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

In opposition

My opposition is one of principle - I do not believe that this or any government has the right to redefine marriage; and of practice - there is no protection that will hold for those who disagree with same-sex marriage, which is both a violation of free speech and also of freedom of conscience. I am not homophobic, and have relatives in same-sex relationships, which I accept. However, neither they nor I believe this should lead to a 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

I do not believe this is a matter of equality and/or human rights; same-sex couples already have the option of civil partnerships (which could be strengthened if there are deemed to be necessary areas). Marriage since time immemorial, in almost every culture in the world with very few exceptions (e.g. polygamous societies), and in every world religion, has been understood and practised as between one man and one woman. This has underpinned social stability, the welfare of children, and human flourishing.

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

Neither

I am not sure what is meant by the term 'belief celebrants', unless that refers to humanists etc.

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

None of the proposed safeguards for religious celebrants who wish to opt out of conducting same-sex marriages are adequate. Lawyers state clearly that none of the so-called safeguards will stand once they are challenged on the grounds of equality and/or human rights law, because these have come always to trump all other considerations, and are interpreted accordingly. So while I know that those who wish to conduct these celebrations will have the freedom to do so, those who do not wish to do so will be hounded and prosecuted. This shows how utterly inadequate the proposed legislation is.
How would you characterise your views on civil partnerships changing to marriages?

In opposition

I do not see any reason why such a change should be necessary.

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

I think this would be the least bad solution, and no doubt will happen, but I still believe it to be fundamentally wrong.

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

In opposition

If by 'belief registration' you mean for example by secular humanists, then we already have this, and I can accept the case for civil partnerships anyway. But I do not think this should be conducted in Christian churches.

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

I recognise that there are a small number of cases where after marriage one partner acquires the reverse gender, and that in an even smaller number of cases the two people concerned wish to remain married. However, this is a statistically very small group, and while I would be very sympathetic to protecting them, their case should be regarded as exceptional, not normative. Making exceptional cases the basis of changes in the law for everyone almost always leads to very bad law.

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

I am very deeply concerned. There are already cases where people have lost their jobs and/or been harassed for merely expressing their belief that marriage is between a man and a woman, as it always has been. It is already clear that believing in traditional marriage and expressing that belief, however politely, and in personal as well as employment contexts, can lead to prosecution. I find that appalling, as a total violation of conscience and freedom of speech. I have three adult children, respectively a minister of religion, a doctor and a teacher, and all three of them risk losing their jobs if they so much as hint that they believe in traditional marriage. I have close friends who are social workers and teachers and civil servants, and they all feel threatened. I have grandchildren, and while they need to learn to respect homosexual relationships ( which they do), I find it offensive that their schools are
increasingly under pressure actively to promote homosexuality and same-sex marriage, in preference to traditional marriage and male-female relationships. I also find it offensive that those who argue on the grounds of equality and human rights for same-sex marriage, apparently have no respect whatsoever for the human rights and equality of those who disagree with them. If this legislation goes through, it must be on genuinely equal grounds, with absolutely as much protection for those who disagree as for those who champion it.

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

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

Are you responding as...

a private individual

Rosemary Dowsett
14 August 2013