

# A Non-Religious View of Same Sex Couples & Marriage

*By Fr. Dave Heney, July 2013*

## *A secular look at the impact of recent Court decisions about marriage*

Many people know gay family members, friends, or co-workers and have a natural desire to help them. Much of the sympathy for same sex couples is a sincere hope for marriage equality and civil rights. This article assumes the best intentions of people on both sides and will just look at the possible impact of these decisions from a non-religious view. After all, not every voter is religious.

The Supreme Court ruled in June 2013 that the federal government must pay the same benefits to same sex couples as heterosexual couples. Same sex marriage was legal in California for a while until 2008 when voters by a 52% majority affirmed marriage as only between one man and one woman in Prop. 8. That popular vote was later overturned by a local judge, and Prop. 8 supporters sued. In June again, the Supreme Court declined to rule on the merits of the California case, which meant that despite the popular vote, that judge's ruling stands for now.

There are many other ways that people can form marriages besides traditional marriage and same sex marriage that have been recognized so far, although all are still illegal now. *For example:*

- Several men and women together (polygamy)
- Several concurrent marriages (bigamy)
- Parent with a child (incest)
- Brother with a brother (incest)
- Sister with a sister (incest)
- Brother and sisters together (incest & polygamy)
- Adult with a child (pedophilia & ephebophilia)

For hundreds of thousands of years, only marriage between one man and one woman was accepted as a marriage by almost every culture in every part of the world and in every historical period. *That is an amazing fact.* With extremely rare exceptions, such as incest in ancient Egypt and some bigamy in Islam, traditional marriage has been a near universal feature of all humankind for eons, and predates all governments ...and even all religions.

In addition, many paleontologists consider traditional marriage, or "pair-bonding" as it is scientifically called, a major cause of our evolutionary success, in that the union of two sexes provided just the right genetic mix of genes for our survival, and the courageous and compassionate care of both male and female parents ensured the successful survival of children, all of whom are born, even today, more helpless than other animals. Traditional marriage began in our earliest human history and was later adopted "as is" by all societies worldwide thereafter.

Now, for the first time in all of human history, that narrow definition of marriage has been widened in a few states and countries to include same sex couples, based on the desire of gay people to have their loving and committed relationships declared marriages. They are certainly glad that change has happened in several states, including California for now.

However, the other forms listed above are still not legal ...*will that last?* If a gay person can now declare his or her loving and committed relationship a marriage, what stops the others? Do they not also claim to sincerely love their partner or partners? *If the courts, the media, and voters affirm that marriage is a personal choice about who we love and marry*, can any government logically stop people from the marital unions they desire, no matter who their partner or partners are? Does every deeply felt love now become a “right to marry?”

Should we have sympathy for these other groups that also want marriage equality? Amazingly, there are bigamy, polygamy, and even incest supporters actively lobbying now for their own right to marry based on the “equal protection clause” of the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment. On what non-religious basis can they be denied? We hope these relationships are never legalized but it could become more difficult to prevent now.

Some say God creates people gay because they are born as such. Our faith actually has no opinion about the source of same sex attraction. While there may certainly be genetic factors, those genes are inherited from family ancestry, not God. Besides, even if genes determine sexual orientation they do *not automatically determine* character or behavior, which develop from our free decisions and choices in life. (For more see “*Same Sex Couples & Marriage*” at [stpaschal.org](http://stpaschal.org))

### **FAQ: How do the Court Rulings Affect the Catholic Church?**

They do not affect our celebration of marriage at all because of solid First Amendment protections designed precisely to ensure the “Free exercise” of our faith from government interference. We can continue to celebrate marriages as God designed, *and continue to support the legal protections of Civil Unions for gay members*, as we have done for some time. However, there may still be attempts by anti-religious people, to attack churches using anti-discrimination laws. Fortunately, in a landmark decision in 2012 (*Tabor v. EEOC*) the Supreme Court unanimously (9-0) affirmed they cannot use these laws against Churches ...*but I am sure they will still try!*

Much of the debate today involves conversational animosity. It is sadly common in politics today to declare opponents “hateful” simply for having different views. When Catholics support traditional marriage we do not harm other loving and committed relationships. We admire mature and responsible love *wherever* it is, and certainly among same sex couples too. For example, when we cheer for the US Olympic team, we are not denigrating other teams. No one “hates” other teams when cheering for the USA. We can happily support the USA ...and traditional marriage too.

Finally, of course, besides this non-religious overview, we still have Our Lord and our 3000 year old Judeo-Christian heritage that both affirm traditional marriage.