

## Postscript

Having now reviewed responses to my emails from two dozen MPs, I set out here some conclusions, and some further points that seem to me important.

1. The four MPs who made substantial responses all argued for retaining marriage as it is. The contributions of Steve Baker, David Burrowes, Liam Fox and Sir Roger Gale are each in their own way thoughtful and compelling, and are well worth reading. I shall not attempt to summarise any of them here.

2. None of the six MPs wanting to redefine marriage set out an argument justifying the change. They say, usually, that there should be no discrimination on grounds of sexuality (or something similar) but it seems to me that is not an argument justifying change: it merely expresses a wish to be equally nice to everyone.

3. For the change to be enacted, marriage would have to be watered down, since some of the present commitments cannot apply to same-sex couples. But equality of esteem and treatment under the law does not require uniformity. Indeed, we are elsewhere urged to embrace diversity. That point seems to be disregarded by the proponents of redefinition.

4. People who seek change do not seem to have considered the law of unintended consequences. Most people now accept the principle of civil partnership but would be unhappy at the watering down of marriage commitments to suit same-sex couples. So they may become less accepting of all homosexual couples as a result. This point is implicit in the contribution from Steve Baker, and put clearly by Liam Fox.

5. Marriage most often involves hope for children, so marriage implicitly commits couples not only to each other but also to the care and nurture of children for many years. That is a special duty as well as, one hopes, a pleasure. It involves a great deal of self-sacrifice for the benefit not only of parents and children but also of society. For that reason alone marriage should be upheld and supported by the law, not destroyed. It is true that under equality legislation same-sex couples can adopt; indeed agencies must treat same-sex couples equally with married clients. But that does not deny the need for couples of opposite sex to generate the children in the first place—and to bring up their own children if they can.

6. The Jesuits say: “Give me a child for his first seven years and I’ll give you the man”. For many years now children in school have been taught to value all forms of family equally. So it is hardly surprising to find many younger people in favour of change. But it seems to me they have not thought this matter through. A better way forward would be a determination to treat everyone fairly, not to destroy marriage.

7. In public debates one hears of same sex couples wanting to be able to say “We are married”. That is a very thin reason or upsetting the fabric of society. We would be better to seek ways of satisfying the understandable need of same-sex couples for status another way. The ceremonial associated with civil partnership can easily be adjusted towards equality without denaturing the marriage contract. Names can be changed. Civil partners may choose words akin to marriage, husband, wife and so on, if they like. The chosen words can be enshrined in legislation. But society would suffer were a small minority allowed for no good reason to unstick the glue holding most of society together.

*John Dexter 21 January 2013*