

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies
North Carolina State University

World Philosophy Day Lecture

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RELIGION AND GAY MARRIAGE: WHY DEMOCRACY IS GOOD FOR RELIGION, EVEN IF RELIGION IS BAD FOR DEMOCRACY

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Witherspoon Student Center, Room 126 (The Washington Sankofa Room)

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Abstract: In a series of dissents in cases concerning the rights of gays and lesbians, Justice Scalia has worried, among other things, that religiously based opposition to gay marriage will now be illegitimately stigmatized as mere bigotry and that it will be shown little if any deference. His fears seem to be widely shared, especially by those who oppose gay marriage on religious grounds. They believe that such an outcome signals a very great loss for religion and religious believers. But I will argue that it is, in fact, a good thing — good for religion and the religious — that the tenets of a religion are sometimes stigmatized and marginalized by the broader society in this way. Such marginalization can be instrumental to the improvement of religion and to rendering religion more compatible with democracy. More generally, I will argue that if religion is to be compatible with democracy, it must become non-dogmatic in the sense that it is willing to have certain of its tenets compete for public acceptance in the open marketplace of ideas, on roughly equal terms with non-religious ideas. And it must be willing to alter or abandon those that cannot compete. Opposition to gay marriage is just one such tenet. I claim that when a religion sheds such a tenet, it is improved. It is made both more intellectually respectable and more compatible with democracy.

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