

## *Zeitgeistism*

Zeitgeistism is the embracing of some policy, belief or attitude only because it has become normal in this time and place. It is the temporal version of “when in Rome do as Rome does.” Zeitgeistism is linked with one understanding of democracy, the one that keeps politicians vigilant about their standing in the opinion polls, because of the assumption that the politicians are there to express the will of the people, whatever that may be. Characteristic signs of Zeitgeistism: “we have moved on since then,” “back in” or, if more than a couple of years ago, “way back in”, “unacceptable in the twenty-first century”.

Zeitgeistism is the enemy of both reason and religion. If the final authority is what is thought to be approved by the majority, there is no room for reasoning. Universal human rights are there because they are there, not because they are just or supported by reason. (This was already true in the American Declaration of Independence: but in the Age of Reason some gesture had to be made, for which the phrase was “self-evident”.) For Christianity, “this is how things are” should be an alarm signal, because Christianity must dissociate itself from the world. The one thing that is how things are in any age is sin. To say, for instance, that we have moved on from regarding homosexual behaviour as sinful will not convince anyone who accepts the authority of the Bible, for that is permanent, nor yet anybody who would like to have a reason for something.

The three most senior members of the Cabinet after the Prime Minister supported the bill to allow same-sex marriage, in a letter published in *The Daily Telegraph* on the decisive day for the bill, Tuesday 5 February 2013. Everything offered in support was pure Zeitgeistism. “We have moved on . . . whether it is any longer acceptable . . . evolved over time . . . a substantial majority of the public now favour . . . support has increased rapidly.” The conclusion of the Zeitgeistist observations: “This is the right thing to do at the right time.” So right is not the opposite of wrong and not the opposite of unreasonable, but is what the mood of the age dictates. “As David Cameron has said, we should support gay marriage not in spite of being Conservatives, but because we are Conservatives.” So the meaning of *Conservative* is also given by the Zeitgeist. But are there any features then that distinguish Conservatives from anyone else?

Perhaps they should change their name as did the Canadian Conservative Party—to The Progressive Conservative Party (blown away by the Zeitgeist in 2003).

Would it be a contradiction for the Zeitgeist to reinstate reasoned argument in politics? In the present House of Commons reasons are not as plentiful as blackberries.

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