

Same Sex Marriage and the Lost Art of Conversation

I've been engaged with the debate on Same Sex Marriage that has been raging in Tasmania in recent weeks. It'll come to a head today with the Legislative Council deciding the fate of the Same Sex Marriage Act 2012. My position is pretty much what the Anglican Church's position statement says. You can read that on the Bishop's blog.



What has intrigued me is the various ways in which the position I hold (that marriage is inherently defined as being between a man and a woman) is misunderstood (and, indeed, deliberately misrepresented at times) by the other side. It's an insight in "not getting our point across" and it's worth a ponder.

Here are some quotes I've gathered just by browsing some social media and newspaper article comments etc. There is of course a great deal of *good* debate out there – people engaging on the real points at stake. In what follows I have done my best to isolate statements people have made about what they believe the position of "our side" rests on.

They think we don't want marriage because of...

1. **FEAR.** It will "make us all rape pigs or what not" [Source] We are "are either homophobes or pandering to homophobes" [Source – Pilko]. We believe "same-sex marriage will lead to polygamy, incest and bestiality." [Source – Rodney Croome]. We refuse to "affirm love" and "bow to fear." [Source – Rodney Croome]
2. **RELIGION.** We are religious, and must therefore be a

source of “constant intolerance and bigotry” [Source – Jason Anderson of Bellerive]. Because we are like “sheep repeating each other.” [Source – Lauren Bunker of Hobart]

3. **INSECURITY**. We are “so insecure in [our] own relationships [we] have to oppose everyone being treated equally.”. We are “so hopelessly insecure about the labels attached to [our] own relationship status that [we] need to deny gay couples that same label?” [Source – Ben Klingberg of Hobart]. We are “so very very insecure... so very vary scared that we might have to treat all people the same.” [Source – Lauren Bunker of Hobart]
4. **A DESIRE TO CONTROL**. Because we wish to “decid[e] how others must lead their lives” [Source – Alan Kearsley of Hobart]

It's something to ponder.

I can give some responses of course. With varying shades of value: e.g... No, it's not about fear, it's about the role of government. Yes, it is about religion, and every person's philosophy of life, and how we negotiate the common ground of society, so what, we all get a say and just because some philosophies have a religious framework doesn't meant that the point of view is not reasonable or wise. When it comes to personal insecurity – well, it's not our side that has tried to frame the debate in terms of feelings, emotions, and the need to have love affirmed and recognised. The task is to actually bring the debate back from personal insecurity and consider societal insecurity – because that's the job of public discourse. If there wasn't a sense of insecurity there wouldn't be any motivation to either call for change or defend against it. Insecurity can be reasonable and well articulated. A desire to control? We are talking about the public sphere here – the common ground where “each to their own” doesn't work. It's not about control, it's about the

boundaries and scope of that common ground, which we all must agree on if we are to even to pretend that we are still a cohesive society.

But I suspect to many that will come across as “blah blah blah”, or as Rebecca Fitzgibbon of the Mercury so insightfully rebutted something I tweeted recently, “Herp Derp.”

We’ve forgotten how to have conversation, us Tasmanians. We’ve lost trust. To be perfectly honest, I don’t trust the Premier any more – to go from announcement to voting on the Same Sex Bill within days (unlike the significant consultation undertaken by the Bacon Government on the Relationships Act in 2003) is to misuse parliament, making it not much more than an instrument of rhetoric. Whatever happens in the LegCo today one side or the other will feel a sense of *imposition*.

How do you do conflict management at such a large level? And how can I personally, and we as Christians (well, as people of any philosophy really), help and not hinder, and yet at the same time remain true to our convictions?

It’ll take a miracle. Pray for our State.