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**The Rt. Rev. Philip Egan
Bishop of Portsmouth**

Ref: +P/sc
15th December 2012

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP
Prime Minister and Leader of the Conservative Party
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Dear Mr Cameron

From **Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan, Bishop of Portsmouth**

I am writing to you to send you best wishes from the priests and people of the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, and the promise of our prayers for you, as you carry the heavy responsibility of leading our great nation. However, I am also writing to ask you, indeed to urge you, to change course on your intention to introduce same-sex marriage.

You have said you are an enthusiastic supporter of marriage and that you do not want "gay people to be excluded from a great institution." Yet I wish respectfully to point out that behind what you say lurks a basic philosophical misconception about the nature of 'equality.' Equality can never be an absolute value, only a derivative and relative value. After all, a man cannot be a mother nor a woman a father, and so men and women can never be absolutely equal, only relatively equal, since they are biologically different. So too with marriage. Marriage, ever since the dawn of human history, is a union for life and love between a man and a woman. It is a complementary relationship between two people of the opposite sex, the man and the woman not being the same, but different. They are not, in other words, absolutely equal but relatively equal. This is why gay couples, two men or two women, are not being 'excluded' from marriage; they simply cannot enter marriage.

By enabling gays to 'marry' and by equating the union of gay people with marriage, however well-intentioned, you are not only redefining what we mean by marriage but actually undermining the very nature, meaning and purpose of marriage. Marriage, and the home, children and family life it generates, is the foundation and basic building block of our society. If you proceed with your plans, you will gravely damage the value of the family, with catastrophic consequences for the well-being and behaviour of future generations. The 2011 Census shows the parlous state of the institution of marriage which you claim to believe in so strongly, and of family life in general, with one in two teenagers no longer living with their birth parents and over 50% of adults living outside of marriage.

Can you imagine the confusion and the challenge for teenagers as they grow up and seek to reach a fully mature and integrated sexuality? This is why I fail to see how your intentions can possibly strengthen the institution of marriage and family life. Rather they will dilute it.

More, you are ignoring the huge opposition of Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, as well as that of a huge number of ordinary people. You are imposing the aspirations of a tiny minority on the vast majority. Make no mistake, the change you are proposing is of immense significance. By it, you will be luring the people of England away from their common Christian values and Christian patrimony, and forcing upon us all a brave new world, artificially engineered. What you are proposing will smother the traditional Christian ethos of our society and in time strangle the religious freedom of the Catholic Church in Britain to conduct its mission. There is no sanction whatsoever in the Bible and the Judaeo-Christian tradition for gay marriage. I cannot see how anyone who claims to be a Christian can possibly justify what you are intending to do.

I know you have spoken of the 'quadruple lock' and other legal safeguards. Yet for me many grave concerns remain about the brave new world you are fashioning in the name of the false gods of equality and diversity. For example, will I as a Christian have to support your ideology when preaching? Will you exempt the Church, its resources and premises, from charges of discrimination if it declines to host same-sex social activities? Will Catholic schools, Catholic societies, Catholic charities and Catholic institutions be free (and legally protected) to teach the full truth of Christ and the real meaning of life and love?

I appreciate how politically difficult it can be to undertake a U-turn and to sustain the attendant criticism such would bring. But when it is a matter of the truth, and the reasons are cast-iron clear, a U-turn would be hailed by history only as brave and courageous. This is why, like a Thomas a Becket appealing to Henry II, I do not hesitate to ask you to consider doing what is the right and just thing to do. Otherwise, will we ever be able to forget that it was the leader of the Conservative Party (sic) who finally destroyed marriage as a lasting, loving and life-giving union between a man and a woman?

I assure you of my respect, best wishes and prayers.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Philip".

Rt. Rev. Philip A. Egan
Bishop of Portsmouth

CC: Priests and People of Diocese of Portsmouth