

Many hands = lighter work No Time to Abandon Conviction

The Catholic Review

Since the unfortunate day New York passed a bill to redefine marriage, national and local media have poured unabated attention – not to mention pressure – on Governor Martin J. O'Malley to thrust his political support behind this issue. I felt it a serious responsibility to counterbalance or offset “politics as usual” with a reminder of our deeply rooted conviction that, by its very nature, marriage cannot be redefined by executive or any other political fiat. That prompted my writing the governor prior to his public reversal on the issue, urging him toward a moral rather than a political course. Ignoring the urgings of his Church, other faith leaders and thousands of Marylanders, the governor thereupon announced his regrettable decision to sponsor a same-sex marriage bill next year.

At that press conference, the governor acknowledged in responses to reporters that he has changed his position on the issue of gay marriage.

Here's The Baltimore Sun account:

“O'Malley was asked three times during the news conference Friday to explain his personal evolution on the issue. He said that he did not want to spend too much time ‘rolling around’ in his individual story, but said that his upbringing in the Catholic Church and attending Catholic schools had been influential in his early thinking.” The governor has publicly drawn on those Catholic teachings to explain his support for an end to the death penalty, immigrants and the poor and vulnerable, but rejects the Church's consistent teaching in support of marriage between a man and a woman.

The Sun suggests a possible answer for O'Malley's change of position:

“O'Malley's change of heart on same-sex marriage tracks closely with public opinion. A Sun poll in 2008 showed that 19 percent of likely voters supported the

arrangement (39 percent said they would back civil unions). A Washington Post poll in May 2010 found that support had risen to 46 percent.”

The teachings of the Catholic Church do not rise and fall with the polls, or like a song on the Billboard Top 40.

The Catholic Church’s teaching on marriage is time-honored and is built solely around what is good for children and for our society ... and it mirrors the laws of most civilized governments of the West. Government has always surrounded marriage with many protections because it is the only union capable of procreating children and, therefore, necessary for the continuation of the human race. If government no longer reserves the special recognition of marriage only to this relationship, our society loses its most basic understanding – an understanding already alarmingly threatened – of a child’s inescapable need for the stable union of his mother and father.

Supporters of the measure have tried to market it to Marylanders by calling it a civil rights issue. Doing so not only ignores the rights of children, but also is an affront to many African-Americans and to others who lived and labored during this country’s Civil Rights Era. In all likelihood, each of us knows and loves homosexual persons and believes they should be treated with the same dignity and respect as anyone else. We not only do not dispute this, we most vehemently demand it. As Catholics, it is ingrained in our very nature to love and respect all persons, and it is perhaps this impulse that many Catholics confuse as a rationale for accepting same-sex marriage. But there are other avenues for granting certain rights and benefits to couples who are not married. Maryland has already taken this step by passing recent legislation granting to domestic partnerships such rights as medical decision-making, hospital visitation and exemptions from real estate transfer and inheritance taxes.

There are many ways of protecting basic human rights; sacrificing marriage isn’t one of them. And those who believe as much should not be bullied into silence for fear of being branded bigots. Treating heterosexual and same-sex relationships differently does not equate to unjust discrimination. Upholding the truth of marriage furthers the rights and equal dignity of all human persons by promoting a social fabric where children can benefit from the unique gifts of a mother and a father.

In his frequent references to religious exemptions, it is clear the governor and others are hoping to gain votes for the bill by quelling the voices of religious leaders and others who rightfully believe such legislation tramples religious freedoms. Despite the limited measures some states have taken to protect religious institutions, none have recognized the religious freedom of individuals. Specifically, they should be protected against having to violate their moral beliefs about marriage. It is hard to believe that any measure can avoid the inevitable collision that redefining marriage will bring between government and people of faith. The slippery slope has already become an impending avalanche and who can seriously guarantee that efforts to promote “religious exemptions” will survive future judicial or legislative reversals.

More importantly, our fundamental concern about redefining marriage does not rest on a concern simply to protect our own interests, but to protect the interests of our whole society. And these interests need protecting at the state and national levels, as President Obama has also apparently changed his public position on this issue given his recent decision to support a bill that would repeal the Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman.

What our nation and this state need is the kind of leadership on display during this past legislative session when legislator after legislator in Maryland’s General Assembly brought the courage of their convictions to the public square. In rejecting legislation to redefine marriage, those legislators stood tall amidst the barrage of back door arm-twisting and deal-making to put what is best for Maryland, best for society ahead of political interests. Such convictions are formed at home, at school and at church, and are what help to raise issues as grave as these above partisan politics and special interest efforts. Those pressures will greatly intensify this year, and it is imperative that we match them with our own unabated voices and unceasing prayers.

I continue to pray, and ask the people of the Archdiocese to do the same, that the governor’s faithful upbringing, based on truth and reason, will consistently influence his thinking and lead once again to a change of mind and heart on the issue of marriage.