

# Will we still be free to have our own opinions of same-sex marriage?

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Marriage, as defined today between a man and a woman, is the best way for Australian society to flourish. It has been the foundation of stable societies since time immemorial and is central to the raising of the next generation.

As a Christian, I believe marriage was created as a gift from God at the beginning of world history. It is the first of all human institutions, even preceding the state, and has existed in some form in every society throughout human history. It would be shortsighted for us in Australia to believe, through observing the comparatively short history of same-sex marriages in other jurisdictions, that it is wise to introduce a radical change to the legal definition of marriage in Australia.

We must acknowledge that, despite the traditional definition of marriage in our law, not every marriage reaches its full potential. Almost every Australian has felt the pain in some way, directly or indirectly, of infidelity, divorce and separated families.

While the Presbyterian Church laments the failings of marriage in our society, we do not believe the answer is to change the institution itself. Traditional marriage is a good and stable institution that benefits our society, and therefore ought to be protected.

Behind the same-sex marriage movement is a superficial view of marriage that sees the relationship merely as a private arrangement: an intimate relationship between two people of any gender. If this were the case, it would be of little interest to the law.

However, to take this view diminishes the true significance of marriage. It is far more than a private relationship: marriage within its present legal definition serves the public good. Traditional marriage points to the beauty of difference and co-operation, demonstrating that men and women are equally essential in the partnership. Marriage encourages harmony between men and women, and reflects the biological reality of human reproduction: that despite our advances in modern medicine, the conception of children cannot be achieved without both male and female

gametes. Nature dictates that life is impossible without a mother and father, which suggests why marriage is appropriately between a man and woman.

The proposed changes to the Marriage Act are far-reaching and must not be taken lightly. Those proposing a private member's bill in favour of same-sex marriage say clergy will be afforded legal protections for counselling, officiating and speaking with respect to weddings.

However, would this prevent ministers and evangelists such as Campbell Markham and David Gee from being hauled before the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner when one referred to same-sex marriage in a blog and the other in a street meeting in Hobart?

If same-sex marriage becomes law this will have a significant and disturbing impact on our schools. There is no doubt that teachers will be required to teach pupils about the validity of same-sex marriage. What protections will there be if they conscientiously object? In Victoria, state policy is that "schools must support and respect sexual diversity, including same-sex attraction". Further, "learning within other domains such as English, the humanities and civics and citizenship provides many opportunities to include sexually diverse content ... and ... texts that incorporate the theme of same-sex relationships".

This policy seems to penetrate most areas of the curriculum and no doubt will trouble many teachers for emotional, moral, philosophical as well as religious reasons. They are right to be troubled. In Canada, which went down this path in 2005, there are no exemptions for teachers in state or faith-based schools. They must support this material despite misgivings.

What implications will this have in schools associated with the Presbyterian Church such as The Scots College in Bellevue Hill, Sydney; PLC Sydney; PLC Armidale; St Andrew's School in Wantirna, Melbourne? Will this proposed bill afford them protections? Will chaplains have protection? We just don't know.

There are consequences to redefining marriage, such that may affect ordinary Australians who uphold the traditional view of marriage and who ask for the fundamental freedom to say so.

If we must have a plebiscite, the population needs to be informed beforehand of all the legal implications that will arise from the adoption of same-sex marriage in spheres such as education, defence, health and aged care. A private member's bill, secretly drawn up — according to

Christopher Pyne — and sprung on parliament by a few backbenchers, cannot hope to address these serious human rights issues without due process and wide consultation.

I urge all Australians to recognise marriage as the fundamental institution of society, which is not ours to change on a whim. Even if all Australians cannot do so for explicitly religious reasons, at least let us recognise that this is a divisive issue for non-churchgoers as well, many of whom do not want to be silenced on such a socially significant matter.

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<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/will-we-still-be-free-to-have-our-own-opinions-of-samesex-marriage/news-story/2e62fb912251f631a54aaccebdb9f60b>