

In gay-marriage debate, who is imposing their beliefs on whom?

In Joe Baker's column, entitled "Legislators basing law on religion," in the May 14 Daily News, he inveighs against religions that "want to impose their own set of beliefs on the rest of society." And the column ends with a quote from a proponent of same-sex marriage, who cited Roger Williams and argued that "we shouldn't impose our own religious beliefs on everyone."

Now let's look at it a little more closely. One point of Mr. Baker's column was that religions do not agree on same-sex marriage. He said only one member of the clergy, a Roman Catholic priest, testified against same-sex marriage, while nearly one hundred of "the state's religious leaders" signed a petition in support of such marriage.

And this is an example of a church imposing its religious beliefs on others?

It's almost funny, if you think about it. Here we have, symbolically at least, one lone clergyman standing up and

saying, "No, don't vote for same-sex marriage," and across the room nearly a hundred others are shouting at him, "Don't impose your religion on us!" Then, of course, they turn the other way and say to the legislators, "Oh, by the way, our religion says same-sex marriage is a good thing for society, so please vote for it."

What makes this argument doubly ironic is that those opposed to same-sex marriage aren't trying to change anything. If the law of marriage was shaped by religion (and I believe it was), that happened a long time ago. So the argument against people "imposing their religion" on the law of marriage comes centuries too late. Today the argument fits those who are trying to change the existing law of marriage — they are the ones who are trying to impose their beliefs, religious or not, on the rest of society.

But actually, the whole "imposing

your beliefs" argument is bogus, no matter who it is used by or against. Whether a person argues for or against same-sex marriage on religious grounds is totally irrelevant. If you don't like the argument, point out its weaknesses or contradictions. If it's a stupid argument, it should be attacked for its stupidity, not because the one making it cites Catholic, Protestant or atheistic dogma.

Finally, let me leave Mr. Baker with a question to ponder: On the issue of same-sex marriage, you roll out the big gun — the "don't cram your religion down my throat" argument. Would you use the same argument when the Roman Catholic Church fights for the homeless, or sanctuary for illegal immigrants, or peace in Iraq? Or do you have a double standard, depending on the issue?

Roland F. Chase, Newport

Npt. Daily News 5/26/07