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# THE RECORD

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### Some Muslims are supportive of same-sex marriage

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FOR THE RECORD

Zubair Choudhury, a Muslim spokesperson of the Conservative party, recently mused that the problem with same-sex marriage is that if we allow homosexuals to marry, then they will want to adopt children and then these children will grow up to be gays. He was participating in a TV debate defending his party's opposition to Justice Minister Irwin Cotler's Bill C-38.

Apparently, the contradiction in his logic was lost on him. For if children of gay parents stand a chance of ending up as gays, then children of heterosexual parents should also grow up as straight kids. But the fact is all gays were born to straight parents.

|I would like to give Choudhury the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps he simply does not understand that gays are born gay by God's will and that homosexuality is not a choice people make like buying cars or TV sets.

Unfortunately, he is not alone. One Toronto-area imam was caught on the CBC as saying that allowing gays to marry would be the first step towards permitting incest. Other Muslim social conservatives and extremists have made no secret of the fact that they consider same-sex marriage as equivalent to bestiality. The hate against Canada's gays and lesbians has acquired a new legitimacy; homophobia now comes carefully camouflaged as opposition to Cotler's proposed legislation.

The ill informed have now been joined by the Waterloo-based Canadian Islamic Congress. In a press release issued last week, the congress said, "Marriage has been a religiously defined institution for ages in all religions." Describing the introduction of the bill as "politically suicidal for a minority government with such fragile credibility," the congress stated the bill does not protect religious institutions against charges of discrimination. It raised the complaint by a B.C. lesbian couple against the Knights of Columbus for refusing to rent them a wedding hall. The case is now before the B.C. human rights tribunal. The congress claimed, "If Bill C-38 passes, there could be many more such cases."

What the congress failed to mention is that the Knights of Columbus is a service organization, not a religious one. Although it is a Roman Catholic group, it rents its hall to the public and has never made any requirement in the past for the renters to follow Roman Catholic practices. The case has nothing to do with marriage and will be won or lost on the B.C. human rights code, not on Bill C-38.

Lost to the congress was the fact while the Qur'an specifies who can marry (and does not explicitly exclude same-sex marriages), there is no requirement in Islam for a Muslim cleric to be involved in the marriage ceremony, or that it take place in a mosque. As such, while some Muslims may not recognize or approve of same-sex marriages, it appears that Muslim opponents of such marriages have no capability, with or without Bill C-38, to prevent Muslim same-sex couples from marrying using Islamic customs.

However, not all Muslims are opposed to equality rights of gays and lesbians. The Muslim Canadian Congress, a Toronto-based grassroots organization, welcomed the legislation

presented and has urged Muslims and other minority groups to stand in solidarity with gays and lesbians.

Addressing a press conference in Ottawa on the first reading of Bill C-38, Rizwana Jafri, president of the Muslim Canadian Congress, said Muslim Canadians have experienced life as a marginalized minority and have relied on the Canadian Charter of Rights to fight for their right to be treated as equal citizens. "It is incumbent upon us, as a minority, to stand up in solidarity with Canada's gays and lesbians despite the fact that many in our community believe our religion does not condone homosexuality," she added.

"This legislation is not about religion; it is about fundamental and universal human rights that are a guarantee that all Canadians, irrespective of their religious or ethnic background, feel part of the same family. While, within this family, we may agree to disagree, we must respect each other and treat others with dignity that is a hallmark of civil society," Jafri added.

Muslims and other racial and religious minorities in Canada must understand that same-sex marriage is today legal in seven Canadian provinces and applicable to 90 per cent of the Canadian population.

Whether Bill C-38 succeeds or fails, gay and lesbian marriages will continue to be legal across Canada. By being party to discrimination against a minority, in the future, we Muslims will have little credibility when we protest the discrimination that so many of us face on a daily basis. Human rights are universal rights. These rights need to be respected even when they apply to groups that we may find contravening our religious teachings.

If conservative Muslims start opposing same-sex marriage legislation today, what will they demand next? The annulment of laws permitting the sale of pork in Hogtown?

Tarek Fatah of Toronto is host of the Muslim Chronicle on Crossroad Television System, and a board member of the New York-based Progressive Muslim Union of North America.

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