



CATHOLICS FOR THE
COMMON GOOD

A NEW CATHOLIC ACTION

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RE: Opposition to SB 906

Members of the California State Assembly
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assembly Member,

Catholics for the Common Good strongly opposes SB 906. By adding a new “civil” class of marriage, the bill seeks to create different types of marriage where there is only one under the state constitution. The author, Senator Mark Leno, has stated that this bill “clarifies the differences between civil and religious marriage under state law” Religion and government each recognize the institution of marriage but that does not and should not render different classes of marriage. The bill also creates the illusion of new religious liberty protections that are in fact meaningless.

Using common sense, the voters most clearly defined marriage in civil law when they amended the California constitution in 2008. Article I, Section 7.5 reads, “Only marriage between a man and a woman is valid or recognized in California.” Recognizing the union of a man and a woman with each other and the children that come from the relationship has a distinct public interest. The recognition, solemnization, or celebration of marriages by various religions provides a deeper understanding of the union as part of the ongoing process of creation—vital to the continuation of society. Thus religion and government each add their own gloss to marriage, but there are not different classes of marriage, as this bill seeks to accomplish. The state has no competence or authority to even make distinctions related to the religious understanding of marriage.

The illusion of new protections for religious liberty is slyly created by essentially granting permission to religions to determine who is qualified to be married in that faith. The U.S. Constitution already prohibits the state from forcing a religion to change its doctrinal qualifications as that would create something tantamount to a state religion. On the other hand, the bill does not “make space for each others' beliefs without compromising the beliefs of any religious group or individual,” as the author claims.

The concerns of people of faith do not relate to control of doctrine but to the free expression of the principles of their faith. Redefining marriage would make promoting the unique value and public interest of marriage between a man and a woman discriminatory under the law since all marriages would have to be treated equally. Churches and individuals who dissent or fail to recognize same-sex relationships as equivalent to “traditional” marriage become subject to law suits, civil penalties, social isolation, and persecution. SB 906 provides no protection for religious liberty in this regard.

Experience demonstrates that the threat to religious liberty is real because the foundational argument advanced by same-sex “marriage” advocates is that mere opposition is an expression of discrimination, hatred, and bigotry. These sentiments have already led to the desecration of temples and churches, loss of employment for supporters of marriage as defined in the state constitution, and attacks on individuals and businesses that support the unique public interest of “traditional” marriage.

The bill is unnecessary and creates confusion about types of marriage and religious protection, opening the door for new litigation and related expenses for the state and local governments. Please vote “no” on SB 906.

Sincerely,

William B. May

cc: Senator Mark Leno
Assemblyman Tom Ammiano