



CNI

COMMENT - CS Lewis thinks you should relax about gay marriage

Or at least he might, judging from this excerpt from *Mere Christianity* - writes Jonty Langley

Social media looked like a Care Bear exploded over the weekend. Or a My Little Pony massacre. Rainbows *everywhere*.

Depending on how many liberal friends you have on Facebook, many of the [profile pictures](#) you would have seen would have been transformed into [rainbow flags](#), in celebration of the US Supreme Court verdict last week 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 I 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. At that point we will have an actual reason for braving the judgement of our rainbow-faced friends in disagreeing with the popular view and remaining steadfastly rainbow-free. But what happened this weekend was not that. It was people with whom, if they are Christians, we might disagree about theology and, if they are not Christians, who have simply been given a right that doesn't affect us.

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.

That, for the moment, is only happening to Muslims (the 'Mahommedans' of CS Lewis' argument). Perhaps how we react to their current trials will determine what we reap in the future.

[Jonty Langley](#)

Jonty Langley is a writer, former DJ and recovering Philosophy major. By day he works at a Christian mission agency, by night he argues with people on the internet. This article was first published in Premier Christianity magazine. For a free copy of the magazine see-

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