

**News and Current Events :: Spain approves gay 'marriage'**

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MADRID (Reuters) - Spain's parliament gave initial approval to a law legalising gay marriage on Thursday in a move likely to rekindle conflict with a Catholic Church that has just elected a new conservative pope.

A packed public gallery erupted in cheers and applause as speaker Manuel Marin announced that the lower chamber of parliament had approved the Socialist government's proposal.

"It's unfair to be a second-class citizen because of love," Socialist legislator Carmen Monton said. "Spain joins the vanguard of those defending full equality for gays and lesbians."

Socialist Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero enjoys broad support, inside and outside parliament, for the reform that would make Spain only the third European country to legalise gay marriage.

But the proposal, part of a raft of liberal social legislation by Zapatero's government, has outraged Spain's powerful Catholic church and is unlikely to please conservative Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, elected Pope Benedict XVI on Tuesday.