

FATHER RAY BLAKE COMMENTS ON GOVERNMENT'S REPORT

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The most striking thing about the government's consultation report on gay marriage, published yesterday, is how casually and cockily it redefines the institution of marriage. The Tories now decree that marriage is simply and definitively "about two people who love each other making a formal commitment to each other". That's it. It's about you and your lover, nobody else. It isn't about having children or raising a family or binding yourself into the broader community through taking on responsibility for creating and socialising the next generation; it is simply about "two people", ensconced in a loving bubble, making a "commitment to each other".

To that end, the report makes absolutely no mention of creating a family. It uses the word "children" only eight times, and its every use of that word is merely part of a response to (and criticism of) those groups that petitioned the government to recognise the importance of marriage as a means of raising and socialising children. It doesn't mention procreation, or family bonds, or communities (except when it refers to the needs and aspirations of the "transgender community"). Marriage is depicted as something which takes place in a vacuum, between two people wrenched from any broader notion of social or generational responsibilities, where the aim is merely to satisfy an individual's own needs. Marriage, the government decrees, is about allowing "two people" to "express their love and happiness".

Of course, marriage, at root, brings together two people, and it is, one would hope, an occasion of love and happiness. But what this report overlooks is that for great numbers of people marriage is about more than "two people" – it is about entering into a union for the purpose of creating a family and assuming a social, even historic responsibility for raising the next generation. For many people, marriage is something which not only binds them to the person they love but which also binds them to the broader community, making them a key cog in a social process of having, educating, caring for and imbuing with goodness children who will go on to become the future guardians of society. That none of this is even mentioned in the government's report – that family, children, community are all glaringly absent from this government decree on "what marriage means" – suggests that an alarmingly narrow conception of marriage is being pushed to the forefront of British political and social life.