

In marriage, common good outweighs rights of individuals

By TERRENCE PRENDERGAST

An extraordinary thing is happening in Canada. We are allowing four false assumptions to paralyse us at a moment of great importance, when the foundation of our society is about to be radically changed.

False assumption 1: Everyone accepts the redefinition of marriage - no debate.

False assumption 2: We are powerless - the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has been invoked and the Supreme Court of Canada has spoken.

False assumption 3: The rights of churches have been protected and therefore they have nothing more to say.

False assumption 4: Those who object are bigots who hate gays and lesbians.

Those statements are untrue, but they are exerting a great deal of power at the moment. Intelligent inquiry and thoughtful reflection on the effect of this change on our Canadian society is being stifled under a blanket marked "prejudice."

But we must have the discussion.

Marriage is the basis of the family, which is our nation's fundamental building block.

Marriage as the committed union of one man and one woman - and the family unit born of marriage - is an indispensable human and social institution not just in Canada, but throughout the world. It is much older than our Constitution or our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

We have to know what we are doing when our Canadian Parliament votes on a bill to define marriage as the union of two adults. Now is the

time to dig under that "equality rights" sign recently planted in front of the Marriage Licence Bureau and see what is really happening to people's rights.

The difference between the union of one man and one woman, and the union of two women or two men, is so vast that we must talk about it openly. There are human-rights laws which say: Men and women must be paid the same wage for the same work; an employer may not refuse to hire someone because of skin colour; landlords may not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation.

These decisions uphold the rights of the individual and at the same time, strengthen Canadian society. They encourage us to recognize the humanity of the other person. And they do not distort reality. In the matter of same-sex unions, however, the statement being made is simply not true. It is a distortion of reality. The committed union of two people of the same sex is not the same human reality as the committed union of one man and one woman.

Same-sex union is not a physical union that transmits human life, producing children. Same-sex union is not the joining of two complementary natures that complete each other.

Simply stated, same-sex union is not marriage. Marriage is the lifelong union of two people who complement and complete each other so much that the language of marriage includes the phrase "two becoming one." Marriage is the social institution intended for the conception, nurture and protection of children. It is true that not every marriage is healthy and not every family is happy. That, too, is a human reality.

A same-sex union brings many things, including a sexual partner and economic benefit-sharing. By its very nature, however, it can never yield the ultimate expression of physical union between a man and a woman, the birth of a child.

In marriage, husband and wife form a committed partnership to care for the children they create through their love. In a same-sex union, children can be deprived of their simple natural right to live with both their birthparents in one family. In the concern to ensure equality rights for adults, we create two classes of children: those who have the potential to live with both parents in a

single family unit, and those who do not. As a social institution, marriage as we know it is concerned with the common good, not individual rights. Same-sex unions, however, are totally concerned with the rights, wants and desires of individuals.

To fulfil a particular desire on the part of some adults, a bill is being introduced in the Parliament of Canada which reshapes the fundamental building block of our society and absolutely deprives some children of their basic human right to live in a family with both father and mother. We can do better than this.

As Canadians, we do not believe that the wants and needs of adults are intrinsically more valuable than the rights of children. We value the elements of our society that contribute to the common good, and we are willing to bring our individual rights into the arena of common good. This cannot be achieved by rushing a bill through Parliament and binding elected representatives to any form of party solidarity.

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