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

In opposition

Marriage between a man and a woman is universal to the human experience no matter what culture, religion, geographic location, or historical era. Biologically, it will always take a sperm and an egg to produce children. Nature itself dictates what marriage is. To change the definition of marriage is to create a legal fiction.

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

In opposition

Same sex couples already enjoy all the economic and social rights of a married couple through civil partnerships. There is NO compelling need to redefine something as universal to the human experience as marriage itself. Redefining marriage will, however, have profound implications far beyond allowing same-sex couples to call each "Mr." & Mrs." which in itself is rather ridiculous. These implications will have profound affects in the workplace (e.g. civil servants, teachers, social workers, etc.), upon education, religious freedoms, and individual liberties.

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

In opposition

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)?

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

In opposition

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?

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

As the law stands at the moment, homosexuals enjoy all the legal and economic rights and benefits of marriage through their civil partnerships. Nobody has to lose their job or run foul of the law. But redefine marriage, and suddenly the rights and freedoms of tens of thousands of employees all across the country will be profoundly affected. This is not scare-mongering, but fact! We have already seen that people of faith will lose their jobs over this issue! Not just religious workers, but also social care workers, teachers, public employees (e.g., registrars, counsellors), charities, volunteers, etc., who also happen to be people with religious conscience will suddenly be marginalised and left outside the protection of the law. Do we really want to do this? Does Parliament really consider the rights of one group less valid than those of another? If so, then we no longer have a democracy, but a tyranny by the few.

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

The government cannot in good faith guarantee that religious freedoms will not be eroded in the future if Parliament votes to redefine marriage. We have already seen the freedom of religion (e.g., religious thought, religious conscience, religious expression, etc.) under attack over these very issues, and the law has not even been changed yet! Regardless of the safeguards that Parliament thinks it can put in place, it cannot offer any fail-safe guarantees that individuals of faith will not find themselves on the wrong side of the law if this measure is passed. The assurances that no minister of religion will be forced to conduct same-sex marriages against his conscience shows an appalling lack of appreciation as to whose freedoms will actually be diminished. The threat to religious freedom does not just affect ministers of religion, but any individual with religious faith. The religious freedom of every individual in society will potentially be compromised. We have already seen some highly disturbing examples of individuals who have lost jobs, been harassed and suffered abuse because they stood for the deeply held values of their religious faith. This is not liberal democracy. Again, do we really want to go down this road? By the way, why does it not count that every single major religious denomination in the country has spoken out against the redefinition of marriage? Do you have any idea as to why this is so? Perhaps, it is because they see more clearly than others (since it most directly affects them) that religious freedoms are actually at stake! It is quite simply arrogant and short-sighted of any politician to suggest that these religious denominations do not know what they are talking about and to ignore their united protest! Redefining marriage not only affects ministers of religion and religious adherents, but it affects those individuals in society with no particular religious affinity who also feel strongly about traditional marriage. What possible guarantees will be put in place to protect their consciences? In other words, by redefining marriage to satisfy the protests of what is in reality an extraordinarily tiny minority of the population (which, by the way, already enjoys all the rights of marriage through the legal framework of civil partnerships already in place), the rights and freedoms of a great many more in society will be compromised. Contrary to the vociferous protestations of a hysterical few, redefining marriage has little to do with promoting social equality. If one is truly interested in social equality,
there are other issues of far greater significance than this one (e.g., economic, educational, social mobility, etc.). In fact, if marriage were redefined, it would most certainly have the negative effect of increasing inequality within our society.

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

By redefining marriage, Parliament is unwittingly opening up the possibility that any sort of human relationship can be legally challenged as a “marriage.” This debate will not end with calls for same-sex marriage. What about polygamous relationship

Are you responding as...

a faith/belief local group or congregation

Rev. Stephen Bender
20 August 2013