

You can't do that – it's against my religion

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As the Same-Sex Marriage Bill reaches the House of Lords, Margot Fernandez writes about the American experience of religion trying to dictate the law.

"You can't get married – it's against my religion!"

That's pretty much a summary of the arguments against marriage equality. Now, suppose I were to knock on your door and ask for your birth-control pills or whatever (assuming that you use some kind of birth control)? Would you hand it over to me without questioning? I don't think so; at least I would not have done so when I was in that situation.

There are indeed a few denominations that are opposed to the use of birth control, but even though they exist, they are not going from house to house taking away little packets of pills. But although that may seem like all is as it should be, it leads us to murky waters.

The people who want to take away birth control have discovered that they can get other people to do their work for them. They can organise politically and try to get candidates elected who will, in fact, make efforts to take away access to birth control through enacting legislation.

Now, at the present time there has not been a mass removal of The Pill from pharmacy shelves in Tucson or Phoenix, but that is not because certain groups don't want the pharmacists to stop ordering them and filling prescriptions for them. And many of my readers are aware that some legislators are working through insurance companies and various types of regulations to make birth control more difficult to obtain.

You may remember that the Religious Right tried to stop access to birth control by claiming that selling The Pill was against the principles of certain pharmacists or their staff. It didn't fly, but they tried. "I am not going to fill your prescription because it is against my religion."

You aren't supposed to practice family planning, you see, because it is against the religion of some man you have never met and wouldn't recognize if he bumped into you on the street. In fact, it goes back to the use of the same argument against marriage equality, and it is just as unacceptable.

Don't you think that it sounds a little thin? "You two over there can't get married because I, over here, have a religious conviction that defines marriage--not for me, but for you."

These self-declared religious authorities define marriage, most often, as between one man and one woman. Well, that's stupid, considering the television programs that follow plural marriages right now. I don't know who the guy is who has his wives and goes through various drama episodes on the television series, but whoever he is, I don't think that a posse of Southern Baptists is going to show up and make him pick one of his wives, and make off with the rest.

It is also stupid because, not long ago, marriage was defined as between black men and women, and between all others, none of whom were free to marry a black man or woman. The test case for segregated marriage was decided in the Fifties--the wife in the case died only last year, remember. It wasn't that long ago.

And if you think that anybody is going to clean out the plural marriages in the Fundamentalist Mormon compounds in Texas and Arizona, look what happened when they tried it a couple of years ago. Authorities retreated with egg on their faces. So that brings us back to two perfectly good, ordinary citizens who want to get married.

The only argument against marriage being defined as between two consenting adults is the group of people who say that you can't do this because it is against my religion. That's it--that's all, folks. That's the argument.

As an American citizen, you or I can be free to marry. Or not. I was free to marry my husband, but I would not have been free to choose a spouse of the same sex. That is against somebody's religion down in the Bible Belt.

Likewise, my husband was free to marry me, after he satisfied the requirements of the Immigration and Naturalization authorities. That is, he was free to marry an American woman--but had he been of a mind to choose a same-sex American partner, he would not have had that freedom. This is the basis of the court finding that took place in California some time ago: the freedom of an adult in America, to marry, at the present time, is not absolute. It does not apply equally to all Americans. It does not.

So there's the argument: you can't do that because it is against what I believe. Doesn't it sound stupid? It is stupid, and pretty soon it will be history.

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