewhat, by refusing to pronounce on whether the traditional definition of marriage is unconstitutional.

There is also much confusion over what it means to live in a secular state. In Canada, there is no established religion. This means that no one religion is the official religion. Matters knowable only by Divine Revelation—that we are created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Jesus Christ, for example, (which have profound moral implications)—cannot be enshrined in law, and rightly so. Some would argue that the traditional definition of marriage is an undue incursion of religious values into public policy. The fact that marriage is between man and woman, however, is knowable by the light of natural reason. Although Divine Revelation asserts the heterosexual nature of marriage, nonetheless one need not adhere to a revealed religion in order to understand and accept this truth. The traditional definition of marriage, then, is not an instance of the interference of religious doctrine in the affairs of a secular state.

In any case, the secularity of the state does not mean that ethical values articulated by the world’s religions are to be relegated to the private realm, or that religious values cannot shape a politician’s conscience. The opposite is the case.

I trust that the unfortunate passage of Bill C-38 will prompt a careful soul-searching in all of us. Our society today needs a deeper understanding of who we are as human beings, of what it means to be a woman or a man, and of the nuptial and life-giving nature of the human body. It is my firm belief that a more enlightened anthropology, that is, vision of the human person, will underscore the fact that Bill C-38, though intending to address real social problems, is a false solution.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Rev. Ronald Fabbro, C.S.B.
Bishop of London