MARRIAGE AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP (SCOTLAND) BILL
SUBMISSION FROM FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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

The Free Presbyterian Church has previously submitted responses to the proposal of a Bill and to the consultation document issued by the Scottish Government outlining in detail its principled serious objections to the Bill and its complete rejection of the legitimacy of so-called same sex marriage. We refer the Committee to these responses and to all accompanying documents sent to the Scottish Government, including protestations and public statements of our opposition.

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 strongly opposed to this measure as illegitimate and irresponsible. We can and will have nothing whatever to do with the legislation and protest that it is in contravention of our rights and privileges as celebrants who have vowed to carry out our functions with respect to marriage in accordance with the terms of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and the Directory for the Public Worship of God, both of which are recognised and expressly identified in statute law and protected by the terms of the Act of Security in the Treaty of Union (1707) to which we appeal as our constitutional protection from any consequences that this proposed Bill may force upon us in our avowed adherence to our ordination vows.

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

We do not recognise the legitimacy of what are called "belief celebrants" distinct from religious celebrants and consider the distinctions already created between civil and religious marriage to be illegitimate and erroneous. Marriage is an institution defined and regulated by the Word of God and the solemnisation of marriage implies a recognition of his authority. For those who do not believe in God there can be no true "solemnisation" of marriage, and the registration of marriage by the state is not equal to solemnisation. This applies to so-called "belief celebrants" who, by this proposed legislation wish to be treated distinctly from religion and civil registration. They ought not to be viewed as solemnising marriages as ministers of religion are recognised in law as doing.

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 oppose the measures proposed as an undue interference with an already suitable arrangement for the registration of marriages in Scotland. We do not believe that the "opt-in" procedures provide sufficient security to ministers of religion authorised under the present legislation and consider the details in the Bill to be utterly inadequate for us to be able to comment on what is eventually to be the new procedure. We respectfully urge the Scottish Parliament not to meddle any further with marriage legislation in Scotland and to recognise formally the security provided in the Treaty of Union for all ministers of religion who are committed to upholding the securities identified in the terms of that treaty in their ordination vows. We do not recognise the legitimacy of any permissive legislation which gives such ministers any right to perform marriages contrary to the terms of the Westminster Confession of Faith and do not consider the State to be empowered to give the ministers of any Church or none that right.

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

In opposition

Marriage is the union of one man with one woman for life. Any definition or arrangement which contravenes this is not marriage and no legislation by any government can make it so. Therefore we are opposed to the concept of calling something constructed by the Scottish Government a marriage when it is self-evidently not a marriage.

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

We do not wish to take to do with civil registration of marriages and the regulations surrounding it, and do not consider that civil registration is equal to solemnisation of marriage. However if the civil registration of marriage requires a solemnisation ceremony we consider it unwise to propose that such a ceremony could take place anywhere at all. We do not consider the concept of religious premises suggested by the proposed legislation to have great significance in that the Church of God may meet in any place at any time without the prescription of laws and regulation sanctifying any particular building or place. However we would be very strongly opposed to any legislation which made any demands whatever on the ministers of religion or any Church court to permit or give access to any Church property for any purpose other than those for which these buildings are held in trust. We consider interference by the State in this matter to be dangerous and subversive of a very positive relationship hitherto between Church and State relative to property and the use of Church buildings.

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

In opposition
We are opposed to the concept of civil partnership as presently defined and regulated. We therefore oppose any further extension of the regulations regarding this practice.

**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

We do not recognise or agree that there can be any legitimate recognition of what is called "transgender recognition" and view the whole issue with dismay and disgust. We consider legislation in this area to be deeply hurtful and offensive to God and to the souls of those who are tempted to think of themselves in any other way than in the gender they were born in. We consider legislation here to be a purely social construct without legitimacy. We are therefore opposed to any legislation which treats people as anything other than what they really are and do not consider a gender recognition certificate to have any substantial meaning in reality. However, if a man and a woman are married they ought to be married for life and so should not be parted by laws of men which are founded on what is a sin and temptation. In order to protect innocent parties in a case of so-called transgender recognition, we consider the law of divorce on the grounds of adultery or wilful and irremediable desertion to be sufficient.

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

We do not consider the proposed securities for ministers of religion, teachers or registrars to be anywhere near sufficient given the momentous nature of the proposed changes and their moral implications. We have no confidence in Acts of Parliament to secure rights and freedoms for the future as future Parliaments could easily overturn these. We are quite certain that the lobby groups responsible for pushing this proposed legislation on to the agenda of the political class will do their utmost to press for further impositions on all who oppose their life-choices on moral grounds and that therefore present securities are extremely vulnerable. We have always asserted that the securities of the Act of Union which have served both Church and Society well for 300 years should be honoured and safe-guarded and that by following these carefully the Scottish Government will prevent a damaging and lasting clash between conscientious and committed Christians and the law of the land.

**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 celebranta faith/belief-based organisation

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