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

In opposition

The Free Church of Scotland is opposed to the Bill. We believe the Scottish Government has pushed this Bill forward despite the views of the majority of people in the first consultation who were opposed to the redefinition of marriage and the introduction of same sex marriage. There is little, if any, evidence that sufficient protections are included in the Bill for those opposed to this legislation. The expression of faith of the LGBT community is used as a justification for introducing same sex marriage, yet the beliefs of those opposed to same sex marriage do not merit protection in the legislation as it stands. In our view this is unacceptable.

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

In opposition

We are completely opposed to the introduction of same sex marriage and the redefinition of marriage for everyone in Scotland. We believe that the traditional, historic definition of marriage as the union of one man with one woman should not be changed. The proposed new definition of marriage is open to interpretation and could pave the way for a further redefinition of marriage in the future. The government is embarking on a social experiment which we believe will cause untold damage to society in Scotland.

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

In opposition

Our concern with belief celebrants is that the definition of belief in the Bill is so wide ranging that associated celebrants may have little or no training or qualifications. 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

We are opposed because we do not wish to see the introduction of same sex marriage. 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 needs to be amended to include these protections.
How would you characterise your views on civil partnerships changing to marriages?

In opposition

We do not wish to see civil partnerships changing to civil marriage. Though the rights afforded are very similar, 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?

Neither

We would not want to see these 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

We are opposed to the religious and belief registration of civil partnerships and believe that there is no evidence of the demand for this.

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

We have no views on this.

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 local authority workers, teachers, civil registrars, chaplains and others opposed to same sex marriage on the grounds of religious belief. This has been raised with the Scottish Government on a number of occasions and it is disheartening that they are not listening. We do not believe that existing procedures and UK Employment Law 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 does seem inconsistent that the government is proposing 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?

Our concerns on the potential impact of the Bill on freedom of speech remain. We welcome that the Lord Advocate’s statement indicates that criticism of same sex marriage or homosexuality is not in itself an offence. However, there are many grey
areas e.g. will a church be able to broadcast online a sermon opposing same sex marriage? We believe further clarification is needed on issues surrounding freedom of speech.

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

We have deep concerns about the teaching of same sex marriage in schools. The government has made it clear that while parents will still be able to remove their children from sex and religious education classes, if they so choose, they will not be able to remove their children from all classes where same sex marriage might be taught. In our view this is unacceptable and parents should be given this right. We are also concerned about the marginalisation of individual Christians, Christian churches and religious bodies opposed to same sex marriage in terms of, for example, the ability to hold public office and having access to public funds. Furthermore, we do not wish to see same-sex marriage being used as a barometer for a person’s moral outlook and values in job interviews and used subtly to discriminate against or weed out prospective candidates. 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, we 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 faith/belief-based organisation

Dr John Morrison
Free Church of Scotland
14 August 2013