



Pastoral Letter on Marriage

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

16th October 2011

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this Sunday's Gospel we read of Our Lord being tested with the question: "Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar?"

His reply was: "Give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar – and to God what belongs to God."

What, we might ask, belongs to Caesar? And in answer, reply: repayment for what Rome provided – the infrastructure of its vast empire, its roads and harbours, its public buildings and the security of the army's presence allowing its citizens and others free movement and safe dwelling. Above all it provided the law by which it sought to govern the peoples in justice.

However when it comes to framing laws, as the Holy Father recently noted in addressing the German Parliament at the Reichstag in Berlin: "The question of how to recognise what is truly right and thus to serve justice ... has never been simple, and today, in view of the extent of our knowledge and our capacity, it has become still harder."

Recognising "what is truly right" can also be expressed as the discernment of moral truth. Caesar, in the person of Pilate asked Jesus: "What is truth?" Today's question is also about truth – the truth about marriage and whether same-sex unions can be described and treated as such in law.

Jesus responded to a question on marriage by going right back to the beginning: "Have you not read that the Creator, from the beginning, 'made them male and female', and that he said: 'This is why a man must leave father and mother and cling to his wife and the two become one body.'" (Matthew, 19: 4-5)

The question then was on divorce, not, as now raised by the Scottish Government, on whether a union of two persons of the same sex might be a “marriage”. Indeed that question was unthinkable, and has remained so throughout the Judaeo-Christian era until the present time, and not only within the moral and social order of our own western civilisation, but also in the other great world religions and traditional philosophical systems of thought.

The Holy Father pointed out in his recent speech to the Reichstag: “In history, systems of law have almost always been based on religion: decisions regarding what was to be lawful among men were taken with reference to the divinity. Unlike other great religions, Christianity has never proposed a revealed law to the state and to society, that is to say a juridical order derived from revelation. Instead, it has pointed to nature and reason as the true source of law.”

There are those who would argue that the contract of two persons in an exclusive sexual relationship is what fully constitutes marriage. From a Catholic and traditional perspective that is only one part of the essence of marriage since conjugal love by its very nature is creative as well as unitive; marriage exists also for the begetting and nurturing of children. God blessed man and woman with the words: “Be fruitful and multiply.” Hence true married love and the whole structure of married life are disposed towards co-operating with the creative love of God in the enrichment of the human family.*(cf Catechism of the Catholic Church 1652/3)*

Today’s question would not be asked were it not for the increasing acceptance, wittingly or unwittingly, of a particular ideology which considers all structures and ethical systems as inimical to human freedom. It places personal autonomy above even physical realities so that, for example, the very determination of one’s own sex and gender is regarded as an issue of choice – even a supposed human right.

Those in Government need to be respectfully reminded that a mandate to govern does not include a mandate to reconstruct society on ideological grounds, nor to undermine the very institution which, from the beginning, has been universally acknowledged as of the natural order and the bedrock of society, namely marriage and the family. In terms of law, its support and defence have been on a par with the defence of life itself. We weaken it at our peril.

While there may be some who, acting out of a religious instinct and desire, wish to receive the blessing of religion on a same sex union - and indeed there may be some ministers of religion desirous to give it - in truth this campaign has very little to do with the practice of religion and everything to do with a change in the concept of marriage, ostensibly obtaining for same sex couples what is currently available only to married couples. Yet the question must be asked: what fiscal or financial benefit would be obtained by a same sex couple in being called "married" that is not currently available to them under civil partnership legislation? The answer is none.

No Church on its own authority, wishing to remain faithful to its Christian heritage, can be justified in unilaterally altering what has been handed down to us from the beginning.

Nor is Christianity alone in holding marriage in such respect. There are many within our own society, members of the great world religions, whose support of the family matches that which we in the Catholic Church ourselves maintain.

While on the face of it, the Government's proposal may seem a small step and one that ought to be taken out of consideration for the feelings of those who are unable to form a married relationship with a person of the opposite sex, it is of serious import and will be rightly resisted by many.

The Catholic Church, for one, will not accept it, and indeed will actively campaign against it, since what is proposed could lead to serious repercussions in the field of education, in the provision of housing and child benefits and lead to gross allegations of discrimination against those who, in conscience, cannot accept the moral equivalence of same sex unions with marriage.

Members of the Scottish Parliament should recall what is written on the mace of that institution, words which reflect the traditional cardinal virtues - those by which everyone should act and most particularly, those who govern.

Justice is of course included among them, but the first named is prudence, or as expressed on the mace by the word "wisdom". Prudence, or wisdom, means taking into account all aspects of one's decisions and actions, seeing them in the broader picture - described by Pope St Gregory the Great as "seeing life whole"

It has traditionally been the duty of the Church to offer insightful guidance to Government on moral matters. The Catholic Church will not fail in attempting to do so, nor in guiding its own members and influencing public opinion towards moral truth.

Today I ask you to respond to this letter in several practical ways:

- Please take home with you the postcards which have been printed by the Catholic Parliamentary office, fill them in and return them.
- I also invite you to take a copy of the full Pastoral Letter I have prepared on this issue and read it.
- And finally I urge you to respond to this consultation. Either by writing, or by emailing your answer to the address provided on the cards.

In anticipation of your support, I thank you and give you my warmest blessing.

Yours devotedly in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mario Conti". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

+Mario Conti
Archbishop of Glasgow