

# Belfast Pride

## and the Amsterdam Declaration

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**“SODOMY IS A SIN”** is one of my favourite phrases. It’s short, sharp and gets right down to business with a lovely alliteration on the letter ‘s’. It is book-ended with two of the most provocative words imaginable. The word ‘sodomy’ hogs all the syllables to itself putting shocking emphasis on the ‘unspeakable’ act. The phrase is beautiful poetry in its own way, and has all the Old Testament wrath of Moses firing an RPG from inside the mouth of a giant, flaming Paisley. If the Christians can come up with catch phrases like that who can possibly stop them? The Gay Pride march does exactly that with brutal efficiency.

I will not waste your time by going over old Voltairean arguments about freedom of expression because I will only be preaching to the converted. At any rate, just because a group is having its freedom to march curtailed doesn’t mean the humanists should always jump aboard their movement as a group. Similarly, I will not go over the moral hypocrisy of those who are going to be demonstrating against the march. I will only explain how I believe that the humanist principles are so close to those of the marchers, and that the tactics of the Pride march are so ingenious (rather than degrading) that not to support them would be immoral and a grave tactical error.

The Pride march is very different from any other political marches. Royal Avenue has seen many huge marches, antiwar, May Day, Republican and Loyalist, but every one of them looks fairly similar. Angry, very serious (mostly) men who are demanding changes and making

veiled threats of violence. The Pride march however takes the simple yet imaginative leap of deciding to show how good it is to be one of them. Instead of coercing the powers that be to kneel before their might, they simply show how much fun they are having just being proud of themselves. Rather than having an ugly suggestion of rioting in the air, the cops seem nervous about the possibility having to break up an impromptu orgy. If any one of them is feeling demeaned by the public exhibition of

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sexuality in the pursuit of equality (which is very much doubt) then they are, in my opinion, the highest kind of martyr – the one that leaves himself the only victim. Gandhi would have been proud.

Not only do they look as if they are having a great time, but the ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ crowd are shown up as the miserable head cases they are. Every angry sentiment they hurl, no matter how bile-filled, no matter how backed up by God, it is thrown back at them, making them look all the more crazy. Like the jujitsu master they use the overbearing power of their enemy against them. Instead of dignifying their weak arguments with counter arguments they simply reply “yes, yes, we are everything you say we are, and we are having a ball, darling!” It is like blowing kisses to the person who wants to kill you. It is this jujitsu strategy that has helped them reclaim the word ‘queer’ like the blacks did for ‘nigger’ and the Pakistanis are trying to do with ‘paki’.

Of course it could be said that getting up the noses of superstitious fascists is fun, but certainly not an end in itself. The problems facing homosexuals in Northern Ireland are deadly serious. More than 80% of homosexuals will have to endure some kind of verbal or physical harassment [1] and the problem has increased 12.2% between 2005 and 2006 [2]. The problem though is different from most confronted by demonstrations. It is less political and much more grass roots. It is this persuasion of normal people rather than politicians that they are aiming for, and succeeding in dramatically. The Pride march is the only demonstration you will see with as many spectators as marchers.

The tactic is so successful because it is the same one used by the organised religions. That is, showing that it is more fun to be one of us than to be a bigot against us. In the Christian case this is that it is more fun to go to Heaven than Hell. Atheism isn’t all existentialist angst. I do believe my life more fulfilled without religion than with it. In this way I think the homosexual’s and the atheist’s battlegrounds are the same, and that we would do well to fight along side them against a common foe.

Reasoned argument is noble and useful, but intellectualism is a feeble instrument among the masses compared to the simplicity of showing people first hand that a much better time is to be had on this side of dogma.

I am glad that some humanists are wary to support this as humanists just because we want equality for homosexuals as individuals. Humanists, by definition, are free to think what they wish about politics. However the point that the Pride marchers are trying to make is not just about changes to the law, but about the same principles that are in the Amsterdam Declaration. All seven ➤