
COMMENT - Alliance could lose votes on same-sex marriage stance

Next time round I will think twice about voting for the Alliance Party, following the revelation that it is demanding that its candidates for election must accept its ruling in favour of same-sex marriage - Alf McCreary in the Belfast Telegraph

One can understand any political group insisting that its members generally toe the party line, but I am surprised that Alliance is so hard-nosed on this issue which should be a matter of conscience.

If their candidates buckle to party pressure, and Alliance refuses its MLAs a free vote on this issue, same-sex marriage will become law in Northern Ireland.

However, the fact that Alliance will allow the Churches a let-out of conscience by not insisting

that they marry same-sex couples, is evidence of a party trying to face both ways.

One wonders how many core Alliance members support this new edict, or is this just another example of cynical political opportunism, as we saw recently in the Republic during its referendum?

Politicians on all sides jump on any bandwagon which they conveniently label as 'progressive' but the Churches, and their members, are entitled to ask what kind of 'progress' is achieved by legalising same-sex marriage?

For many centuries the traditional concept of marriage between a man and a woman has been one of the bedrocks of family and community life, and recent legislation granting civil partnerships to same-sex couples enshrined their equal status in law.

There is no need for same-sex 'marriage' and those who hi-jacked the lovely, descriptive word 'gay' are surely clever enough to invent a new buzz term which would satisfy people who want to be recognised as 'equal' in their same-sex relationships.

I am not homophobic, but I resolutely oppose any moves to change such an ancient, stable

and valuable institution as traditional marriage merely for the sake of political correctness.

The Presbyterian and Catholic Churches have rightly called on the political parties to allow their members a free vote when this controversial issue again comes up in the Assembly.

Fr Tim Bartlett, one of the most eloquent Catholic spokesmen in the Irish Church, has called on MLAs to follow their conscience, "even on pain of death".

This reference to the martyrdom of Sir Thomas More is going much too far, but I agree with Tim Bartlett's point. All MLAs should be given a free vote on same-sex marriage.

The Catholic Church is resolutely opposed to same-sex marriage, but this issue, together with the ordination of homosexual bishops, is tearing apart the Church of Ireland and the Anglican Communion.

This is very much the elephant in the room for all the Protestant churches, and it also threatens to tear apart the Presbyterians.

Recently when I covered this story during the General Assembly, a number of leading clergy on

both sides of the argument flatly refused to talk to me on the record about this subject.

Nevertheless, in a small straw poll that I carried out on the opening night of the Assembly, the vast majority of the laity expressed their strong, yet gracious, opposition to same-sex marriage.

At least the Churches pay some attention to freedom of conscience, unlike Alliance which is behaving on this issue just like any other party in a scramble for votes.

Alliance supporters do not like being told what to think, and I am one of them. The party should reconsider its misguided stance on legalising same-sex marriage, otherwise it will lose staunch supporters, and also its hard-won reputation for balance and fairness.