

Am I Intolerant and a Bigot?  
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Public radio's *On Point* recently aired a program about gay marriage on the one-year anniversary of its legalization in Massachusetts, the first state to permit such unions. Several gay married couples were on the show along with Brian Camenker, director of Article 8, a group that lobbies against gay marriage.

The couples talked about the benefits of being married, both in terms of how it made them feel about themselves and how their families, friends, and coworkers felt about them. They seemed happy and said their children were more comfortable now that their parents' lifestyle had been officially recognized by the state.

Camenker said that gay marriage is an assault on "traditional" marriage; that is, one man one woman. His primary point was children need a father and a mother for proper nurturing and, no matter what, a gay man could never be a *real* mother and a gay woman could never be a *real* father.

Consequently, he said, gay marriage will weaken the family, the cornerstone of American society. His group's website showcases an anti-gay marriage bill (H654) introduced in the Massachusetts legislature by Rep. Emile Goguen that contains the following: "It being the public policy of this Commonwealth to protect the unique relationship of marriage in order to promote, among other goals, the stability and welfare of society and the best interests of children, only the union of one man and one woman shall be valid or recognized as a marriage in Massachusetts. Any other relationship shall not be recognized as a marriage or its legal equivalent, nor shall it receive the benefits or incidents exclusive to marriage from the Commonwealth, its agencies, departments, authorities, commissions, offices, officials, and political subdivisions."

Only a year has passed since same-sex marriages were permitted in Massachusetts, so the bill's assertion that banning gay marriage will "promote, among other goals, the stability and welfare of society and the best interests of children" is plain opinion.

Evidence, however, is not what drives Camenker and those who share his point of view. Instead, they are motivated by their sense of what is "moral." In a press release posted on the Article 8 website, Camenker writes, "Even pro-family churches now hesitate to speak out

on this moral issue, since it has been politicized by the radical homosexuals and their allies.”

Morals are beliefs about how people should be. They are shaped by culture, religion, or both but are not necessarily supported by proof that certain approaches to living are safer or wiser than others. For example, sex between unmarried people might be deemed immoral in some cultures, but there is no reason to think, all other things being equal, that sex is actually more harmful to those who haven't tied the knot than to those who have. In fact, sex before marriage is a common American practice. Many upstanding citizens have engaged in it, and it has gone on for centuries.

Camenker's views against gay marriage are built on moralizing intolerance and nothing more. This is why I find it hard to *tolerate* Camenker and people like him. The question is does this make me *intolerant*? In a similar vein, if I refer to people who use the bible to support their anti-gay views as being locked into a supernatural way of thinking that was shaped during the benighted Bronze Age and Iron Age, does this make me a bigot?

In the broadest senses of the words, I am both: intolerant and a bigot. Dictionary.com defines bigot as, "One who is strongly partial to one's own group, religion, race, or politics and is intolerant of those who differ." The definition of intolerant is "not tolerant," and tolerant is defined as showing "a willingness to recognize and respect the beliefs or practices of others."

Both words embody a long list of negative connotations. In addition, both are applied mainly to individuals like Camenker who wish to deny equal rights to people they don't like for one reason or another. In years past, the reason might have been skin color or ethnicity. Such blatant (and historically *approved*) prejudices largely have been beaten down by a brilliant wave of enlightened thinking flowing from giants such as Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King.

It is now unacceptable to denigrate African Americans or other minorities for simple physical or cultural differences. You can still find hateful rhetoric at bastions of backward thinking like the Kingdom Identity Ministries website but mainly it has been driven underground.

If it surfaces in a public way, as it did recently when Mexican President Vicente Fox said Mexicans working in the United States were willing to

take jobs that “even blacks” wouldn’t take, condemnation quickly follows—and rightly so.

Although I will admit that I am both intolerant and a bigot, when it comes to people who advocate restricting the rights of others—like Camenker does the rights of gay men and women to marry—I wear both titles proudly. I am also intolerant of child molesters, murderers, racists, rapists, spouse beaters, thieves, and a long list of other villains, and I am hopelessly bigoted about anti-mythism, humanism and rationalism.

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