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Gay marriage continues to bother Cardinal Francis George

Robert McClory | Jun. 12, 2013 NCR Today

Chicago's Cardinal Francis George has probably spoken more and written more about same-sex marriage than any other bishop in the U.S. His latest column in the *Catholic New World* [1] is no exception. It reveals his ongoing concern about the growing majority of Catholics who approve the legalization of same-sex unions. At the same time, it also reveals his failure to look at the subject with an open mind.

In the first two paragraphs, George expresses his eagerness to partake in the public conversation and "discussion" of the subject, and I don't doubt his sincerity. But he sabotages his ability to discuss by stating that the subject is closed by reason of Jesus' statements about marriage in Matthew's Gospel. He follows up by congratulating those who successfully urged Illinois legislators [2] recently to give no consideration to a bill allowing same-sex marriage in the state.

Although the discussion is essentially finished for the cardinal at this point, that does not hinder him from going on for more than 1,000 words bolstering his absolutely certain judgment. The inroads of secularization have created a situation, he says, where "many, unfortunately, now see marriage only as a private, two-person relationship based on love and sexual attraction rather than as a public social institution governing family life."

But the erosion of marriage as a social institution has overwhelmingly affected heterosexual unions, which end in divorce at an appalling rate. At the same time, there is plenty of evidence that gay couples increasingly see their unions as contributing to society by adopting children or giving birth to new life through the marvels of modern science, except in those cases where the church has been able to bar such actions. The trend toward acceptance of gay unions is here, and it's not going away.

Still, the cardinal continues, stressing the importance of fathers and how "fatherless families contribute to the violence that plagues us." What he is trying to say, I think, is that single-parent families contribute to violence. But that has nothing to do with gay unions, which consist of two parents.

George then launches out into the deep about the separation of religious faith from public life. He blames John F. Kennedy for starting a roll down the slippery slope and worries Catholics will be eventually barred from federal judgeships, medical schools, editorial offices at major newspapers, the entertainment world and university faculties.

"If Catholics are to be closeted and marginalized in a secularized society, Catholic parents should prepare their children to be farmers, carpenters and craftsmen, small business people and workers in service industries," occupations that "do not immediately impact public opinion." What?

Unfortunately, what Cardinal George cannot consider is the possibility that Catholics at the grass-roots level are coming to understand new and different ways to welcome to the table those previously excluded. Many, including not a few theologians, propose that the essence of marriage is the love and permanent commitment of two persons to one another -- period. As that conviction matures in time, I believe the church will have to make accommodations with its implications, just as Christians in the time of Galileo had to reinterpret so much they

and their ancestors had taken for granted as irreversibly, dogmatically true: the movement of the earth, the sun, moon and stars. It was for many a painful, revolutionary process. And the one believing Christians face now will be for some no less painful and revolutionary. But it must be done, lest the Catholic church disintegrate into a closed, inconsequential cult.

Read George's whole column. [1]

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