

Dear Committee Secretary,

This morning I received an email encouraging the support of traditional or heterosexual marriage as an exclusive model for all Australians. However, the problem with this view is that diversity is deleterious both to adult commitment and children. I therefore welcome this opportunity to make the following submission.

I write to you as a committed Catholic and one who has had long involvement in the Church. The seriousness of that affiliation has, among other things, led me to look at issues such as marital status, gender and sexual orientation at an academic level. Indeed, I am currently pursuing postdoctoral research on progressive Catholicism, which is moving on from these arguments to concerns about pressing contemporary issues such as the development of personal and mutual relationships, climate change, refugees, homelessness and the like. In the meantime, I also know that the bishops are increasingly divided over these and other issues, and that priests and laity are becoming demoralised and frustrated. Some would also express their concern over the increasing irrelevancy and marginalisation of the Church, simply because it refuses to discuss issues such as the one being put forward: same-sex marriage.

I assert that if marriage is to be a public celebration of a couple's commitment to each other, then it should be made available to those adults who are willing to enter into that mutual arrangement. To deny same-sex couples that public institution is to handicap their relationships and diminish the social supports and sanctions that come with that.

As for children, they need functional parents. Marital status, gender and sexual orientation are different qualities and are no guarantee that children will receive what is needed for their formative years. The statistics on divorce provide one example of my claim. Today, parenthood requires men and women to be skilled in the art of loving and raising children.

In today's society, I doubt that many of us consider ourselves to be simply biological beings, which, here, implies that generativity need not be solely related to biology. Similarly, most people would not consider the primary purposes of marriage are procreation and the protection of the wife and children. Rather, I think we recognise ourselves as sociological beings in that we value or give pre-eminence to the quality of our relationships. That emphasis, in effect, changes the meaning of marriage. Marriage is most importantly about a mutual covenant between two people who love each other, who seek to make a lifelong commitment to each other, and who care and nurture each other. It is in this relational frame that children are ideally raised. The couples as parents ensure the generativity of their love and commitment to each other are passed onto their children. From this perspective, I see, therefore, no reason to exclude same sex couples from marriage. Indeed, I see every reason to encourage their marriages. Marriage as a public contract along with its deep mythological and religious foundations, has the potential (unlike 'superficial' civil unions) to provide support, sanctions and a deep grounding that will, ideally, work to protect their relationships and the children that may or may not be raised by these people.

With regards my religious perspective, it concerns me greatly that the Christian and Catholic view is no longer catholic. It assumes uniformity rather than diversity of opinion, a fundamentalist stance

that I believe does not serve Australian society. In a transitioning society, we need to deal with and accommodate complexity of contemporary relationships in proactive ways.

In closing, the ultimate nature of relationships is care and nurturing. I trust that this foundation will be recognised as grounds for achieving equal treatment for same-sex couples, including marriage.

Kind regards,  
(Dr.) Jane Anderson