



CNI

Comment - CS Lewis thinks you should relax about gay marriage

Recently social media exploded in celebration of the US Supreme Court verdict making marriage legal for gay couples across the USA

Depending on your view of 'gay marriage' (or 'equal marriage', or 'marriage'), this would have delighted or dismayed you, but it was quite hard to ignore. And while most conservatives would have fallen into the 'dismayed' camp, comfort might come from a seemingly unlikely source.

CS Lewis is as close to a Saint as evangelicals come to having. From his transcendently popular *Narnia* allegories to his wonderful and powerfully influential works on Christianity, he is still something of a hero to orthodox and conservative Christians of all ages. And in perhaps his greatest work of popular Christian thought, he said this about marriage:

'Before leaving the question of divorce, I should like to distinguish two things which are very often

confused. The conception of marriage is one: the other is the different question – how far Christians, if they are voters or Members of Parliament, ought to try to force their views of marriage on the rest of the community by embodying them in the divorce laws. A great many people seem to think that if you are a Christian yourself you should try to make divorce difficult for every one. I do not think that. At least I know I should be very angry if the Mahommedans [Muslims] tried to prevent the rest of us from drinking wine.

'My own view is that the Churches should frankly recognise that the majority of the British people are not Christians and, therefore, cannot be expected to live Christian lives. There ought to be two distinct kinds of marriage: one governed by the State with rules enforced on all citizens, the other governed by the Church with rules enforced by her on her own members. The distinction ought to be quite sharp, so that a man knows which couples are married in a Christian sense and which are not.'

What we believe Lewis is saying, essentially, is that even if we hold a conservative view of marriage, we need not despair if the state does not share it. We should remember that only God can truly bless a marriage in the Christian sense,

and whether or not we believe homosexuality to be a sin, the state's sanctioning of marriage doesn't change that.

For CS Lewis' generation, the key marriage issue was divorce. For ours, it has been whether gay people should be allowed to marry. It's helpful for us to remember that while no conservative would consider divorce, in the usual course of things, an ideal outcome for a marriage, we hear precious-few Christian voices demanding that divorce be legally banned.

The principle is the same for our generation. The Government or courts behaving as if they are not the Church (because they are not), shouldn't bother us. As long as we are, in our churches, allowed to believe, teach and practice according to our consciences (if you're a Baptist) or traditions (if you're from a more hierarchical Church), what secular institutions do is really up to them.

If, on the other hand, the Government or courts seek to tell us what we may believe and how we may act, *that* will be a reason for dismay. That might even be a reason for resistance. Currently, though, we're not being told what to believe. We're not being watched like hawks, enduring Government programmes that assess whether

we are raising our children correctly or
demanding that we promote 'moderate' forms of
our faith.