



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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8 January, 2013

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for sharing your views with me about same-sex marriage. I am sorry to write to you in this impersonal way but, as you can imagine, I have received a great many letters and emails.

This debate has become divisive and bitter involving sections of the British public who are not normally stirred to political anger. It has led to the alienation of many loyal and, in many cases lifelong, supporters of the Conservative Party. Before things get out of hand we should take a step back to consider the situation with as much objectivity as we can.

The proposals for same sex marriages in Church are supported by many of my friends and colleagues in Parliament who have held this position clearly and honourably for a long time. They are perfectly entitled to their views and they should be listened to with due consideration. Indeed, the whole debate would benefit from a good deal more circumspection and without ulterior motives being insinuated by both sides.

As a doctor I believe that same-sex relationships are a variant of the spectrum of human sexual behaviour and should be treated with tolerance and respect. Prejudice dressed in any other clothes is still the same.

Proponents of same-sex marriage argue that any change is simply a matter of equal rights. I disagree with them. I believe that this argument fails to understand the full complexities of the social issues involved. If this were simply an argument about righting a wrong, with no other consequences, it would not be creating so much division.

The legal introduction of civil partnerships, recognising the legal basis of same-sex relationships, dealt with the perceived and real discrimination against a section of our population. It was a remedy that was widely accepted, not least as it affected only those who had long faced this discrimination in their legal and financial affairs.

The change in the status of marriage in the proposed legislation does not fit this pattern. It proposes to change the definition of marriage for all, for the perceived



benefit of a much smaller number. Unlike civil partnerships it is not even clear that there is much demand for the change. I have not heard any of the gay friends that I have clamour for same-sex marriage in the way that they demanded the right for civil partnerships. The problem facing these proposals is that marriage is held by many to be the unique (and in a religious context sacred) bond between a man and a woman. Many see the change in the legal status as denying them in law the special recognition of this relationship - a relationship whose unique qualities they have valued, often over many years. The result is that, far from embedding the tolerance and equality that the civil partnership legislation brought, it is highlighting division and difference. This is to be greatly regretted.

The principle of altering the accepted legal status of the majority of the population in order to satisfy what appears to be a very small, if vocal, minority is not a good basis on which to build a tolerant and stable society and should be enough reason in itself to think twice about changing the law.

What makes the position worse is the way that the legislation increasingly looks as though it was made on the hoof to deal with the political problem du jour. Banning the Church of England from what would be an otherwise legal activity is anomalous and absurd. If the "exemption" is, as stated, because the Church had made clear their objection to same-sex marriage then why not exempt the Catholic Church which has been even clearer in its opposition.

This confused picture is made worse by the fact that the Church of England hierarchy claims not to have been fully consulted at all. The idea of making certain practices illegal for one Christian Church, but not others, risks further weakening and splintering Britain's traditional religion at a time when many Christians feel that they are under threat on a number of secular, political and cultural fronts. To fail to understand this is to risk an affront to a large stabilising and normally acquiescent section of this country which will sow completely unnecessary seeds of dissent.

Worse still, any assurances that we are given that distinguishing between churches will not be used at some point by European courts to drive a coach and horses through the legislation carries little credibility with those of us who have watched similar assurances trounced in the past. Having narrowly avoided taking the State into the realm of a free press we should not be intruding on the freedom of worship that is the proper preserve of the Churches not the Courts.



I do not believe this is simply an anti-discrimination measure. If it were, it would carry much greater support in a nation whose greatest characteristic is its fairness. This smacks of a form of social engineering of which Conservatives should be instinctively wary. I do not doubt the sincerity of the proponents of this measure and think talk of attempts to purposefully antagonise traditional Conservatives is far-fetched. However, I believe these proposals are divisive, ill thought through and constitutionally wrong. That is why I will vote against them in the House of Commons.

Yours sincerely,  
Stanley