

SUMMISSION TO SENATE ENQUIRY INTO SAME SEX MARRIAGE BILLS

I wish to place before the committee my views in support of same-sex marriage as expressed by me in letters to The Catholic Weekly newspaper. These letters sent some months ago have not been published and at this stage I doubt that they will be.

The Catholic Weekly has published a considerable amount of letters, articles and editorial opposing the proposed changes to the Marriage Act. Much of the material published indicates attitudes that would have opposed decriminalisation of homosexual behaviour between consenting adults and would support reintroduction of criminal sanctions. The underlying argument seems to be that heterosexual behaviour is normal and homosexual behaviour is aberrant. Whereas, the body of law, wherein the Marriage Act lies, recognises homosexual behaviour as normal for some persons.

As far as I am aware, The Catholic Weekly has published nothing supporting or promoting an even-handed discussion of the proposed changes to the Marriage Act.

As a life-long practising Catholic, now in my 80's, I support in principle a change to the Marriage Act to include same-sex couples. For much of my lifetime, persons now described as gay or lesbian have been subjected to ridicule, verbal abuse, physical assault and ostracism; in some cases, they have been driven to suicide. More recently, truth has gradually triumphed over ignorance and prejudice, and much has been done to remove discrimination. As a person with a long experience of an ongoing marriage with children and grandchildren, I can see no reason for opposing the proposed change.

I support the Church's right to advocate and promote the values of Christian marriage but I am embarrassed when persons speaking for the Church imply that marriage per se will be damaged by a change to the Marriage Act to include unions that the Church would not recognise as valid. The Marriage Act has always embraced unions that the Church has not recognised as valid and Catholic parties to such marriages have been excommunicated. All the proposed change asks of us, as Catholics, is that we extend to others in our pluralist society the tolerance we constantly seek for ourselves.

I am embarrassed too when persons speaking for the Church in this context "plead" the case for children. The welfare of children is a separate issue to the Marriage Act. Sadly, now as in the past, children are potentially at risk in all forms of custody/care arrangements. What is required here is an ongoing "fit and proper person(s)" test, rigorously applied by relevant authorities outside the Marriage Act.

I am grateful for the opportunity the committee's enquiry affords me to express my opinion and I wish it well in its deliberations.

Tom Togher