

Gale`s View – Wednesday, 21 March, 2012.

I am opposed to the concept of “gay marriage” and I shall, given the opportunity, vote against it in the House of Commons. I shall do so because I believe that “marriage” describes the union, in Church or out of it, of one man and one woman and it is not a term or a status that I wish to see hijacked in the false name of “equality”. As a consequence I shall be described, by some of my own constituents and by the wider “gay” community, as homophobic and prejudiced. I have, though, yet to hear any satisfactory argument to persuade me that my own strongly held faith and beliefs are of any less value or significance than those of a militant homosexual.

It will be said, immediately, that the Coalition Government`s proposed legislation, promoted by the Minister for Equality, Lynn Featherstone, will not compel any religious organisation to permit “gay marriage” in a church, a synagogue, a mosque, a temple or any other building used to observe a faith. All that we are being asked to vote for, we are told, is the right of same-sex couples to enjoy a civil marriage. That simple guile belies the fact that, for many, “marriage” defines – as it does for me – a particular status. Once undermined, it will only be a question of time before those who called for the recognition of Civil Partnerships demand, probably through the European Court of Human Rights, the right to marry in a Catholic or an Anglican Church or elsewhere.

I know. I did not vote on the Civil Partnerships Bill because, as the person who chaired the legislation through its committee stage, I was barred by parliamentary convention from so doing. But because I presided over the management of the bill through its committee stage I also heard rather more of the debate than most. Those opposed to this legislation argued at the time that it was “the thin end of a wedge that would lead to a demand for gay marriage”. Ministers and supporters of the bill assured colleagues that this was not so and that the bill was purely designed to enshrine in law protection of property and other rights that any who choose to live together ought to be able to enjoy.

Interestingly, and as an aside, the Civil Partnerships Act, as it now is, does give entirely proper legal protections to same sex couples but at the same time discriminates against, for example, two spinster sisters who choose to share their incomes and a home! Ms. Featherstone has, I note, no plans to correct that “inequality”.

Notwithstanding all of the assurances given at the time of the passing of the Civil Partnerships Bill, the Act has, as its critics predicted, paved the way for the Government`s current proposals to legalise “gay marriage” and I do not believe or accept that that process will stop at my church door. In the tearoom of the House of Commons last week I was asked by a Party colleague, a gentle man who I respect and like, why I wanted to stop him and his same-sex partner from being blessed in his Catholic church. My answer was, and remains, that it is for precisely the same reason that I and my wife and soul-mate, Suzy, were united in a registry office and not by the Anglican Church of which I am proud to be a member. As a divorcee I may not re-marry in my church. Those are the laws of my faith. I acknowledge them and I do not wish to change them for my own convenience, much though I would dearly love to walk Suzy down an aisle. The inference, though, is clear: my parliamentary friend does not want a registry office wedding. He wants the right to be married in church and the holy law excludes that possibility.

Additionally, we are told, the Liberal Democrat Equalities Minister, presumably with the support of the Government, wishes to re-write history and tradition and literature and official forms and to remove from the lexicon the words “husband and wife” because these words, of course, encapsulate the very fact that marriage is, indeed, a union between a man and a woman. This takes “equality” into a realm that is almost Stalinist in its “political correctness”. If we are to re-construct official and business documentation and to replace “Husband and Wife” with “spouses” and “partners” where, please, will this stop? Will Shakespeare and Milton and The Holy Bible be re-written also? Will only “correctly” expurgated literature be allowed to be used in the classroom? Do not try to portray this as fanciful. Children`s literature has been sanitised in the interests of other “equalities” and this, if it is allowed to pass, will follow.

The Government proposes to allow a free vote on this issue. It does so in the knowledge that from both sides and in the middle of the House of Commons there is a majority that will carry this legislation through. Only the about-to-be-abolished House of Lords and the British people may be able to prevent it. I cannot see that socialist backed organisation, 38 Degrees, mustering its troops to flood MPs mailboxes with e-mails in support of Christian marriage but I would urge any who share my own view to seize the moment and respond within the Home Office time limit of three months, to the consultation that was launched last week. Speak now or forever hold your peace.