

Don't use marriage as a 'political football', Archbishop tells George Osborne

The leader of the Roman Catholic Church in England and Wales has warned George Osborne against a "foolish" attempt to use marriage as a "political football".



Archbishop Vincent Nichols and George Osborne Photo: DAVID ROSE/AFP

By John Bingham, Religious Affairs Editor The Daily Telegraph

The Archbishop of Westminster, the Most Reverend Vincent Nichols, questioned claims from the Chancellor that same-sex marriage would be a vote winner for the Tories, insisting that he detected "deep unease" over the issue.

It follows a newspaper article penned by Mr Osborne earlier this week urging the Conservatives to learn from Barack Obama's election success by adopting a liberal stance on social issues.

He wrote that the US Republicans has lost "swathes" of voters, especially women, because of their stance on issues like abortion.

Mr Osborne claimed that in this country gay marriage is supported by a "clear majority" of the public and would enable the party to show it was in step with "people and how they want to live their lives".

But speaking in London, after a four-day meeting of Catholic bishops, the Archbishop said: "He is the politician not I – I just think it is too important to be made simply as a political football.

"This is not simply a redefining of marriage to accommodate a few, it is a redefining of marriage for everyone and therefore all marriages, if this bill is introduced, will be different.

"It is a different reality for everybody and that is a very serious matter and one to which we are very strongly opposed and will remain strongly opposed."

He said that while it was for politicians to try to judge the political mood the Church would continue to argue for the traditional definition of marriage as a union between a man and a woman.

"It is a very important building block in society and it is very foolish to alter that when as far as we can see there is not a specific identified problem that that change is supposed to be addressing," he said.

"My own sense is that many people feel deeply uneasy about this move, it was not in any election manifesto, it has not in that sense been put to the country.

"That is why the strength of opinion expressed in the consultation ought not to be hidden and that's why we want the full disclosure of the results of that consultation."

At its gathering in Leeds this week, the Catholic Bishops' Conference agreed a resolution insisting that all political parties allow their MPs a free vote on the issue and the results of the Government's consultation on "equal marriage" be published in full.

The consultation document made clear earlier this year that the different views expressed would be taken into account but "not the number of responses received".