

ECP Centre National Press Conference
(Ottawa) Friday, April 8, 2005 (10 a.m.)
Rev. Tristan Emmanuel's speech

Bill C-38 Will Be Used To Strip Majority Rights Away!

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen of the national press and Members of the Parliament of Canada. My name is Rev. Tristan Emmanuel. I am the executive director of Equipping Christians for the Public Square Centre. Standing with me today are: Rev. Matthew Dyck, of the Almonte Reformed Presbyterian Church, Rev. Ken Roth, of Chapel Ridge Church in Ottawa, Rev. Dr. Barry Boucher, of Life Centre Ottawa, Rev. Marc Jagt, of the Canadian Reformed Church in Ottawa, and Mr. Arnold Hulzebosch and Mr. Gerard Woudenberg from Burlington, Ontario.

Together, my colleagues and I call upon the Prime Minister to consider carefully the ramifications of imposing the very divisive anti-marriage Bill C-38. We are calling upon the Prime Minister to restore faith and trust in his administration and withdraw Bill C-38.

As the prime minister of our great dominion, it is his fiduciary duty to ensure that Canada's system of government is not unnecessarily compromised, or otherwise impugned. Canada is a nation which recognizes at its core the Supremacy of God, the rule of law and the right of the people to be heard and represented by the laws of the nation.

Therefore, neither the prime minister, nor his caucus, nor the Supreme Court, nor special interest groups have the right to unilaterally impose their moral philosophy on the people of Canada without the common consent of the citizens. This respect is fundamental to maintaining our pluralistic society.

John Rawls, the seminal philosopher of the modern liberal tradition, has maintained that for modern political liberalism to remain constructive it must strive to remain impartial as a way of respecting diversity. In practice this has meant that when deep disagreements over public policy emerge, it is not the role of the state to impose a particular solution. Rather it should allow the nation's culture to resolve the differences from the bottom level up. Any attempt to legally impose a particular ideology by the state damages civic life, distorts political liberalism, undermines constitutional consensus and places communities holding different views in permanent tension with the law and with each other. And yet, under Prime Minister Paul Martin, this is precisely what is happening in Canada.

Five years ago, in 1999, Mr. Martin, then acting Finance Minister, voted and pledged to defend the traditional definition of marriage because in his view that was the common consensus at the time. Since that time, however, Mr. Martin has done everything to retract his previous pledge and is now using the power of the Prime Minister's office to undo the status of marriage as that exclusive and sacred union between one man and one woman -- even though the consensus has not changed.

Mr. Martin claims that he is simply attempting to honour the wishes of the Supreme Court and human rights declarations. Yet he is being less than honest here since

neither the High Court, nor the United Nations, nor any other internationally respected human rights codes have maintained that marriage is a fundamental human right.

Granted, as an individual, Martin has the right to adopt a moral philosophy espousing alternative sexual preferences. But he does not have the right to use the power that comes with the office of Prime Minister to unilaterally impose his moral ideals about what does and does not constitute a human right, or what does and does not constitute a marriage, especially without the clear consent of the people.

Moreover, in the last election, Mr. Martin promised Canadians that the vote on the re-definition of marriage would be a free vote. Yet, now Martin is binding the conscience of his Cabinet. Martin's definition of a free vote is exclusive to backbenchers. For his Ministers, however, Martin's definition of a free vote is to vote his way, or he will free them from the Cabinet.

Which leads us to the final great abuse of his office and the denigration of our democracy. Mr. Martin keeps telling us that to be a "Liberal" means to defend minority rights. I'm sorry, this rings hollow. Tell that to the very groups Mr. Martin seeks to help, because apparently they don't have respect for the constitutional rights of Canadians of faith. Don't good Canadians like Bishop Henry of Calgary, Alberta, who is awaiting a trial with the Alberta Human Rights Commission for daring to defend Catholic teaching on human sexuality, have a constitutional right to teach their religious tradition openly -- and without being branded a bigot, simply because homosexuals don't like what they hear?

The great insult in this debate about the redefinition of marriage is that the Prime Minister thinks he can buy off sincere people of faith with "religious protection" language, as though we were too blind to see what is happening. Bishop Henry's case is proof that in Canada the issue has shifted very dramatically; shifted from protecting minority rights to the active suppression of the rights of the majority.

Bill C-38 will be used to strip away majority rights.

Mr. Martin's words and actions are not only duplicitous, they are egregious. By refusing to heed the call of hundreds of thousands of Canadians Martin has embarked on a course that will, if it hasn't already, fracture his party, damage civic life, distort political liberalism, and undermine constitutional consensus. Canadians have endured more than a decade of arrogance and scandal under Jean Chrétien. If Mr. Martin continues down this present course, when over 67% of Canadians oppose his anti-marriage bill, his legacy will be that of destroying the social cohesion of this country -- pitting Canadian against Canadian and thereby creating an environment of irreparable cultural division. This is why my colleagues and are as saying: "Mr. Martin, do the right thing. Withdraw Bill C-38!"

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