

Christian Groups Decry Canada's Gay-Marriage Ruling

After an Ontario court ruled that same-sex unions are legal, evangelicals vowed to fight the implications

Same-sex marriage is now legal in Canada's largest province, Ontario, and will become legal across the nation as early as this month following an uncontested declaration by Ontario's Court of Appeal that said forbidding gays to marry is unconstitutional. Canada is now the third country in the world—following Holland and Belgium—to legitimize same-sex unions.

But in a surprisingly swift move, Canada's outgoing Prime Minister Jean Chretien and his Cabinet, who did not contest the

Ontario decision, proposed legislation to legalize same-sex marriage nationwide. The bill included language that would protect the right of churches to refuse to marry gays and lesbians.

The definition of marriage in Canada's Constitution will be changed to that of a union between two consenting adults. The move follows a long fight by gay activists who argued that the old definition of marriage as between one man and one woman was unconstitutional because it violated the constitution's Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"We were totally shocked that the federal government wasted all the work of its Justice Committee and the taxpayer's dollars to rush this through," said Bruce Clemenger, president

of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC), a large national association of evangelical Christians that has been present at every stage of the same-sex marriage debate.

“If you redefine marriage as the union of two consenting adults, how do you draw the line at just two people being involved? Further down the road, we could see the legalization of polygamy or incestuous relationships.”

Clemenger said homosexual and lesbian couples who have lived together longer than one year already receive the same rights as heterosexual couples in matters of health care, social assistance, ability to adopt children or use artificial reproduction methods, and inheritance rights. “Basically, these couples are taken care of ... but what they really want is the golden ring,” he added. “They want to be seen in the eyes of the public as completely acceptable.”

Dan Cere, an ethics professor at McGill University and founder of the Institute for the Study of Marriage, Law and Culture, said the decision in favor of same-sex unions is part of the general deterioration of marriage in Canada.

“We can wash the law of gender differences, but it doesn’t change the basis of how relationships and families are designed,” said Cere, a staunch Catholic. “We’re developing a kind of culture which is immune to marriage, when the truth is that marriage is a cultural institution you shouldn’t mess around with.”

Wendy Gritter, executive director of New Direction for Life Ministries, a Canadian ministry to Christians who struggle with same-sex attraction, believes the gay marriage issue can

present an opportunity for evangelism. "The same-sex marriage issue is a great opportunity to reach the gay community with the gospel by showing them the love of Christ coupled with discipleship for their struggle," she told Charisma.

David Hazzard, head of ministerial services for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (PAOC), says PAOC supports the EFC's stance on same-sex marriage.

"In Canada, we live in the midst of the tension of speaking both God's punishment and God's mercy," Hazzard said. "I preached a sermon on Gay Pride Day in Toronto two years ago which told of Jesus offering His grace to the woman caught in adultery, but I also told of Christ's commission to change her lifestyle. The implication was He views homosexuality in the same way."

The United Church in Canada ordains ministers who are practicing homosexuals and says it will marry same-sex couples, while certain dioceses of the Anglican Church of Canada recently adopted a service to bless same-sex live-in relationships.

Since June when same-sex marriage became legal in Ontario, approximately 10 percent of all marriage-license applications have come from gay and lesbian couples, including several from gays in the United States, where same-sex marriage is not legal except by civil ceremony in Vermont.

Also in June, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Texas law banning sodomy. Gay rights groups praised the decision, likening it to the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision that ended segregation in public schools. Christian

organizations, however, decried the ruling, saying it could clear the way for gay marriage in the United States.

“This case gives advocates of same-sex marriage a weapon with which to force state officials and private employers to give same-sex unions exactly the same status as traditional marriage,” said Vincent McCarthy, executive director of the Center for Marriage Law. “The court has now imposed the sexual revolution into the Constitution.”

The ruling may serve as a wake-up call to “the majority of Americans who believe in traditional marriage and oppose same-sex unions,” said Mathew Staver, president of Liberty Counsel, one of more than a dozen mostly Christian groups that filed a brief in February opposing the legal challenge to Texas’ sodomy law.

“[The] decision has awakened a sleeping giant,” Staver said, “and will galvanize and reinvigorate the majority of Americans who believe in traditional marriage but have ignored the radical agenda of the same-sex marriage movement.”

Josie Newman in Toronto