Who'll defend marriage in face of liberal onslaught?



By David Quinn

There is something more than a little hypocritical about all those leading Irish liberals suddenly jumping aboard the marriage bandwagon having spent a good part of their careers tearing that institution to bits in the name of 'freedom'.

But now, because they support same-sex marriage, marriage has become temporarily fashionable again in liberal circles.

The health of marriage as a social institution is measured in various ways -- and liberals care for none of them.

For example, how many people are getting married? How many people are divorcing or separating? How many people cohabit either as an alternative to marriage or a precursor to it?

Does marriage receive special support and recognition both from society and from the State that protects and encourages it?

Above all, how many children are raised by both of their married parents until they are grown up?

Those who think about the health of marriage in Ireland are concerned that just less than half of our population over the age of 18 is married. That is lower than in America.

They are concerned that the number of Irish people who have experienced divorce or separation has skyrocketed from 40,000 in 1986 to 250,000 last year.

They are concerned that the rate of cohabitation in Ireland is now higher than in the US. They are concerned that the social welfare code actually penalises marriage.

They are also concerned that 28pc of Irish children do not have the advantage of being raised by their two married parents. That is higher than the EU average.

Anybody who genuinely cares about the health of marriage has to be as concerned about these trends as an economist is concerned about the rate of inflation or unemployment.

Is Labour concerned about any of these things? How many in the leadership of Fine Gael are concerned? In Fianna Fail? In Sinn Fein?

When is the last time you heard a leading Irish politician express any concern at all about the health of marriage as an institution?

The other day, Tanaiste Eamon Gilmore gave a speech in which he patted himself and Labour on the back for introducing divorce and other liberal reforms. He then called for same-sex marriage.

Following suit, Alan Shatter did much the same thing.

But you will have to search very hard for a single remark by either of these men worrying about rising divorce and separation, the rising number of births outside marriage, or making a single suggestion as to how marriage might be strengthened.

In fact, you will be hard pressed to find anyone who supports same-sex marriage ever expressing concern about the social trends that are harming marriage.

The conclusion is irresistible: few if any of those now calling for same-sex marriage could really care less for marriage as an institution.

They might well be married themselves, but they see it as little more than a private arrangement of no particular social significance.

The reason liberals care little or nothing for the health of marriage is because they have always seen its previous strength as an impediment to personal freedom.

They did not like the fact that you could not divorce, so they campaigned for divorce. There is no evidence that they are losing any sleep because 250,000 of us have now experienced divorce or separation.

They did not like the fact that marriage was the pre-eminent form of the family, so they sought to reduce its social status.

They don't worry about cohabitation or the number of births outside marriage because they see these things as manifestations of personal freedom.

It is true, of course, that marriage was sometimes too strongly defended in the past -- in particular through stigmatising single mothers.

But today it is hardly defended at all -- and this is bad for children, above all, because children normally do best when raised by their own married mother and father.

The reason support for same-sex marriage has grown is because we have forgotten that the core purpose of marriage as an institution is to commit mothers and fathers to raise their children together. It is a child-centred institution, not an adult- centred one.

Campaigning liberals believe in marriage as a lifestyle choice and no more. Accordingly they have reduced marriage to just that.

This is why we should always beware when liberals look towards marriage, as it is always with the intention of either weakening it or redefining it out of all recognition.

The political question now is what is going on in the mind of Enda Kenny? What is his view of marriage? Does he believe that, in general, children ought to be raised by their own married mothers and fathers? Does he believe it is an adult- or a child-centred institution?

In other words, will he go with the current political flow, or stand firm and defend this most vital of social institutions from being further weakened by some of his fellow cabinet members?

- David Quinn

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