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Roadblocks in the path to same-sex altar

By Ted Byfield

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Gay marriage, the phenomenon decisively rejected in 11 American state referendums last November, appears headed for a triumph in Canada, but not a very glorious one.

The minority Liberal government of Paul Martin has introduced a bill authorizing the marriage of two people of the same sex. It has also declared a "free vote" in the House of Commons, meaning that the defeat of the bill would not defeat the government.

However, the free vote is not all that free. Cabinet ministers, accounting for 36 Commons votes, have been ordered to support the legislation, whether they like it or not. Since the 308-member house is sharply divided on the issue, the requirement of cabinet solidarity was necessary to assure passage.

Meanwhile, for the bill's sponsors, everything seems to be going wrong.

When Calgary Catholic Bishop Fred Henry denounced the measure as fundamentally at odds with the church, the Bible and the Christian faith, Liberal cabinet ministers and the liberal media promptly denounced Henry, demanding that the Canadian church repudiate him. Instead, both the French and English cardinals endorsed the Calgary bishop and urged the government to put a moratorium on the legislation for five years.

This was the first time in living memory that the Catholic Church had so unanimously plunged into a Canadian political debate. The church's determined opposition to abortion-on-demand, for instance, was largely initiated in Canada by the Catholic laity in strong co-operation with evangelical Christians. The same coalition has recurred, and last month Bishop Henry shared a platform with David Mainse, long-time host of the country's best-known evangelical TV show, urging Christians to fight the bill.

The gay-marriage question relates to the abortion issue in another way: Christians urge women with an unwanted pregnancy to carry the baby to term and put the child up for adoption. Now that the child could wind up being raised by two gay men, the prospect is considerably less attractive. When the Conservatives, nearly all of whom oppose the bill, declared that the new law will provide legal grounds for polygamy in Canada, the government described such a possibility as absurd. It was then discovered that, on the contrary, the government had been quietly seeking ways to prohibit polygamy after the bill was passed.

Then came more trouble. The American Focus on the Family and the American Knights of Columbus both backed their Canadian affiliates and financed full-page ads in the newspapers, vigorously supporting the traditional family and in that way opposing the bill. Justice Minister Irwin Cotler saw this as an American intervention in Canadian politics. In Canada, he said, "we have free speech, but we don't want public opinion to get mortgaged to the highest bidder." It was the kind of anti-American jibe that plays well to the current Liberal audience.

Both groups had to word their ads carefully because Canada does not in fact have free speech. Under Canadian law, only political parties are allowed to spend on political advertising. If other groups do it, they can, and often do, lose their tax status. To most Americans, such a law would appear not only unconstitutional but incomprehensible. However, few Americans yet realize that their northern neighbor is rapidly developing the most autocratic government in the free world.

All these difficulties aside, the bill will probably pass. (NAH! - over our dead bodies! - we will make sure this nefarious bill never sees the light of day - and we hope & pray that the MPs will finally come to their senses at the last moment and listen to the voices of 67% of Canadians fiercely & passionately opposed to C-38 - RJ) Canada has four federal parties. Quebec's separatist Bloc Quebecois and the socialist New Democratic Party will support it, along with the Liberal government and a few Conservatives. The danger lies in the Liberal back benches, where rural members and those in ethnic urban constituencies are under increasingly fierce pressure to oppose the bill. The Liberal minority government will probably face an election within the next year and a half, (we hope the morally-bankrupt & supremely arrogant Liberal government is brought down in shame by its current scandals and forced to go to elections right now where it could be defeated (hopefully, that would automatically kill C-38) - a defeat of this execrable Liberal Party is the best solution for Canada, and we should do everything in our power to vote this abomination of a party out of power - this party has been in power way too long, and power has gone to its head - as Lord Acton famously said, "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely" - RJ) and some MPs could easily be defeated on this issue. If too many of them appear ready to oppose it, Prime Minister Martin could withdraw the bill and submit the issue to a referendum where gay marriage would almost certainly be defeated.

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