

Anti-Gay Marriage Movement Finds Brave New Voice

Ryan Anderson has planted himself on arguably the most unpopular stance for his generation: opposing gay marriage.

At 31, Anderson has become one of the leading voices in the “millennial” generation against the legalization of **gay marriage**. With the upcoming Supreme Court decisions on gay marriage, his ideas have been circulated in conservative circles, giving him an influence beyond his years.

“Debating marriage is probably not what I would have chosen,” said Anderson, a fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation in Washington. “It’s the question that most likely gets you kicked out of your law firm.”

Anderson’s path began as a research assistant to Robert P. George, a Princeton professor who’s been called “this country’s most influential conservative Christian thinker” by *The New York Times*.

“Ryan is on his way to establishing himself as the leader on those of the conservative side of the spectrum,” George said. “He is both brilliant and brave, a powerful combination for a young and emerging public intellectual.”

CNN’s Piers Morgan invited Anderson to debate **same-sex marriage** on his show, but seated him in the audience, not at a table alongside gay financial guru Suze Orman. The idea was to get Anderson to debate from a distance. “He held more than his own, kept his composure and answered their abuse with arguments,” George said.

In brief bullet points, Anderson offers three reasons why he opposes gay marriage:

- There would be no government institution that defends the idea that children deserve both a mother and a father.
- The redefinition of marriage won't stop with gay marriage.
- The impact it could have on religious liberty and rights of conscience for opponents.

But proponents of gay marriage like Jonathan Rauch, a guest scholar at the Brookings Institution in Washington, find the arguments ineffective. According to the Pew Research Center, support for gay marriage has jumped from 33 percent to 51 percent over the past 10 years. Among Anderson's millennial generation, that figure hits 70 percent.

"If you look at the way the polls are going, the way politics are changing, it's pretty clear that the wind is not blowing in their direction," Rauch said. "I don't think they're winning the argument, though they've made it in an articulate way."

Together with Princeton Ph.D. candidate Sherif Girgis, George and Anderson released *What Is Marriage?: Man and Woman: A Defense*, a 150-page book that has become go-to material for conservatives looking to argue against gay marriage. The trio also wrote a similar article for the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*.

Like his Princeton mentor, Anderson is a devout Catholic—a factor that influences his thinking and arguments.

"Ryan's Catholicism gives him a special bent toward not just having theological views but trying to get to the deep naturally available rationale for those views," Girgis said. "He combines a deep appreciation of the role of religion in society with the sense of the special value and possibility of reasoned arguments for his conclusions."

Anderson's influence crosses over into some evangelical camps.

He gave the commencement address at Regent University, founded by religious broadcaster Pat Robertson, and appeared on this month's cover of Focus on the Family's *CitizenLink* magazine.

His evangelical friends say he often half-teasingly encourages them to convert to Catholicism.

"Ryan is kind of evangelical in his Catholicism," said Eric Teetsel, an evangelical who heads the Manhattan Declaration, a movement that focuses on marriage, sanctity of life and religious freedom. "He is a true believer and wishes the rest of us would come on board."

When he was a 29-year-old assistant editor at the conservative Catholic journal *First Things*, Anderson was a leading candidate to head the financially struggling magazine. Both parties decided it was too soon.

Anderson is now a doctoral candidate at the University of Notre Dame. He is developing a thesis on economics and the common good, one he says avoids the popular categories of social welfare or libertarianism.

Vincent Munoz, a political science professor at Notre Dame, said Anderson is one of the brightest students he has ever met. "He possesses a remarkable ability to translate philosophical principles into public arguments," Munoz said. "Faith is certainly an integral aspect to Ryan, but his arguments are grounded in philosophical reasoning."

Anderson's thesis, however, has taken the back burner to the issue of marriage, an issue he sees as in urgent need of defense. "Even though I don't like talking about it in social situations, I will," Anderson said. "We have to explain it in a way that makes sense."

It's a question he's addressed at congressional hearings, lectures at law schools and in media interviews following President Obama's public support for same-sex marriage and the

Supreme Court's hearings on two gay marriage cases.

Poll numbers that favor the other side don't dissuade his activism. With a cheerful disposition, he indicates long-term optimism.

"People called Marxism, socialism, the Equal Rights Amendment, now abortion rights inevitable," he said. "I don't think anything in life is inevitable."

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