

December 12, 2006

## **OttawaWatch 100: Straight goods on political sex talk**

**By Lloyd Mackey**

*In today's context, some of the "sex talk" which became part of Barbara Kay's column would not capture as much interest as it did in 2006. That is likely because social conservatives in both the Liberal and Conservative parties are keeping their powder dry. Conservative leader Erin O'Toole's contention that he wants to grow the "blue tent" seems to take precedence. He wants people who are LGBTQ and straight, worshipping on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, every day or not at all. And he believes the only way to defeat the Liberals is by growing that tent. We will see.*

When will it be that advocating for traditional marriage will lose its "us against them" approach which, at best, is a spinoff of our adversarial political structures?

Talk about a loaded question. But I ask it in order to provide some "outside the box" thinking to the reality that we are now into a period of time when the legal definition of marriage is unquestionably that of being "between two persons" irrespective of gender.

I had contemplated talking about the results of last week's House of Commons vote on whether to re-visit last year's legitimization of same-sex marriage.

The government-proposed vote failed 175-123, with several cabinet ministers voting against the motion and several socially-conservative Liberal MPs casting with the government. The other two parties, the NDP and Bloc, stood solidly against the re-visiting proposal with a whipped vote, which meant their respective leaders would brook no dissent on it.

Newly-minted Liberal leader Stephane Dion backed down from initial ruminations about whipping his vote, recognizing that he should avoid being trapped by the major reason that this even became an issue. That reason, of course, is that Bill C-38, the same-sex marriage legislation passed by the Paul Martin government, was somewhat less than a free vote and thus open to the charge that it was, indeed, undemocratic.

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All of the above has been running through my mind the last few days as I tried to see what kind of useful analysis could be offered by a Parliament Hill-based Christian journalist.

I wanted to suggest that Christian leaders who wish to encourage the continued strong level of acceptance in Canadian society, of the concept that marriage is between a man and a woman, keep in mind that they still have every right to hold to that belief. And, indeed, such leaders continue, as well, to have the right to point out to the rest of the

community that we do not yet have the full word on the effects that the legitimizing of same-sex marriage might have on how families function in a civil society.

I also wanted to suggest to Christian leaders that we can learn much from the pro-life issues that continue to periodically catch, if only briefly, the attention of Ottawa politicians.

I believe that we have learned that banning abortions is not an option in either the short or long term in Canada. But, more optimistically, we have also learned that people on the other side of the issue, particularly those who are personally opposed to abortion but who struggle with the question of a woman's right to choose, are still interested in finding ways to reduce – even by large numbers – the number of abortions taking place in Canada.

What is it that pro-traditional-marriage people can learn from all this?

The fact is that the issues are not completely parallel, but they are close enough to recognize that Christians, whether operating officially within religious denominations or through ad hoc advocacy organizations, can continue to impact how society views marriage.

True, some of the more radical pro-gay groups seem to have an agenda of turning Canada into, not simply a gay-friendly society, but into a gay-dominant domain. They are the groups who insist that heterosexual marriages are breeding grounds for what they describe as “breeders” (no pun intended) who want to overrun the world with their own kind.

But such groups do not have general acceptance, even in the larger gay community, although, at times, the noise they create might seem out of proportion with their real influence.

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Almost unnoticed, even by many Christian journalists, was an Ottawa conference spearheaded by the Centre for Cultural Renewal, which took place just a few days before the above-mentioned same-sex marriage vote.

Present in the crowd at that conference was Barbara Kay, a *National Post* columnist who often proves her mettle by cutting through to the core of the story on a range of social issues.

In the Wednesday, December 13 issue of the *NP*, Kay nicely synthesized a post-conference press release quoting CCR director Iain Benson as proposing:

... a government-funded “standing constitutional forum” with representation by all stakeholders – not only those activists challenging traditional norms, but also tradition’s defenders – to level the ideological playing field.

Kay introduces her column by suggesting that:

Traditionally-minded Canadians and their libertine counterparts resemble dysfunctional lovers: The traditionalists’ needs go unfulfilled, while their litigious bedmates selfishly achieve their goals through premature adjudication.

Such a one-sided climax was the case when Paul Martin’s Liberals, with a whipped vote of Cabinet, rammed through the Civil Marriage Act of June, 2005, on the spurious claim that the traditional definition of marriage contravened the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

As with many acts of political analysis, Kay saves the best and most relevant of her contentions to the last. That comes after she has laid the groundwork in the preceding paragraphs.

She notes:

Politics makes strange bedfellows, and past performance failures rankle. Still, although sexual traditionalists and postmodernists may never join together in a trip to the moon on gossamer wings, a Constitutional Forum might yet allow them to enjoy a mature, fruitful relationship before one or the other’s ideological clocks run out. The government should give the forum proposal non-partisan consideration, for the ideal of giving satisfaction to competing claimants through compromise has always been a Canadian consummation devoutly to be wished.

I could not have said it better myself. The full Benson brief, entitled *To Encourage Civil Dialogue: A Principled Analysis for Governmental Support of Constitutional Development in Canada* can be found at [www.culturalrenewal.ca](http://www.culturalrenewal.ca). Caution to non-lawyers: You may want your legal counsel to help simplify some of the paper’s contents. Benson writes best when he is communicating with the legal community. Even politically-aware word-crafting journalists are challenged by his erudition.

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