

The Bishop, the People of God, and marriage

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No, Bishop Richard Malone does not speak for the Catholics of Maine, as he observed in Augusta, any more than, on sexual matters, the hierarchs in Rome speak for the People of God. They speak for some, for many, for all only of those who salute every pronouncement from the Vatican. Others march to a different drummer.

As Chicago Loyola University Psychology Prof. Eugene Kennedy once observed, the Church has “never gotten sex right.” It has, for example, seen marital sex as the punishment of Adam, sinful, lust, a necessary evil for procreation, only for procreation, and, where the marriage fails, a life sentence to misery.

Only with Vatican II did Rome recognize mutual love and sanctification as a primary end of marriage. About the same time, confessors stopped advising abused wives (or husbands) to grin and bear it.

Paul VI’s rejection of the near-unanimous recommendation to end the ban on artificial contraception of a birth control commission he had overloaded with conservatives, led, in turn, to the People of God rejecting that teaching (*sensus fidelium*.) Since, they have tuned out the hierarchs and followed their own informed consciences on sexual matters—for better or worse.

As poll numbers suggest, the same likely now holds regarding homosexual relationships. The Vatican produced an insensitive abstraction for homosexuality: “objective disorder”—a birth defect, unlike others in requiring denial of one’s sexuality and, for that matter, human capacity for love.

(Given that the papacy and 200-odd sitting U.S. bishops have deliberately abetted the criminal and destructive aberrant sexual expression of thousands of priests, none accepting moral responsibility, what authority can they claim to say anything about any sexual matter? }

As the same-sex closet has emptied, more and more Catholics have come to see their homosexual brothers and sisters not as disordered or perverts but as responsible fellow human beings, loving and responding to love, seeking only to have a life.

As Boston Cardinal Richard Cushing’s experience of good Jews contributed to radical Vatican revision of the teaching of no salvation outside the Church, so experience is teaching Christians who take seriously their obligation to respect the dignity of every human being to respect same-sex relationships. Unlike Cushing, like most other church hierarchs, Malone does not attend experience or listen; he attends only Rome’s dictate.

To make a clean case against same-sex marriage, Malone sets aside present teaching to define marriage's purpose as procreation alone, foreclosing argument that marriage between two men or two women could fulfill the other primary purpose of marriage: mutual love and sanctification. By asserting that marriage without procreation is "to render marriage meaningless," he necessarily dismisses the millions of Church-blessed marriages in which procreation is impossible.

In Augusta, Malone further affronted the experience of the People of God. In the presence of same-sex parents and children--and contrary to evidence. He argued that children cannot be properly nurtured in a same-sex relationship.

In the presence of heterosexual couples, he mouthed the nonsense that same-sex marriages threaten the institution of marriage. The institution of marriage is threatened by human imperfection and all that nowadays gets in the way of a selfless mutual gift of love.

Like too many U.S. bishops, Bishop Malone fails to appreciate the implications of a pluralist society. Witnessing sacramental marriages is the Church's province, not the state's. Promoting Christian married love, as he puts it, "to support it in all ways possible," is his business. A civil marriage covering legal, societal rights and responsibilities is the state's business.

I once espoused the argument that homosexual couples should be content with a civil union not identified as marriage. But experience demonstrates that same-sex couples in civil unions do not escape societal hassles and enjoy all legal protections of marriage. More importantly, "civil union" does not reflect their bond of "mutual love and sanctification" as only "marriage" does. Experience is a good teacher.

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