

MICHAEL C. BARBER, S.J.
BISHOP OF OAKLAND



2121 HARRISON STREET,
OAKLAND, CA 94612
510.267.8316

**Statement of
Bishop Michael C. Barber of Oakland
on the Recent Supreme Court Decision on Marriage**

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As an American, I was saddened by the Supreme Court’s decision in June redefining marriage in our country. Marriage is more than two people who love each other. It is about having a family and raising children who deserve a mother and a father. The family is the basic building block of our society. Time will tell what effect this court ruling will have on marriage, family life and our American society.

People say we people of Faith are “against gay rights”. Not so. We believe in the inherent dignity of every human being. That is why we are pro-life and oppose the killing of children in the womb. That is why the Churches led the fight to make racial discrimination illegal. But we are against the re-definition of marriage to accommodate a lifestyle. We would also oppose a heterosexual man’s “right” to redefine marriage as a union of one man and *two* women.

The Catholic Church supports the dignity of all human beings of whatever sex, race, age, religion, or sexual preference. Archbishop Anthony Fisher of Sydney expresses my point of view when he writes:

In reality, of course, we all know and love someone with same-sex attraction. We recognize that people of the same sex can love each other, sometimes deeply . . . and that some people want to commit to this in a public ceremony. They are usually good-willed people, who feel they are missing out on something precious. Because we want the best for them, we feel the tug of the view that everything that makes opposite-sex couples happy should be open to them too. We want no more of the discriminatory or violent treatment that such people often suffered in the past and sometimes still suffer.

After all, God made every person unique and irreplaceable, as His beloved images in this world, and if God loves people with same-sex attraction, so must the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the recent [Australian] bishops' pastoral letter, *Don't Mess with Marriage*, teach that every human being, regardless of race, religion, age, sex or *sexual orientation* deserves our reverence;

that all forms of unjust discrimination must be opposed; that everyone is entitled to justice and compassion; and that the challenges of healthy and chaste friendships are for every human being, whatever their attractions. If Christians haven't always talked that way or walked their talk, we should repent and do better in future.

I agree with the Archbishop. I have gay friends, who are Catholic, and who have experienced relationships, say to me (regarding same-sex marriage) “But that’s not marriage.” They are correct. While there is love, there is no natural opportunity to have children – and thus no ability to have a natural family. The scriptures speak of same-sex friendships of profound intimacy, but friendship that is *chaste*: David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, Our Lord and St. John.

This is not just about religion. Marriage between a man and a woman has been the common practice of human beings for thousands of years. As Chief Justice Roberts wrote in his dissent, “For all those millennia, across all those civilizations, ‘marriage’ referred to only one relationship: the union of a man and a woman. ... It arose in the nature of things to meet a vital need: ensuring that children are conceived by a mother and father committed to raising them in the stable conditions of a lifelong relationship...”

Furthermore, God’s design in nature, that marriage is between a man and a woman, has been confirmed in the teachings of the major world religions: Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism – as well as local religions of native peoples on every continent.

For us Catholics, Jesus specifically taught “a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” In Genesis, our first parents were told to “be fruitful and multiply”. Furthermore, for Catholics, marriage is a *sacrament*. The union of husband and wife signifies the union of Christ and the Church. The redefinition of civil marriage by the Supreme Court will have no impact on the definition of marriage as a sacrament of the Catholic Church.

I only hope we Christians will still have the freedom to teach our view of marriage in our churches and Catholic schools. Chief Justice Roberts writes:

Today’s decision, for example, creates serious questions about religious liberty... The majority graciously suggests that religious believers may continue to “advocate” and “teach” their views of marriage. ...The First Amendment guarantees, however, the freedom to “exercise” religion. Ominously, that is not a word the majority uses.

Hard questions arise when people of faith exercise religion in ways that may be seen to conflict with the new right to same-sex marriage—when, for example, a religious college provides married student housing only to opposite-sex married

couples, or a religious adoption agency declines to place children with same-sex married couples. Indeed, the Solicitor General candidly acknowledged that the tax exemptions of some religious institutions would be in question if they opposed same-sex marriage. ... There is little doubt that these and similar questions will soon be before this Court. Unfortunately, people of faith can take no comfort in the treatment they receive from the majority today.

St. John the Baptist was executed because of King Herod's oath following Salome's dance. But John the Baptist was in prison to begin with for daring to say that Herod's marriage was not licit. The Baptist was hated for speaking the truth. He wasn't the first saint to be treated thus.

Take St. Thomas More. I have always found him to be very clear in getting to the heart of the matter. When More, a renowned judge, was on trial for refusing to approve King Henry VIII's divorce and the new law making the King the Head of the Church, he said:

Some men say the earth is flat.
Some men say the earth is round.
But if it is flat, could Parliament make it round?
And if it round, could the king's command flatten it?

Does a government have the power to change nature?

Michael C. Barber, SJ
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