

Same-Sex Wedding

Synopsis:

Canadian religious groups play a role in the nation's policy-making processes provincially and nationally. Historically, Christian churches have spoken out within public discourse concerning issues related to marriage and divorce. This was the case concerning same sex marriage. Since 1999, Christian churches have been part of the public debate in Canada about the extension of marriage rights to same sex couples.

According to Young (2006) Roman Catholic, Evangelical Protestant, Presbyterian, Salvation Army, Anglican and Pentecostal Assembly churches were officially opposed to same sex marriage rights. The Unitarian, Metropolitan Community Church, and the United Church of Canada officially supported the proposed change to federal legislation on marriage.

The arguments that the churches used in opposition included theological arguments on the basis of the Bible, tradition and the will of God, procreation, child rearing and the male-female natural sexual bond. In addition, these churches argued that they have had an historical role in witnessing marriages on behalf of the state. Being forced to witness same sex marriage would violate freedom of religion principles and jeopardize religion's role in preventing moral and social discord.

Churches in favour of same-sex marriage referenced the history of marriage and appealed to scholars who conclude that there is nothing about marriage that is natural or universal. Throughout history the definition of marriage has changed, especially in Western societies. The concept of procreation as the basis for the normativity of heterosexual marriages is dismissed given the advancement of technological means for reproductive control and fertility.

Within each of the Christian churches in Canada, there are those that support equality for gays, lesbians, bisexual and transsexual persons. There is also division within Christian churches between those that are in favour of same sex marriage and those that are opposed. The churches that supported same-sex marriage, such as the United Church of Canada, had fewer public policy statements compared to churches that argued against it, such as the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops. Nevertheless, Bill C-38 was passed in 2005 and defined marriage as "the lawful union of persons to the exclusion of all others."

Young, P.D. (2006). Same-sex marriage and the Christian churches in Canada. *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 35(1):3-23.