How would you characterise your views on the Bill in general?

In opposition

The Baptist Union of Scotland has made submissions at the earlier Public Consultation and Draft Bill stages. To avoid repetition, it is not intended to restate these submissions at this stage. However, for information and ease of reference, a note of the resolution passed by the assembly of the Baptist Union of Scotland, in October 2011, is inserted at Question 14. It relation to this stage, individual Baptist congregations may comment directly. However, we wish to note that the predominant view within the congregations which are members of the Baptist Union of Scotland is one of opposition to the introduction of this Bill on the basis of its redefinition of marriage.

How would you characterise your views on the introduction of same sex marriage, so that same sex couples can marry each other?

In opposition

The predominant view within the congregations which are members of the Baptist Union of Scotland is that marriage can only be between one man and one woman. Any move to redefine marriage would not be consistent with that view. As a union of churches which has invested heavily in marriage, encouraging marriage over cohabitation, preparing many couples for marriage in carefully ordered programmes, supporting couples struggling to remain married, because we believe it to be the most stable basis for society and for the rearing of children, we would clearly state that the predominant view within our congregations is that we do not wish to see marriage redefined in our nation through this Bill.

How would you characterise your views on putting belief celebrants on the same footing as religious celebrants?

In support

Our commitment to religious freedom in this nation would extend to those of any faith or none. We have no objection to belief celebrants having the same status in law as religious celebrants.

How would you characterise your views on the arrangements for authorising celebrants to solemnise opposite sex and same sex marriage (including the opt-in procedures)?

Neither

We find the opt-in procedures to be more appropriate than an opt-out option. We hope this will protect local religious celebrants and local churches from litigation.
However, there continues to be a fear among celebrants that refusal to conduct same sex marriages will quickly lead to persecution or prosecution.

**How would you characterise your views on civil partnerships changing to marriages?**

Neither

**How would you characterise your views on allowing civil marriage ceremonies to take place anywhere, other than religious premises, agreed between the couple and registrar?**

In support

**How would you characterise your views on allowing the religious and belief registration of civil partnerships?**

In opposition

Civil partnerships are by definition a civil matter and we strongly believe that they should remain in that domain. We do not believe that bringing this civil institution into the religious sphere is at all helpful. We would fear that in years to come it could potentially harm the religious freedom of celebrants and religious bodies. We strongly affirm our belief in the separation of church and state and request that the government does not allow religious and belief bodies to have any legal part in civil partnerships.

**How would you characterise your views on allowing transgender persons to stay married when obtaining a full Gender Recognition Certificate, which provides legal recognition in the acquired gender?**

Neither

**Would you like to comment on the wider issue of protections for those in society who may have concerns about same sex marriage?**

We appreciate the attempts of this Bill to protect the freedom of individual conscience of celebrants and to reassure our religious body that we will not be required to choose between conducting all forms of what will come to be known as marriage or no forms of what will become known as marriage. We believe that if this Bill is to become law, then changes to the Equality Act 2010 will be required. However, our concern is that these may prove to be insufficient and unsustainable, and in time churches, trustees and the clergy opposed to same sex marriage may all find themselves without robust legal protection. We would ask that full consideration be given to our earlier proposal outlined in the first consultation, and in all conversations with government ministers and civil servants, that the most inclusive and equitable approach for our society as a whole, including the protection of the religious freedom of celebrants and religious bodies, is for the state to withdraw from marriage and to seek civil registration of partnerships for all for the purposes of organising our society. As we stated in the earlier consultation, the only way we can imagine this inequality being addressed, if the government is not convinced to maintain the present definition of marriage, is through the introduction of civil
partnership for all, with the option for religious organisations to bless that which their religious conscience allows. As the predominant opinion within our union of churches clearly is distinct from the view of the present government, we believe that a separation of church and state on this issue has now become necessary. Further to this, we believe that the EIA fails to recognise that Christian belief and other religious beliefs apply to the whole of life and not simply the formal structures of church and clergy. Baptist believers declare in their baptismal vows that Jesus Christ is their Lord and Saviour. The implication of Jesus’s lordship is intended to be expressed in every aspect of their lives. Many Baptist Christian believers have, in response to this lordship, sought the opportunity to serve our nation in the public sector. We believe that the EIA has failed to fully recognise the impact this proposed legislation may have on people of faith who oppose the concept of same sex marriage, who are currently working in the public sector, such as registrars and teachers. We believe that those with a conscientious objection may find themselves disciplined at work for refusing to conduct or endorse same sex marriage. Greater consideration needs to be given to the religious freedom of all rather than simply that of the clergy and religious bodies. Our fear is that those who oppose the concept of same sex marriage and will neither endorse, participate in or teach it as equal marriage, will be discriminated against in our nation.

Would you like to comment on the wider issue of freedom of speech?

We affirm Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. The crunch issue is whether a state can affirm and accommodate contradictory views being held, expressed, and lived out by its citizens. A mature democracy should be able to answer yes to that. But it must apply to all. We accept that the views and voices of many groups in society have been discriminated against in the past and have been marginalised. We accept that it is right to correct this discrimination and marginalisation. We submit that it is also important that the correcting of that discrimination must not lead to a new discrimination where other views and voices are not accepted as valid, and are therefore disregarded or actively undermined.

Would you like to comment on any other wider issues in relation to the Bill that are not mentioned above?

Our Assembly passed the following resolution in October 2011: The Baptist Union of Scotland adopts the EBF resolution on marriage dated 22-25 September 2010. In doing so, and with reference to the consultation asked of us by the government, we 1. Believe the current proposal from the government is unwise, and ask that before they seek to introduce legislation for same sex marriage, they commit to a further conversation with Christians in Scotland for us to discuss our serious concerns. 2. Affirm the authority and beauty of Scripture as it points toward true and wholesome human sexuality, expressed in the words of Genesis 2:24. 3. Accept the testimony of Scripture that our relationship with God, our Creator, is broken and is expressed in rejection of His ways and pursuit of our own. 4. Resolve to be, as the EBF resolution invites us to be, pro-active for the wellbeing and good of all in our society. European Baptist Federation Council Mondo Migliore, Rome, Italy 22-25 September 2010 The European Baptist Federation Council: Rejoices in
the mutually loving and selfless relationship of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the demonstration of this through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Gives thanks to God for creating man and woman in his image and seeks to follow the witness and teaching of Scripture for any expression of human sexuality. Urges Baptists to model, value and teach that marriage is the creational and biblical setting of any sexual relationship between a man and a woman, as expressed in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.” Shares in the brokenness of human relationships and acknowledges the pain and difficulties this brokenness causes for people in our churches and society. Affirms our responsibility to share the Good News of Jesus Christ in word and deed with all people, irrespective of their way of life or convictions. Recognises the need to encourage, support and pray for married people, offering pastoral and spiritual care for the strengthening of healthy and vibrant Christian communities in relationship with Jesus Christ and each other.

Are you responding as...

a faith/belief-based organisation

Alan Donaldson
Baptist Union of Scotland
23 August 2013