

Religious rights versus human rights redux

By Bill Kilpatrick

Spanish painter Francisco De Goya once said that, "The slumber of reason breeds monsters," and at this point in time, reason, it would seem, is almost asleep. Last week as I read through page after page of sources that were cited in the 1 Million March 4 Kids pamphlet I could not help but feel a little depressed and overwhelmed with the sheer number of logical errors, lack of sourcing, falsehoods, hate, conspiracy theories, emotional reasoning and confirmation bias that was rampant throughout many of the sources. As I analyzed the material I found myself coming back to the same question over and over again and that question was: "How did this whole movement begin?" I did more research and found that this movement appears to have begun in Canada with an incident at a public school out in Londonderry in Edmonton in spring of this year. A Muslim student secretly recorded his teacher who was lecturing him about not attending Gay Pride themed events at the school and many members of the Muslim community were deeply offended by the recording when it was made public. The teacher was called "Islamophobic" for her comments and her language was called "divisive" by Jamal Osman, the vice-president of the Muslim Community of Edmonton Mosque, according to a Edmonton Journal article. Osman went on to say that, "She [the teacher] seems to have the opinion that it is somehow un-Canadian to have a difference of opinion. I think this is exactly the opposite of what diversity and inclusiveness mean. Diversity and inclusion does not mean you will think one way. That's counterintuitive." This person also went on to say, according to the Edmonton Journal, that "his concern and that of his [Muslim] community is if the incident is secular [a one-off incident] or if this is a reflection of teachers in the school system." It appears now that certain members of the Muslim community, and certain members of the Christian community also believe that it is reflective of all teachers in the school system, and from this incident it appears that the 1 Million March 4 Children was born. However, there was a similar incident regarding the teaching of 2SLGBTQIA+ lessons in the United Kingdom in March of 2019 and the protest that followed looks eerily like the current protest as many of the protestors used the same slogans we are currently seeing. In articles in the Daily Mail.com, and The Guardian, you can see protestors standing outside of Anderton, Elementary school holding signs that say things like, "My child my choice," "let kids be kids," "stop exploiting innocent children," "education not indoctrination," and "say no to promoting homosexuality and LGBT ways of life to our children." What we can gather from this is that it is not new and in our multicultural society that respects human rights, it's not going to stop anytime soon. In a 2012 Human Rights Commission article entitled, "Human rights, sexuality and religion: Between policy and identity," Heather Shipley, speaks about the importance of nuance when speaking about issues of sexual identity and religion which are often assumed to always be in conflict. She says, "There is widespread evidence that the relationship between religion and sexuality is not inherently in conflict, but often is constructed as such in public discourse/media," and suggests that, "it is time to think of how policies of inclusion can be formulated so that religion is not necessarily posited as in conflict with sexual diversity, or equality regarding sexuality." And this is where the issue lies because we know that being a member of the 2SLGBTQIA+ has nothing to do with morality anymore than being a Catholic priest does. Just because you belong to a church, or religion does not mean that you are moral and just because you follow the rules of a particular religion, or not, or have sex with a particular person or not, also does not make you a moral or an amoral person. We know that there is hatred, racism, misogyny, rape, and murder in many of the world's holy books and we know it would exist without those books as well. Morals are more complicated than that. The teacher in the recording makes some good points around respect going both ways and that if you want to get it you've got to give it, but instead of practicing mutual respect, many people would rather keep their kids out of school during pride events or sex education lessons, which is the choice that a parent is entitled to make, but that choice, does not promote open mindedness, mutual respect, education, or equality. Shipley said that both religion and sexuality are "complex, nuanced, fluid and resistant to essentialization." Therefore, we need to be promoting understanding and that can only happen when different people interact. However, many people in the Muslim community and in the Christian community as well hold their beliefs as being correct, and unchangeable, especially around 2SLGBTQIA+ issues. Shortly after the incident at Londonderry School, a public statement was issued online called, "Navigating Differences: Clarifying Sexual and Gender Ethics in Islam," and according to the statement was written by, "Muslim scholars and preachers representing a diverse range of theological schools," and was written with the intention of being a, "non-partisan articulation of Islam's position on sexual and gender ethics." It states that, "there is an increasing push to promote LGBTQ-centric values among children through legislation and regulations, disregarding parental consent and denying both parents and children the opportunity to express conscientious objection. Such policies subvert the agency of Muslim parents to teach their children their religiously grounded sexual ethics." The statement goes on to say that "Islam enjoys a rich tradition of jurisprudence that allows for

diverse perspectives and accommodates various cultural norms. However, particular principles that are explicitly stated in revelation, known to be necessary elements of Islam, and unanimously agreed upon by qualified scholars are deemed immutable and not open to revision by any person or entity, including the highest religious authorities. Further down in the statement under the heading, "Islam's position on sexuality and gender," it states unequivocally, "By a decree from God, sexual relations are permitted within the bounds of marriage, and marriage can only occur between a man and a woman. In the Quran, God explicitly condemns sexual relations with the same sex." So, when Osman says that, "Diversity and inclusion does not mean you will think one way," I hope that he is preaching that same message to his fellow Muslims with regards to the Quran's exaltations about homosexuality, but somehow I don't think this issue is that fluid.