

Same Sex Marriage - Cultural Appropriation

What is distressing about the 'same sex marriage' issue is the lack of clarity in the arguments being presented, and the positioning of the issue by same-sex marriage proponents as solely a question of "equality of rights". In our western culture, as in most other cultures, marriage had traditionally been recognized as a religious ceremony, and a legally recognized institution that carries certain obligations and conveys particular rights on a man and woman entering into matrimony. Historically in western society, whether performed by a minister or priest as a religious sacrament (or a rabbi as a spiritual bonding), or as a civil ceremony by a magistrate in countries having a parallel system of civil marriage, the marriage ceremony united a man and a woman as husband and wife. Moreover, the unspoken, but universally accepted, ultimate purpose of marriage was to unite a man and woman in a legally recognized union for the procreation and maintenance of children within a family unit.

Given the deeper meaning and essence of marriage in western culture, and in particular its spiritual nature, any suggestion that individuals of the same sex might be united in marriage would have been regarded as absurd, and the very idea would have met with incredulity and a fierce resistance, over the past two millennia of western civilization. However, public attitudes towards homosexuality and long-term same-sex relationships have evolved dramatically in recent years; and we now face the same-sex marriage issue.

Not too long ago homosexuals, once identified, were almost universally persecuted by society, and prosecuted at law. Only within living memory have gays and lesbians achieved a large degree of toleration within western society, with their life style "tolerated" in the sense that: 'we don't approve, or condone, your sexual preferences, but we won't denounce or attack you or your lifestyle'. Moreover, much more recently, we've seen homosexuality come to be "accepted" by large segments of western society in the sense that: 'it's okay to be a gay or lesbian, if that's what you are'.

In the past the critical issue for homosexuals in seeking "equality of rights", was to be accepted as individuals as equal members of society with all of the civil and legal rights that heterosexuals enjoy as individuals, with no laws in force proscribing their particular lifestyle or conduct. However, now there is a demand by some members of that community to have their committed conjugal relationships – for want of a better phrase, their life partnership relationships – recognized in law. In effect, to obtain the right for same sex couples to be joined together in a relationship recognized in law that will bestow on them the same rights, benefits, and entitlements, as are enjoyed by heterosexual couples who are married, or living common law.

Already in the federal public service the same-sex partner of a public servant living in an established conjugal relationship of more than one year's duration, has the same rights, benefits, and privileges, as does the opposite-sex partner of a public servant in a common law relationship; and these are exactly the same rights as enjoyed by the wife or husband of a married public servant. What is needed is the extension of the same rights, benefits, and entitlements to same sex couples as are enjoyed by married couples throughout the public and private sector in Canada.

How can this be done? An equality of rights can be achieved simply by the federal government, with the support of the provinces, legislating the establishment of a ‘civil union’ or “life partnership” institution, whereby same-sex couples can be united in law; and that in having the force of law, would bestow on same sex couples all of the civil and legal rights, benefits and entitlements enjoyed by married couples united in the religious institution of marriage.

The establishment of a civil union would create a parallel institution that would bestow an equality of rights on same-sex couples, and would provide a public and legal recognition of their union. The establishment of a civil union, distinct from marriage, would also avoid another potentially divisive moral issue centering on ministers and priests, and magistrates, being compelled in future to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples under the proposed new government legislation. Otherwise, in refusing to do so as a matter of religious belief, or matter of conscience, they would be exposed to facing sexual discrimination charges and prosecution by human rights tribunals – Human Rights Commissions – established under both federal and provincial statutes.

Given that the establishment of a ‘civil union’ instituted in law would appear to address all equality of rights concerns related to the same-sex marriage issue, why have gay and lesbian activists rejected proposals for this type of political settlement when brought forward elsewhere – what is the real motive behind their “marriage” demand?

When gay and lesbians activists, and their supporters, demand the right for same-sex couples “to marry”, and to have their same-sex conjugal relationships recognized in law as a “marriage”, they are no longer seeking equality rights in any real sense – that is to say, in terms of gaining the civil and legal rights, entitlements and benefits, enjoyed by married couples. What they are seeking is to appropriate marriage for their own ends, and in so doing to re-define the religious institution of marriage to such an extent as to negate its very essence and the moral-religious values that have sustained it.

In this endeavour, gay and lesbian activists, and their supporters, are adding insult to injury by dismissing and/or deriding the deeply held beliefs, convictions, and faith of Canada’s religious communities from whom the institution of marriage is being appropriated in a blatant act of cultural appropriation.

What these activists are trying to do constitutes the height of intolerance and insensitivity – to disregard and disrespect the moral values, religious beliefs, and conscience of others; and to force adverse cultural values on them by appropriating and re-defining a sacrament that is central to the beliefs of Canada’s religious communities. In effect, such an action constitutes a violation of a sacrament that religious communities fervently believe consecrates, and blesses, a conjugal union between a man and a woman under God. What we have here is a political agenda of gay and lesbian activists that goes far beyond seeking to achieve “acceptance” and/or “equality of rights” for homosexual couples in a domestic partnership. It constitutes an effort to force society at large to “approve” the life style of homosexuals – by forcing Canadians, by executive fiat, to give same-sex partnerships the marriage stamp of approval.

In ancient times when a conqueror wanted to subdue and convert a conquered people of a

different religion, he would appropriate, and incorporate, their religious institutions, rituals, and symbols into his new religion; he would seek to reshape their religious beliefs to his own ends; he would convert their temples to the new religion; and he would occupy their holiest of holy places and erect his primary temple thereon. By doing so the aim was to give credibility and credence to the new religion by forcing the conquered people to adhere to, and thus give a tacit approval of the new creed, through subsuming the old religion in the new religion, and destroying the distinctiveness and purity of the cultural values of the conquered people – values that were based on their particular religious beliefs. However, Canadians are not a conquered people to be dictated to, and imposed upon, from on high. Although it does give one pause for reflection in witnessing the liberal press in Canada, and those who have power over us, promoting a lifestyle that contradicts our traditional religious beliefs and values, while having nothing good to say about the faith of our forefathers.

Indeed, the churches of Canada have been told by a government cabinet minister that they ought not to publically express their beliefs where the same-sex marriage issue is concerned! Whatever happened to free speech? If there ever was a moral-religious issue on which Canada's churches, and Canadians generally, have every right to speak out, it is the issue of same sex marriage. The government has tried to silence the churches by invoking, ironically, the time-honoured, Protestant religious principle of separation of Church and State. Well yes, let us maintain the separation of Church and State.

Since the Trudeau government years, Canadians have accepted the principle that the State has no business entering the bedrooms of the Nation to regulate sexual conduct and dictate morality; let the government now recognize a far older principle, that the State has no business entering the realm of religion to define or redefine religious institutions and sacraments. Let the federal government create a new institution for uniting homosexual couples who wish to enter into a life partnership recognized in law, but it ought not to intervene in marriage which is a traditional religious institution, based on a religious sacrament, that far pre-dates any Canadian government. The current Liberal Government has no right to transgress by appropriating and redefining the religious institution of marriage for political purposes.

Today, most Canadians would support the granting of such an equality of rights to same-sex couples, and few Canadians would object to the government passing legislation to establish a civil institution, such a "civil union" or a "registered partnership", to register same sex partnerships in law and to convey an equality of rights with married couples. What many Canadians object to, however, is the current Liberal Government engaging in a blatant act of cultural appropriation, and a willful distortion of the traditional religious and civil concept of marriage, by seeking to pass legislation that recognizes same sex domestic partnerships as "marriages".

Such arrogance and intolerance as is being expressed by our current Liberal Government under Prime Minister Paul Martin, ought to be denounced and opposed by all Canadians, regardless of their differences in beliefs, values, political affiliation, and lifestyles. By all means grant homosexuals the right to enter into a same sex life partnership recognized in law, with equality of rights with married couples, but do not foist a terrible injustice on Canada's religious communities by appropriating and violating the traditional religious institution of marriage.

To gain respect and understanding, any community must first respect and understand the sensibilities, values, beliefs, and conscience of others, and refrain from offending them. True respect is earned, not demanded or appropriated. Let the government establish a life partnership institution, a civil union, for same-sex couples who wish to be united in law, and to enjoy an equality of rights with married couples. Then, through establishing loving and lasting relationships, same-sex couples will attain the respect, understanding, and good will of society at large. It is the only way that they will truly attain what they seek.

Passrob
February 2005