



Malcolm in the Middle

David Cook

On Friday, 12th February, at the invitation of the Australian Christian Lobby, I joined a delegation to meet Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in his Sydney office. It was agreed that we confine our remarks to the issue of the plebiscite regarding single gender marriage which will be held, in the event of a coalition victory, soon after the next Federal election.

The issues which concerned us were:

- The framing of the question to be answered in the plebiscite. Would we have input into this so that it did not unfairly encourage the preferred response of either side?
- The question of religious freedom both during and after the debate, if the plebiscite is lost.
- If the Commonwealth was to provide funding for campaigns, how would such funding be allocated? The campaign in favour of single sex marriage in Ireland outspent the traditional campaign, 15 to 1.
- When will the proposed Bill to change the Marriage Act and enable the plebiscite, be available?
- Will the PM do all in his power to ensure equal access to media for both sides of the argument?

The PM was warm and engaging and assured us that he was interested in matters of spirituality and “enjoys a good homily”.

The Government will be bound by the result of the plebiscite, voting will be compulsory and victory will be determined by the side having a majority of votes across Australia. Yes and No campaigns will be funded equally.

Mr Turnbull wants the process to be scrupulously fair and transparent and would refer the question of media access to his Communications Minister.

The total cost of the plebiscite will be 160 million dollars. The PM assured us that our advice would be sought in framing the Bill to ensure religious liberty. “No one wants to force celebrants to marry people against their conscience,” he said.

When it was pointed out that only 19 of the 195 nations in the UN had approved of same sex marriage, he said that those closest in culture to ours had done so.

Our group had met over the past twelve months with Federal Parliamentarians from both parties who are supporters of traditional marriage.

The ALP members are under pressure since the Party will not allow freedom of conscience on this issue from 2019, when it will become mandatory for all Parliamentarians and pre-selected ALP candidates. The ALP, if elected in 2016, will legislate for single gender marriage in the first 100 days of office. ALP policy is also to remove many exemptions for religious bodies under State anti-discrimination laws.

There is no doubt we are facing a very different Australia in the future when such curbs on liberty become part of the policy platform of a mainline political party.

Neutrality will not be an option in the debate leading into the plebiscite.

The church, usually reluctant to enter into politics, needs to take the lead in having an educative role.

We need to be much in prayer at this time and the silent majority need to speak up. Speak to local members, speak at Party meetings, speak at shareholders’ meetings of companies who feel it is good for business to support single gender marriage. The gay lobby does not want this issue decided by a plebiscite, but their active campaign to have it scrapped seems to have failed.

We have history, research, and reason on our side, and respectful debate will show the strength of our position.

One Federal member told us, “Have no doubt this is a battle not just about marriage but about freedom of speech and freedom of religious conviction in Australia.”

I believe this plebiscite is winnable! It is estimated that 5% of the electorate make up their mind in the polling booth, there are 6,700 polling places in Australia all needing to be manned.

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I would rather stay home and read a book but that is not an option for any of us.

When the PM was asked about freedom of conscience for those in the marriage industry (florists, caterers, etc) he said that he was sure common sense would prevail. But if common sense were common we would not need a legislature, as we have in Canberra with such a heavy program.

Mr Turnbull displayed an overly optimistic assessment of the human condition, believing that common sense will prevail ignores the facts of history. Once marriage becomes gender blind, the new Marriage Act will override any religious freedom provisions.

Again it is God's assessment which is so uncomfortably realistic, "The heart is deceptive above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9)

The PM stated that single gender marriage wasn't the greatest threat to marriage, rather, violence, indifference, and unfaithfulness posed a greater threat. But, as to be avoided as these things are, none of them seek to restructure and redefine marriage in the way single sex marriage does.

Changing that Act will change society; genderless marriage will lead to genderless families, no more mothers and fathers, just parents; genderless living will be used to encourage children to choose whichever gender they would like to be.

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The PM told us he will be voting for single gender marriage in the plebiscite. When asked how can we help him with the many issues he faces, he replied, "Encourage more people to get married and stay married." It is this logical contradiction – on the one hand encouraging people to marry and respecting marriage and on the other hand voting to change its very character – that I find troubling.

As one whose politics is more right than left, I was profoundly disappointed and I am sorry to say that Malcolm in the Middle, turned out to be Malcolm in a Muddle.

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