Reasons for the Catholic Church’s Opposition to Same-sex Marriage.

The official position of the Catholic Church on same-sex marriage is not a new teaching, but it does require some explanation and pastoral reflection.

For the person in the street, religious and moral arguments do not cut the mustard, however, there are good practical and secular reasons that also underpin the Church’s stance on this issue.

In the case of marriage and family there is no need to ask the question: Which came first, the chicken or the egg? that is society, or marriage and the family.

The family is well-accepted as the bedrock of society; it comes first and society follows; this has been the case for millennia. Marriage is the formal public institution of the family, fostered as such quite deliberately by the State for very sensible reasons.

Marriage provides the State with a sound and reliable formal structure for the loving procreation and careful nurturing of its future citizens.

Marriage is also a personal institution. It is the exclusive, permanent, loving relationship and commitment between a man and a woman open to the natural possibility of procreating and raising children. It has a two-fold purpose: mutual affection and support, and the natural procreation and care-filled raising of children.

It is easy to understand why same-sex couples committed in love to a long-term and exclusive relationship would wish to share in this experience. However, extending the understanding of marriage to same-sex couples would break down both the public and the personal institutions of marriage that have stood throughout time; indeed, marriage would lose its meaning.

Whilst the Church is sympathetic to same-sex couples who wish to seal their commitment to one another in marriage, the very object of their aspirations would evaporate in their act of obtaining it.

Marriage would no longer be linked in its essence to bringing new life into the world and society. Society would, therefore, have no further reason or need to protect the institution of marriage. It has been suggested that, logically speaking, if marriage represents only a loving relationship, it could come to represent any such relationship: opposite-sex couples, same-sex couples, polygamous and multiple partnerships of any sex, etc.

If the link to bringing the new life of children into the world is broken, marriage itself is broken and the concept is of no further use, to the individual or to society.

Is there another agenda for some behind the push for same-sex marriage? If marriage is broken, as open to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples, there is really no longer a need for any sort of institutional distinction between a man and a woman. Gender would be rendered officially as culturally-learned rather than fundamentally prescribed by our nature. But now, to the ordinary person in the street, this would just seem to be going too far. This is the very argument: a same-sex union is not what we have normally understood marriage to be down through the ages.
But, where would that leave children?

Children have a right to be conceived and brought into this world naturally, and to know of their biological origins wherever this is feasible. Children have a right to the chance to be nurtured and cared for by a mother and a father. We know that life often intervenes to deny these rights, but we start from the potential for them to be satisfied.

With same-sex marriage, however, adult needs, desires, hopes and aspirations become the focus to the exclusion of the rights of the child.

And where else may this lead? Would the law eventually oblige: teaching homosexual preference and lifestyle in schools? Requiring ministers of religion to perform same-sex marriages? Or Church-based adoption agencies to facilitate same-sex adoptions?

Extending marriage to include same-sex couples would unjustly discriminate against opposite-sex couples who are married. However, legislation that marriage is between and man and a woman does not discriminate unjustly against same-sex couples.

Not all discrimination is bad; the law provides many forms of discrimination for the good of society – eg consanguinity laws for marriage (note again the link to children inherent in society’s notion of marriage) and age limits for driving licenses.

There are many sensible and compelling reasons for opposing legislative support for same-sex marriage. However, homophobia is not one of them. The Catholic Church is firm in its teaching on this. The belief that every individual person is made in God’s image is at the very heart of Christian teaching. Every human person is loved by God and personally saved and made holy by the life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus the Christ. From this we cannot resile; it is central to our faith, the core of our belief.