

Marriage is an institution with a long and most importantly, varied, history. In Europe - the society that spawned our own - marriage pre-dates the current dominant (and most vocally against gay marriage) Christian religion. Marriage has changed its primary definition and purpose over time, being initially legalised not for reasons given by the church, but to regulate inheritance and try to prevent men from abandoning women they had impregnated. The church encouraged Christian marriage ceremonies only AFTER the need for legal marriage had been encouraged by the state. Marriage then became dominated by the church, but civil marriage has never ceased to exist. In modern times the choice to have a secular marriage has been taken by more people, and most importantly, a completely secular marriage between a man and a woman is as legal and binding as a religious one, recognised by the state, all our institutions, and society. The word 'marriage' is used, and all rituals and titles (the ease for a married partner, for example, to change their surname) are all given to secular marriage.

The above notes on the history of marriage are to make a simple point - marriage is not an institution (or a word) that is owned by the church. It has always existed outside of the church - it existed in pre-Christian times (and in pagan times no religious ceremony was required, a private declaration constituted marriage) and it has continued to exist as a secular institution alongside religious marriage. Therefore, any view that the church holds on marriage is irrelevant to what should be considered in civil marriage law.

As a nation we have recognised gay relationships. We have made non-heterosexual preferences legal,

and we have given gay de facto couples the same legal status as heterosexual couples. Thus, it is clear that we accept that sexual preferences are equal, as a society and recognised by law.

My case is this. Marriage is a secular institution as well as a religious one. For legal purposes we can ignore church definitions of marriage.

*Religions are private institutions and may of course deny their particular marriages to whomever they chose.* Gay couples are recognised by our state as equal to heterosexual couples. Therefore, it is illogical and discriminatory to deny marriage to gay couples.

My personal story is this. I am a heterosexual woman who has recently married. Several of our best friends are gay couples who wish to marry. They are lovely people whom I love and wish the best for, but their personal attributes are irrelevant. They are adults, they wish to marry, and there is no reason why I should be allowed to and they not. Our current laws against this are blatantly discriminatory and unacceptable. It astounds and upsets me that this issue in our laws has not been resolved yet, but I choose to make my case dispassionately and logically because how I feel about the issue is not what I consider most important. What matters is what is RIGHT.