

“Not to Destruction, but to Salvation”

Friday, September 12, 2008

The most senior California bishops of the Episcopal Church came out in favor of same-sex marriage in the state on Wednesday. The bishops then called on voters to defeat Proposition 8 — the constitutional amendment that would define marriage as the union of a man and a woman.

From the [statement](#) released by the bishops:

As Episcopal Bishops of California, we are moved to urge voters to vote “No” on Proposition 8. Jesus calls us to love rather than hate, to give rather than to receive, to live into hope rather than fear. On Tuesday, November 4th, voters in California will be given the opportunity to vote for or against Proposition 8, which would amend the state’s constitution to reserve marriage as only between a man and a woman. Since the California Supreme Court’s ruling in May that civil marriage should be provided to all of the state’s citizens whether the genders of the couple are different or the same, faithful gays and lesbians have entered into marriage as the principle way in which they show their love, devotion and life-long commitment to each other. Furthermore, marriage provides these couples the same legal rights and protections that heterosexual couples take for granted.



Proposition 8 would reverse the court’s decision and withdraw a right given. Proponents of Proposition 8 have suggested that this amendment to the Constitution would protect marriage. We do not believe that marriage of heterosexuals is threatened by same-sex marriage. Rather, the Christian values of monogamy, commitment, love, mutual respect and witness of monogamy are enhanced for all by providing this right to gay and straight alike. Society is strengthened when two people who love each other choose to enter into marriage, engaged in a lifetime of disciplined relationship building that serves as a witness to the importance of love and commitment.

The sweeping statement represented an unconditional support for same-sex marriage. In one of the most revealing sections of the statement, the bishops celebrated the fact that the decision handed down by the California Supreme Court meant that “faithful gays and lesbians have entered into marriage as the principle way in which they show their love, devotion and life-long commitment to each other.”

The use of the term “faithful gays and lesbians” indicates that the bishops see active homosexual relationships as fully moral and thus to be celebrated. They offered enthusiasm about the display of love, devotion, and commitment among homosexual couples.

“Society is strengthened,” they argue, “when two people who love each other choose to enter into marriage, engaged in a lifetime of disciplined relationship building that serves as a witness to the importance of love and commitment.”

Note that the bishops simply refer to “two people who love each other.” Why two? Once marriage is transformed from the union of a man and a woman into a union without respect to gender — and on the claim that marriage is a “fundamental right” — how can the number two be anything but arbitrary?

Tellingly, the bishops offered no substantial biblical or theological defense of their statement. Instead, the bishops

relied upon generalized language about “the Christian values of monogamy, commitment, love, mutual respect and witness of monogamy.” They added that these should be celebrated and affirmed “to gay and straight alike.” The Bible contains absolutely no generalized affirmation of monogamy. Indeed, the Bible commands monogamy in *marriage*, defined without question as the union of a man and a woman. The “Christian values” the bishops cite in favor of their support of same-sex marriage are aberrant abstractions from the biblical text, from the Christian tradition, and from the moral witness of the church.

The church is not to *respect* what the Bible clearly identifies as sin. Furthermore, some loves are explicitly prohibited within the Scripture. The bishops stood to endorse activities and relationships that every previous generation of Christians had understood to be sin. No previous generation has been confused about the issue of gender with respect to marriage. The bishops announced their defiant stance against Scripture, tradition, and the practices and beliefs of most Christians worldwide — including most within their own Anglican Communion.

In the majestic language of the 1928 *Book of Common Prayer*, a prayer offered at the consecration of a bishop includes these words: “Mercifully behold this thy servant, now called to the Work and Ministry of a Bishop; and so adorn him with innocence of life, that, both by word and deed, he may faithfully serve thee in this Office, to the glory of thy Name, and the edifying and well-governing of thy Church; through the merits of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.”

Later, a prayer calls upon the Lord to grant the bishop grace to “use the authority given him, not to destruction, but to salvation; not to hurt, but to help: so that, as a wise and faithful servant, giving to thy family their portion in due season, he may at last be received into everlasting joy.”

Those beautiful words, “not to destruction, but to salvation,” take on a deadly significance in the case of these bishops. They are leading their own church to destruction, and encouraging in the larger society what the Bible condemns as sin. These are shepherds who are leading their own flocks right off a cliff.

