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

In opposition

The Scottish Government has rushed through this major change to Scottish society at break-neck speed without considering the wider societal implications (marriage and family unit). The protections offered to those holding to the traditional view of marriage are virtually meaningless or completely ambiguous - meaning they are likely to be challenged and defeated in court. It also remains deeply unpopular, as demonstrated by the first consultation (where two-thirds of respondents opposed this controversial change).

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 definition of marriage is the union of one man with one woman should not be changed. The proposed new definition is completely open to interpretation and could pave the way for a further redefinition of marriage in the future. Although polygamy is billed as a straw man arguments, there is increasing evidence of this behaviour on Scottish shores - particularly on social media. Again, this shows the lack of proper scrutiny and rationale thinking applied to this bill. The bill does not follow logic either. For example, adultery does not apply to proposed same-sex marriages. Commitment and responsibility are important parts of the legal framework of marriage, yet they only apply in practice to heterosexual couples. Surely this shows that relationships between same-sex and opposite-sex couples are completely different and should continue to be classified in different categories accordingly.

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

In opposition

The definition of belief in the Bill is so wide ranging that associated celebrants may have little or no training or qualifications (ministers of religion generally train for at least three years). This could lead to a further dissolution of the meaning and integrity of marriage.

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)?

In opposition

I have no wish to see the introduction of same-sex marriage and oppose this proposal. Given that the Scottish Government is steamrolling ahead regardless,
there must be protections enshrined in legislation to protect those celebrants, churches and religious bodies that are opposed to same sex marriage. The UK Equality Act must be amended to include these protections.

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

In opposition

Civil partnerships are not marriages.

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 opposition

For the avoidance of doubt I do not wish to see these same-sex marriage ceremonies held in a place of worship.

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

In opposition

There is no need or demand for this to happen. Civil partnerships have managed perfectly fine up until this point.

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?

In opposition

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

The Bill is lacking in protections for many individuals opposed to the redefinition of marriage, e.g. local authority workers, teachers, civil registrars and chaplains. Existing procedures and UK Employment Law do not offer enough protection for these workers and recent decisions in the European Court show this to be the case. The Equality Act needs to include a specific reference to protect those workers opposed to same sex marriage on the grounds of religious conviction. It is inconsistent for the Scottish Government to propose changes to the Equality Act to protect choirmasters, choirs and organists against discrimination but yet registrars, teachers and other workers are afforded no such protection.

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

The guidance from the Lord Advocate is totally ambiguous and needs to spell out the details. For example, will a church be able to broadcast a sermon online opposing same-sex marriage?
Would you like to comment on any other wider issues in relation to the Bill that are not mentioned above?

It is unacceptable that parents will not be allowed to remove their children from all same-sex marriage related lessons. This should be amended, so that the subject is in line with provision offered to sex education (where opt-outs are available and advance warning given to parents). It is also puzzling why atheist teachers are not obliged to teach religious education on the grounds of belief, and again, supporters of traditional marriage are being made to promote this new definition by the state. This, again, is unacceptable - if not blatant discrimination. Surely this inconsistency should be resolved? Or perhaps reasonable accommodation should be the principle applied? Additionally, given the complete lack of clarity from the Scottish Government on how this legislation will affect individuals who believe marriage is only between a man and a woman, I suggest the legislation is amended and adopts a conscientious objection clause similar to that of the 1967 Abortion Act (section four) with regards to the celebration of same-sex marriages. This would provide indisputable guidance which would be hugely helpful, rather than having to establish precedents through the courts. Given that the legislation has worked well for abortion, another deeply contentious moral issue, it would make sense to make similar provision for same-sex marriage.

Are you responding as...

a private individual

Gordon Bell
22 August 2013