

## IS MARRIAGE A'CHANGIN'?

*Thomas More Garrett, O.P.*

**B**ob Dylan famously sang that “the times, they are a’changin’.” Sometimes the vastness of the change that comes with time can be best appreciated through conversation between the young and the old. For example, did you ever ask your grandparents whether they could have imagined at your age that a certain this or that would have taken place in their lifetimes? Perhaps those who were young in the ‘60s recall asking their grandparents whether they thought they would live to see a man walk on the moon. A grandson today might ask his grandfather the same concerning the Internet.

A similar type of conversation between junior and senior friars is not unusual. While shared wonder over novel developments can often be fodder for pleasant banter, this summer one such discussion in which I was engaged took on a more serious tone. In the final days of June, not long before folks arranged the fireworks and flag-bearing fire trucks in preparation for the Fourth of July, the legislature in New York made that state the latest to redefine marriage to include couples of the same sex. In the midst of the barrage of parades and pageants, I asked a more seasoned friar one afternoon whether he ever thought that he would live to see same-sex “marriage” endorsed, and indeed celebrated, by the state.

His silent expression of disbelief conveyed his surprise concerning the outcome of recent events. I imagine that some surprise would characterize the response from any person of a certain age, regardless of his or her view concerning homosexuality. Press accounts reported astonishment even among the ranks of the well-funded, highly organized, nationwide lobby intent on eroding the exclusive nature of the relationship of man and woman joined as husband and wife.

Yet there is more at issue than the state's definition of marriage. Without some action to curb the excess of the vocal minority pushing for the complete normalization of homosexuality, our ability to live our faith outside of the confines of our homes or churches will become a thing of the past.

That the practice of the faith will be confined to one's home or church is a bold claim, especially in the United States, where freedom of religion served as an inspiration for our nation's very founding. But the assertion is warranted all the same. The gay-rights movement has done more than threaten the unique character of marriage in order to provide special rights for people who happen to be sexually attracted to persons of the same sex. In states that have sanctioned same-sex "marriage" or have enacted marriage-equivalency statutes, the threat of legal action menaces individuals who want their lives to reflect a commitment to the beliefs that they hold dear.

One ready example is the impact that an evolving definition of "marriage" has on the responsibilities of certain public offices. For example, town clerks in Vermont and New York have been forced to resign for being unable to leave their morality at home and issue "marriage" licenses to same-sex couples. For these individuals, the victory of the gay-rights movement has disqualified them from public service, at least in their former capacity, and deprived them of their livelihood and professional commitment.

The occupational threat presented by a change in the definition of "marriage" extends to private business owners as well. Shortly after Illinois' civil-union law went into effect earlier this year, at least two homosexual couples initiated separate legal actions against owners of private businesses where the businesses declined the use of their facilities for "commitment ceremonies." These events are far from unique, and some similar actions have already been decided against the private owner. For example, a Methodist organization lost its New Jersey state tax-exemption for refusing to lease a private facility, used largely for Sunday church services and youth programs, for purposes of a civil-partnership ceremony.

Moreover, the threat to freedom of religion that arises from same-sex marriage extends even outside those jurisdictions where



HENRI TOULOUSE-LAUTREC - IN BED

the same-sex lobby has succeeded in pushing legislators or judges into redefining marriage. Consider a few recent examples: A photographer was fined \$7,000 by the New Mexico Human Rights Commission for declining to photograph a same-sex “commitment ceremony;” graduate students in Michigan and Georgia have been dismissed from universities for refusing to counsel homosexuals in furtherance of a same-sex sexual relationship; and a newspaper reporter in Maine was fired after sending private emails expressing opposition to the legalization of same-sex “marriage.”

These aren’t the only cases where people who were unwilling to keep silent about homosexual behavior have faced social and legal reprisals—the number of similar events continues to grow in America, leaving aside the even more severe threat to freedom of religion in Western Europe. You can find further information concerning instances such as these both inside and outside the United States, as well as a wealth of additional materials on this topic, at the websites of the National Organization for Marriage

([www.nationformarriage.org](http://www.nationformarriage.org)) or the United States Bishops Conference ([www.marriageuniqueforareason.org](http://www.marriageuniqueforareason.org)).

**T**he continuation of the same-sex marriage trend will narrow the ability of faithful Catholics to participate in the economy and society in general. Indeed, entire professions and offices of public service may become inaccessible to individuals with a Catholic sense of morality.

The supporters of same-sex “marriage” adopted their own little twist to Dylan’s lyrical commentary on time and change in embracing the slogan “It’s time.” Perhaps you have heard the phrase used in this context yourself recently. Be sure to understand the consequences of what this motto implies, even beyond the approval of same-sex “marriage.” If we are not content with leaving our faith at home when we leave for work or for school, this slogan means that it’s time for us to change as well.

*Thomas More Garrett entered the Order of Preachers in 2008.*