

Bishop Harry Jackson: Supreme Court Just Declared War on the Church

I am disappointed with the Supreme Court's decision to change the definition of the institution of marriage for the entire United States. A major aspect of my disappointment is that the court did not let the people decide at the state level. Instead, the Supreme Court imposed its decision about this issue on the entire nation in one fell swoop. I am concerned for the rights of the people to vote on a critical issue like this. Many people in my circle of influence wonder if this ruling will lead to the abridging of our most basic constitutional rights, such as the right to live by personal conviction and the free exercise of religion.

I cannot help but remember waiting for the court to make a similarly important decision in January 2011. During that month the *Associated Press* wrote: "The Supreme Court has rejected an appeal from opponents of same-sex marriage who want to overturn the District of Columbia's gay marriage law ... turning away a challenge from a Maryland pastor (Harry Jackson) and others who are trying to get a measure on the ballot to allow Washingtonians to vote on a measure that defines marriage as between a man and a woman."

I felt that both judges and politicians had failed the citizens of the District of Columbia, not allowing us to make the decision about this important policy issue. Now the Supreme Court failed the 50 million Americans who had the opportunity to vote for marriage and had cast their vote for marriage as one man and one woman.

Now we will work to restore that understanding in our communities and in our laws. We will continue to stand for

marriage. We will work to protect religious freedom. Our Constitution guarantees that, as a person of faith, I can exercise my faith without fear of reprisal. We should be free to continue to live our daily lives consistent with our beliefs about marriage.

For example, most Americans are not aware of the fact that a Methodist church association in New Jersey lost its property tax exemption status because it refused to allow use of their facilities for a same-sex union. This kind of unfairness toward those standing up for marriage as one man and one woman has become all too common. The Solicitor General of the United States made clear during the oral arguments in this marriage case why we need additional religious liberty protections when he suggested that a private school that continues to teach that marriage is the union of a man and a woman could be in danger of losing its tax-exempt status. We need to protect both individual laymen and Christian church from coercion in the wake of this decision.

As a black American, I understand more than most citizens that there is a possibility of misuse of power in our great land. In the early 1950s my father was threatened at gunpoint by a state trooper, who discharged his weapon just inches above my father's head. My dad went home and began making plans to leave the South. A majority of black Americans still believe that marriage should be defined as the union between a man and a woman. This is in part simply an acknowledgment of the concern that redefinition of marriage will further undermine the structure of families in our community in which more than 7 out of 10 children are born out of marriage. Redefining marriage in a way that further separates marriage from childbearing does nothing to address such a critical issue.

In this critical time in our nation's history, we recommit ourselves to standing for marriage and religious liberty.

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Christian Church in the nation's capital. Jackson, who earned an MBA from Harvard, is a best-selling author and popular conference speaker. He leads the High-Impact Leadership Coalition.