



Gay Marriage, Liberty and Morality

by Stephen Almond

The issue of Gay Marriage and the legalisation of the right to marry for same sex couples has been very much at the top of the agenda for the cultural elite in 2012. Many politicians pride themselves in publicly promoting a society that sets out to prove its moral backbone in regards to equality, freeing homosexuals from years of social exclusion by allowing them to declare their love as couples with a legally binding marital contract alongside heterosexual couples.

But what does this actually mean for the institution of marriage that has been the corner stone of the family unit? It seems the battle lines for this issue are clear - modern liberal morals or traditional religious ones. However the subject is a not as clear cut as it initially appears.

The first legal Gay marriage in the world can be traced back to 2001 in Toronto, Canada at the MCC church on 14 January, and was made officially legal by the Ontario Court of Appeals in 2003. This led the Canadian Parliament to pass a law making same sex marriages in selected provinces legal, and gave way to the three judges who dealt with the original Ontario Court of Appeal case, labelled "Nation builders" by the national press. Since then many countries have moved closer towards same sex marriages (civil partnerships) or given them legal status. For example, countries with stronger religious fibres than the UK, such as Portugal and Argentina, as well as traditionally liberal countries such as Holland and Switzerland all now allow same sex marriage. This would seem to suggest that the world in general is ready to accept that homosexuals have the right to marry as much as their heterosexual counterparts.

Traditional marriage has less of a grip on the lives of people in the UK today - 15% of women and 20% of men never marry, compared to 7% and 9% respectively in 1970. People feel more able to opt out of marriage than ever before, and perhaps more so than those opting in as a social obligation. Are we seeing the traditional heterosexual marriage being replaced with an equality or liberal approach towards marriage - that love for another regardless of sex is the binding action for it? Theresa May, the Home Secretary thinks so, writing in Times;

"Regardless of their sexual orientation, society is stronger when people enter into a stable relationship; when they commit to each other; when they make binding vows to love, honour and cherish one another". Mrs May adds: "The introduction of civil partnerships in 2005 was a significant step forward for our society. For the first time, same-sex couples could make a public and legally recognised commitment to one another. That made relationships more enduring and our society more stable."

Britain has a divorce rate of 2.8 divorces per 1,000 - the highest in the EU alongside Finland. However, I am not too sure that the introduction of same-sex marriage promotes a stable

society quite as Theresa May eludes. You would think that there would be widespread public support from the liberal UK to jump on a campaign for same-sex marriages, but a ComRes poll putting forward the statement “Marriage should continue to be defined as a life-long exclusive commitment between a man and a woman” came back with 70% agreed to the question. From the 18-24 age group, 66% said they wanted marriage to remain between a man and a woman only. However this poll was requested by Catholic groups and it shows in the question.



It would seem that same-sex marriage remains the majority belief in what people regard marriage to be, according to the ComRes poll at least. Still times change and many things that are traditional and held as right may not be a view that is not right for modern times. Many years ago it was unheard and forbidden for a Protestant and Catholic to be married in a Catholic or Protestant Church. I am sure at the time many people would have agreed with the saying “it’s not right in the eyes of god”, but that ruling has been eroded with time and many people would not bat an eye-lid to the idea today. However that taboo only disappeared with changes in society through decades of social evolution.

Why then is the Gay Marriage agenda being pushed so hard by Politicians? In January of this year, political leaders signed a pledge to support a campaign to legalise same-sex marriage and David Cameron was reported as wanting same-sex civil marriage to be in place by the end of the current Parliament in 2015. This ‘want’ seems in complete contrast to the public’s view on the subject for marriage to remain traditional in its legal sense, between a man and a woman. Many Politicians see the change in the law as the furtherance of today’s society and are more or

less riding rough shod with the idea to fulfill their own grandiose schemes of how society should be deemed fair for all. Cabinet Office minister Fancies Maude explains the reason for the Conservative party pushing the agenda in Pinknews

“The Conservative Party will always suffer if it is seen as if it is trying to turn the clock back to an imagined golden era. You can’t drive policy looking through a rose-tinted rear-view mirror. If we are seen as being defined by backward-looking social attitudes we will be seen as unacceptable and unelectable.”

This seems to be a veiled attempt to show the Tories in a new modern light and of the modern age. It is easy for out of touch politicians to sit on their high horse and sit high they will!

So could the issue be more about the Government picking a fight with religious institutions rather than bringing in equality for homosexuals perhaps? With many politicians and liberal newspapers championing the issue in what seems a lone wolf crusade regardless of general public opinion, religious groups and the Catholic Church have come out all guns blazing. The Catholic Church in England and Wales has recently written to every state-funded Catholic secondary school encouraging them to ask their pupils to sign a petition against gay marriage. Further, Scottish Catholic leader Cardinal O'Brien, has argued that gay marriage is a "grotesque subversion of a universally accepted human right" and the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord George Carey, described it as "cultural vandalism". It is clear that the religious camp sees this as an issue that should not be moved on and it looks like they intend to campaign against the political liberal crusade. The coalition for marriage, which is an umbrella group for Christian organisations have, run a well-funded campaign, collecting over 400,000 signatures "opposing same-sex marriage in registry offices". With a sceptical public, reluctant to move away from existing definitions of marriage, the future of the clearly lies with how much the political elite are prepared to fight for it.

What is very noticeable from the issue of Gay Marriage is lack of support shown by the Gay Community itself. The lead opposition to the Coalition for Marriage is the aptly named Coalition for Equal Marriage. Set up by a gay couple from Newcastle, supported by organisations including the Humanistic Society, Gay times and the National Secular Society, they have collect about 50,000 signatures agreeing with the change in the law. However, with 6% of the population, or about 3.6 million Britons estimated to be homosexual it doesn't seem to be a real cause for that the community are fighting for or want. This seems that the agenda is being pushed from the top down and not from the bottom up. The Labour MP Ben Bradshaw, the former culture secretary and one of the first openly gay minister, said to the Huff post

“homosexuals had already won equal rights with the introduction of civil partnerships and had never needed the word 'marriage' this isn't a priority for the gay community, which already won equal rights”. Ben Bradshaw continues "This is more of David Cameron trying to drag the Conservatives kicking and screaming into the modern world, of course, we'll support it, but this is pure politics on their part”

So what can be concluded from the battle lines over gay marriage? The cultural elite see this as an issue, to update their image with the modern world more than bringing equality for the Gay community. So set are they on this they care not for the division it will cause and stand smugly in the knowledge that anyone who believes in equal rights for all will toe the line and support it for fear of seeming old fashioned. On the other side of the trenches are the religious groups who are mobilizing mass ranks of soldiers with zealot zeal armed with notion that this would destroy the institution of marriage, causing a collapse in social norms and marital apocalyps where anything is fair game. Can I marry my dog now? In the middle are the Gay community seemingly unimpressed with the what is been fought for in their name and showing a strong case of indifference towards the issue.

Almost like an indiginous population of a county, where two warring imperial armies have turned up on their land to shell each other for control of something they do not own or have a right to fight for. The battle in my opinion will rage on for a long time but the winner will probably be the cultural elite. Having put so much liberal faith and rhetoric into the subject they will bring a change in the law but with religious groups ready for a fight I doubt the change will be as far reaching to give Gay couples the right to marry in the eyes of god and let alone under his roof.