

THE SAME-SEX MARRIAGE: VIEWPOINTS OF CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY

***Abstract:** For each person, marriage is important event, marked the psychological and physical maturity, awareness and social responsibility. Therefore, it directly depends on the ethical concept, regional customs, ethnicity, religion, beliefs, social development, etc.. Currently, twenty three countries have recognized same-sex marriage in the whole world. Other countries oppose or do not ban but have not yet recognized, etc. Recognition or non-recognition is based on certain and specific arguments. This article explores viewpoint of the Catholic moral theology of same-sex marriage.*

***Keywords:** Holy See, same-sex marriage, theology, Catholic morality.*

Introduction

Marriage is a social life field that is influenced by society. At different times, marriages have their own characteristics. Human rights are more respected when society is more developed. In contemporary society, most people have the right to choose their spouse according to their own perspective and preferences. Generally, marriage is freedom, voluntary to marry between a man and a woman under the Marriage and Family Law of each country. However, in the current society, this rule is no longer common because there are people who choose to live with the same-sex husband or wife, that is with the same-sex marriage.

The same-sex marriage is a combination of two people of the same biological gender: between a male and a male or between a female and a female¹.

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By 2016, twenty three countries have recognized the same-sex marriage. These countries allow the same-sex couples the right to apply for marriage and wedding, such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, South Africa, Norway, Sweden, Portugal, Iceland, Argentina, Denmark, Newzealand, Uruguay, Brazil, England, France, Scotland, Luxembourg, Slovenia, Finland, Ireland, United State of America, Colombia.

It can be said that in the more developed society, personal freedom is valued as well as the same-sex marriage is increased. Currently, there is a lot of debate around this issue. Generally, there were three main opinions as follows: support, oppose or no idea. It is worth mentioning that the group of supporters of the same-sex marriage has gradually increased in the developed countries; this phenomenon is still happening in social life where it is opposed or not accepted.

In Vietnam, the Law on Marriage and Family in 2000 stipulates “no marriage between the same-sex person”². And if anyone violates that person will be punished. In 2012, a same-sex marriage was organized under the traditional wedding ceremony in Ha Tien, and the local government prevented it. This event caused attention to public opinion and the press. It became a great question for society, lawmakers and authorities. The amended Marriage and Family Law in 2014, “not admitting the same-sex marriage”³. This law has been effective since January 1, 2015.

In term of legal, there are still many different views of the same-sex marriage in the world. However, whether the law acknowledges or disapproves, this phenomenon is still common in the world and in Vietnam, including Catholics.

1. Catholic concept of marriage

There are different definitions of marriage depending on study dimension. The concept of marriage is mentioned in this paper is Catholic marriage, the faith of Catholics. The Marriage and Family Catechism of the Catholic Church in Vietnam defines: “Marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman, with a sense of freedom and

responsibility, love and help each other in marriage; in order to procreate and educate children in the task of parenthood”⁴.

Based on the above definition of the Church, three points may be given to the marriage of Catholics: *Firstly*, marriage is the coherency, the free consent of a man and a woman, giving each other and receiving each other. *Secondly*, marriage is fulfill the responsibility of loving and helping each other all the life. *Thirdly*, the purpose of marriage is reproduction, nurture and education children.

According to this definition, the same-sex marriage can only satisfy the second point (fulfill the responsibility of loving and helping each other all the life), and can not satisfy the first point (marriage is the union of a man and a woman) and the third point (marriage for the purpose of reproduction, nurture and education of children). This is the basic difference between a normal marriage (one man and one woman) and the same-sex marriage (two people of the same sex).

According to Catholic conception, cohesion between two people of the same biological gender is not considered as a marriage, although its attachment has the same characteristics as a marriage: it is also based on love, a need for a long-lasting relationship, together to build happiness and even bring up children.... However, the Church does not regard cohesion between two people of the same biological gender is a marriage because it violatesthe Catholic morality.

In short, according to Catholic conception, marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman with a sense of freedom and responsibility, in order to live together and help one another in marriage, to reproduce and educate children in parenthood. This is the basic essence, the inalienable character of marriage; it can not be changed inspite of social development; no power and no ideology has the right to eradicate it.

2. The Holy See’s views on the same-sex marriage

In the process of existence and development, each religion has created their own values. The concept of Catholic marriage is regulated and influenced by faith in the Bible, the doctrinal system,

the canon law, the declarations of the Holy See. The strict organization of the Holy See as well as the rules of Christian duty have created the unique identity for Catholics. Despite the changes in practice, this identity has shaped the life style of Catholics from one generation to the next.

Based on the Catholic moral tradition, the Holy See has definitely rejected the same-sex marriage. This objection is based on Catholic moral theology with the following arguments:

Firstly, when creating the world and human beings, God arranged an order, a balance between males and females, yin and yang. God created mankind in His own image. Marriage is a union of a man with a woman derived from God.

The book of Genesis: After creating mankind, God formed the birds, the wild animals, and then brought them to Adam. But for Adam no suitable helper was found, then the Lord God made a woman [Genesis 2: 18-23]. The Lord God created mankind (men and women) in His own image, and let them rule over all the creatures the move along the ground. God blessed them and said to them “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the Earth [Genesis 1: 26- 30].

Based on the Bible, the Church affirmed that since beginning God fixed the purpose of marriage: *Husband and wife love each other for life and reproduce children.*

The first purpose: *Husband and wife love each other for life*, “for Adam no suitable helper was found” the description of the lack, the need of Adam. God gave Adam all the things, but Adam was not happy because his soul was empty. And to fill that emptiness of Adam, God brought Eva to Adam. Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” [Genesis 2: 23]. Catholics think that it was Adam’s satisfaction to find “suitable helper”; it suggests that conjugal happiness can only be fulfilled when there is a combination of male and female love.

Thus, according to the Bible, God created man, and human gender was given by God. God just gave mankind two sexes: male and

female. “male and female he created them” [Genesis 1:27]. In this view, the Holy See affirms that the third gender, multi gender or change of gender is unfamiliar with the Bible, with views of God since the creation of mankind.

Secondly, the same-sex marriage breaks the natural balance in conjugal life, contrary to the divine creation of God.

When creating the world and mankind, God created the universe with diversity and difference but in a rational order. On human beings, the Holy See emphasizes that the difference in gender between men and women complements and assists one another in marriage, giving the couple a life of love. St. Paul said that man alone are not good. “Male and female complement each other; it not only from a physical and psychological point of view, but also from an ontological point of view”⁵. Thus, “in all culture, people usually regard as male or female only a half: “We are only a half, we must open the door to welcome an other half if we want to be whole”⁶.

According to the Holy See, it means that the difference in biological sex does not make the husband and wife strangers or contradictions; on the contrary, they are called to live together. “That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” [Genesis 2:24]. This combination will be bound by the love between two people all their life, with a unique and indissoluble character.

Marriage is unity, it means monogamy. In marriage, a man can not be a husband of any woman except his wife, and a woman can not be a wife of any man except her husband. This is a particular feature of Catholic marriage, as well as an affirmation of the origin of marriage by God. Marriage is freedom of consent, a lifelong attachment between a man and a woman; it means that the consent can not be withdrawn, because this is a sacred bond, so it can not be put under the arbitrary adjudication of human. Catholics believe that marriage is an arrangement of God for the fulfillment of his love among human beings, so by nature, conjugal love requires a lifetime commitment.

Marriage is indissoluble, it means that the husband and wife can not divorce. When a couple is married, the marriage will bind the two people to death. They must be faithful to one another for life; no one has the right to remove from the marriage because that is the law set by God. When asked about divorce, Jesus recalled God's intention from the "beginning". "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" [Mathiew 19:6].

The theological basis of two characteristics is established in the norm of Catholic marriage: It is a bilateral union between Jesus and the Church: the Church can not exist without Jesus; It is just a secular organization, and without the Church, it can not continue to produce children for God.

In the present state of homosexual marriage, the Holy See has vehemently condemned and defended the definition of marriage: "There is a combination of the two different sexes; each individual can achieve perfect status thanks to consolidation between the two and psychological, physiological complement between the two"⁷.

The Bible does not say much about homosexual marriage, but the biblical remarks on marriage as mentioned above show that marriage is a sacrament originated from God with the divine nature. It was God who used the power of bonding a man and a woman in marriage and family. Thus, if marriage is secularized or merely seen as a natural reality, the sacrament will be overshadowed. The sacrament of marriage belongs to grace and faith, and Catholics believe that marriage is a divine, noble relationship because of God blessing, sanctification. Therefore, they are not arbitrarily divorced for the reasons of the secular world.

This view in the Bible is embodied through the Magisterium's view of the interpretation of the Word of God. Accordingly, the same-sex marriage was strongly opposed by the Church. Pope Francis, in his meeting with the Polish bishops, had a talk with young people on the topic of transgender and the same-sex marriage, strongly criticized the issue. He considered it is "an ideological form of colonialism... and it is terrible"⁸. He asserted that the era in which children are taught at

school that they can choose their gender, transgender by emotion or free to marry homosexuality is the age of “sin against the Creator”. He repeated the Bible: “God created mankind in his own image. Male and female he created them” [Genesis 1:27]. Accordingly, gender is a grace of God, and when human beings fully live with that identity, they can establish a good relationship with themselves, with society and with God. It is contrary to the divine creation of man to live as a husband and wife of the same sex.

The Church also emphasizes that gender is a fundamental factor that makes the personality, the way in which human beings grow up; it helps mankind to express themselves and communicate with others, give each person a characteristic. Therefore, people need to live faithfully and in harmony with the natural law of their own body. It is a theological basis of the Church that opposes the transgender in order to live or marry a same sex person, condemn the destruction of the natural order by God. Since the Church asserts that marriage must be a union between a man and a woman in order to complete and support each other. In the marriage, the choices that go against the healthy balance of this order are considered as a disease that needs to be healed.

Thirdly, a same-sex marriage loses its sacred meaning and supremacy of mankind to cooperate with God in the act of procreation.

The first purpose of Catholic marriage is love the whole of life, then procreation and education of the children. Catholics believe that love between husband and wife like planting a tree. When planting a tree, every one would like to have fruits. And at the height of the fullness of love between wife and husband, a life is born. According to the Church, the love of the wife and the husband is only meaningful when the couple gives birth children. It is the commandment of God, the basis of the procreation of children. Moreover, it is also the intrinsic purpose of gender. From the beginning of creation, God created men and women and wanted mankind to have a large presence on earth. Human beings are privileged to cooperate with God in creation. By nature, the love of man and woman attracts each other naturally. This love is fully expressed when the couple give each other soul and body. And the

result of that self-giving is creation of happiness for one another and a new person given birth. Accordingly, a new man is the result of God's work, originated from God: "Children are God's grace, a birth is the reward God gives" [Psalm 127: 3].

According to the perspective of the Church, it can be said that the condition for the coming of the new man is that a man and a woman love one another and perform the sacrament of marriage in front of God. It should be emphasized that sexuality is not a purely physical act, but it is only performed when it is a constituent of love. The marriage and family is just place where people can fully consecrate. In other words, marriage is a conscious and freedom choice, whereby a man and a woman accept to live together and share love as God wanted.

Through the sacrament of Marriage, a couple is closely linked together in a sustainable way. The purpose of Catholic marriage is the love for life and childrengiven birth. Accordingly, the ultimate goal of the family is to serve life, to carry the image of God from one person to another in the act of procreation. Children are the result and sign of conjugal love, a living proof of the complete dedication of one man and one woman. Only in the love of the couple, through marriage and family, new life is formed.

Fourthly, the same-sex marriage is primarily based on the feelings of the human being, which is against the law of the Creator. The Church stated that "This is dangerous, because emotion is uncertain, can be changed"⁹. In fact, in Vietnam and in the world, there are people who got married and had children, then they divorced and lived together as husband and wife with a same-sex person. Conversely, some people got married to a same-sex person, then they divorced and married to a opposite-sex person, had children and a normal family life. Such stories often occur in the present society. It can be said that people can do different things at different times, even completely against each other based on their emotions.

Though freedom is a value of humanity, consistent with the progressive marriage trend of the contemporary world, the Church does not encourage the kind of freedom to indulge human emotions to

the extent they are defying everything to protest traditional values that upset the world order set by God from the beginning of creation. Over time, the Catholic view on marriage has unchanged; “it is an engagement of a man and a woman, both being baptized and free to marry, and they voluntarily express their consent. Freedom means: it is not forced; obstructed by natural law or the Canon law”¹⁰.

The Church considers the consent of a man and a woman to be “necessary of a marriage”. Without this consent, a marriage will be failed”¹¹. However, it does not mean that a consent of a same-sex couple is also considered as a freedom of marriage.

Fifthly, the combination of two same-sex persons, in principle, it can not be equal to a marriage; it is not considered as the foundation of the family.

In secular society, we consider the connection between two people of the same biological gender as a same-sex marriage. However, according to the Holy See’s view, it is not a marriage. It is just a bond between two persons of the same sex, although it also has the same characteristics as a marriage.

Reading the texts of God’s creation in the Book of Genesis, we understand God’s plan - Adam and Eva become the first communion form of humanbeings. The two become “one flesh” [Genesis 2, 24] and participate in procreation; they become contributors of the Creator. This means, for Catholics, in the plan of God, the family is considered as the first place where the process of individualization and socialization takes place; it is a cradle of life and love. It is in the family that the giving of each other between a man and a woman is linked in marriage to create a living environment in which the children are born, nurtured and educated to maturity. This notion of Catholicism shows that the family is not only a cell of society but it is also a church, the place of procreation, of evangelization. The purpose of a marriage is to reproduce children.

The sacrament of Matrimony helps Christians to build their family as a happy home, where God and love reigns. In order to build a miniature church, the Christian family is required to live the life of the

Church, meaning that a religious life. Thus, the family is just like the Church; it means that the family must serve the building up of the kingdom of God in the community, proclaiming Gospel and imparting Christian values to other family members.

According to this theory of Catholicism, the Church regards conjugation between two same-sex persons is unequal to a marriage, and the relationship called the same-sex marriage is not considered by the Church as a foundation of the family. No matter how hard, these relationships work to create family-like functions (such as transgender, adopt a child); the Church does not recognize, always reserves of the Catholic marriage.

To face the protest of the same-sex marriage supporters, the same-sex couples and the tendency of liberalization, the Church remains faithful to its original view from the beginning that a marriage must be the freedom of association between a man and a woman whose purpose is to love one another for life and to reproduce and raise children. All actions contrary to the natural law are regarded by the Church as “ideological colonial forms... And it is terrible”¹², according to Pope Benedict XV’s words: “This is the age of sin against the Creator”¹³.

Thus, the family must be based on the basis of a marriage between a man and a woman; it is not based on a marriage of two persons of the same biological gender. Only through marriage (to marry in front of God), a family is formed. The spousal relationship is formed as a new family with the two first members. The conjugal bond of love and responsibility leads to the birth of children, grandchildren. Children are just allowed to perform sacraments if their parents performed the sacrament of matrimony. This view of the Church differs from that of some people and some countries when they recognize the same-sex marriages. In these cases, a family does not need to build on the foundation of a marriage.

However, the Church affirms: “It needs to respect the homosexual dignity, and to encourage them to follow God’s plan by paying particular attention to practice purity. It does not mean to defend the

legitimacy of an act that does not conform to morality; it does not mean the recognition of the right to marry of the same-sex couples and it is equal to the family”¹⁴.

The Holy See’s point of view, on the one hand, condemns the same-sex marriages as decadence, disorder, on the other hand, the Holy See always calls her members to respect homosexuals. It means that the Holy See does not promote homosexuals caused by mental illness and emotional disorder, but it respects congenital homosexuals. Because many diseases and emotional states can not be fully decoded by modern medicine. In terms of science, it is not true that every product is perfect at birth, including human beings. In fact, many different diseases are led by genetics, congenital defects. Therefore, to some extent, it needs to consider homosexuality or emotional disturbance in the perception of marriage as a disease so it just needs to be healed. In this case, the Holy See stated that “It needs to encourage them to follow God’s plan by paying particular attention to the practice of purity”¹⁵. At the same time, the Vatican has vehemently condemned the so-called “terrible” tendency of “poisoning children with the idea that our gender can be selected and changed”¹⁶. In fact, it is a hot issue of contemporary society; there are many controversies; it needs to continue to study in a wide range of different dimensions.

Conclusion

The current issue of marriage is complicated with different views. The contemporary society makes people sometimes feel confused and disoriented. And this trend are increasing. The meaning of marriage is also becoming more complex when a same-sex couple can to get married and be recognized by the law in some parts of the world. In this context, the Catholic Church maintains an immutable stance when it asserts that *marriage is freedom and voluntary union between two persons of the opposite sex who need to be attached and to live together all their life, to reproduce and to educate children*. The physical, spiritual and religious ties of the Catholic marriage create norms for a traditional family and foundation for maintaining a family relationship with society, especially with Church.

The perspective of the Bible about human origin, gender and marriage as analyzed above, it can be said that the stance of the Bible is opposed. This view is confirmed in the Bible:

“If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads” [Lv 20:13]. Based on this basis of the Bible, Catholicism considers homosexuality as a degeneration, so the Holy See asserts that homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered. They are contrary to the natural law; they are not derived from the real need for emotional and sexual complementarity; they also do not open to life flourish, which is unacceptable.

Although a same-sex marriage has the same characteristics as a marriage, the Church does not consider it as a marriage but it is merely homosexual union. Accordingly, this union can not be equal to a marriage; it is not the foundation of a family. Thus, human beings have no right to redefine a marriage, to change moral values for the benefit of themselves and of society itself.

To deal with the current changes, the Church has always affirmed and protected its immutable doctrine, a marriage for procreation a new life. Views against this mechanism are considered as against the moral values of Catholicism. /.

NOTES:

- 1 *Từ điển Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Dictionary)*, Danang Pub., 2005: 461.
- 2 National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2001), *Law on Marriage and Family of Vietnam in 2000* (Vietnamese), National Politics Pub., Hanoi, Article 10.
- 3 National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2001), *Law on Marriage and Family of Vietnam in 2014* (Vietnamese), National Politics Pub., Hanoi, Clause 2, Article 8.
- 4 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (2004), *Doctrine of Marriage and Family* (Vietnamese), Religion Pub., Hanoi: 13.
- 5 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, *Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99)* (Vietnamese): 96.
- 6 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, *Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99)* (Vietnamese): 97.
- 7 The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam (2007), *A summary of the social theory of the Catholic Church*, (Vietnamese), Religion Pub., Hanoi: 175.

- 8 Đặng Tự Do, “Đức Thánh Cha Phanxicô mạnh mẽ chỉ trích ý thức hệ chuyên giới”, <http://vietcatholic.org/News /Html/188346.htm>, access 8 April 2016.
- 9 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99) (Vietnamese): 97.
- 10 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2012), *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vietnamese), Religion Pub., Hanoi, N°. 1625.
- 11 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2012), *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Vietnamese), Religion Pub., Hanoi, N°. 1626.
- 12 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99) (Vietnamese): 105.
- 13 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99) (Vietnamese): 105.
- 14 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2007), *A summary of the social theory of the Catholic Church*, (Vietnamese), The Religious Pub., Hanoi: 176.
- 15 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2007), *A summary of the social theory of the Catholic Church*, Religion Pub., Hanoi: 176.
- 16 The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Vietnam (2017), “Communion”, Bulletin on the Vietnamese Family (99) (Vietnamese): 108.

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6. The Archbishopric (1998), *Bible: The Old Testament and the New Testament* (Vietnamese), Ho Chi Minh City Pub.
7. Pope John Paul II (2006), *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio - The duty of the Christian family in the world today* (Vietnamese), Holy See.
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