

Archbishop of York tells David Cameron not to overrule the Bible and allow gay marriage

- **Marriage is set in history and cannot be changed overnight. It should be between a man and a woman, Dr Sentamu says**
- **David Cameron has shown support for a gay marriage bill**
- **The church needs more 'black people'**
- **Lib Democrat Minister says the CofE would not have to administer the same-sex ceremonies but the Church says this would not uphold in court**

By [Katie Silver](#)

Ministers should not overrule the Bible by allowing same-sex marriage, the Archbishop of York has said.

David Cameron would be acting like a 'dictator' and overruling the Bible if he legalises gay marriage, Dr John Sentamu has warned.

He told the prime minister that he will face a rebellion if he pushes ahead with plans to allow fully-fledged gay marriages.



Archbishop of York John Sentamu says David Cameron would be like a 'dictator' if he legalises gay marriage

Marriage is set in history and the government cannot change it overnight, the second most senior cleric in the Church of England added.

The Archbishop believes marriage must remain a union between a man and a woman.

Dr Sentamu said: 'I don't think it is the role of the state to define what marriage is. It is set in tradition and history and you can't just (change it) overnight, no matter how powerful you are.

'We've seen dictators do it in different contexts and I don't want to redefine very clear social structures that have been in existence for a long time and then overnight the state believes it could go in a particular way.

'It's almost like somebody telling you overnight that the Church, whose job is to worship God, (will become) an arm of the Armed Forces. They must take arms and fight. You're completely changing tradition.'

Dr Sentamu, who is in Jamaica to mark its 50 years of independence, also said that the Church's leadership needs to do more to avoid its leadership being solely white and middle class (see below)

Dr John Sentamu pictured in Jamaica earlier this week. The archbishop believes marriage is set in history and cannot be quickly changed by the government

The Government will open a consultation on its marriage reform bill in March, but the Church of England has already warned that same-sex couples will be able to have church weddings if David Cameron goes ahead with the plans.

The Church's lawyers last month said that weddings will have to be offered to same-sex couples under any scheme to open the full privileges and title of marriage to gays and lesbians.

Dr Sentamu said the bishops in the House of Lords did not try to stop Labour introducing civil partnerships in 2004.

He added the Church was also content with last year's move to allow civil partnership ceremonies in places of worship, as long as it is voluntary.

But Dr Sentamu said the Government would face a rebellion on any changes in legislation on gay civil marriage.

'The rebellion is going to come not only from the bishops. You're going to get it from across the benches and in the Commons,' he said.

'If you genuinely would like the registration of civil partnerships to happen in a more general way, most people will say they can see the drift. But if you begin to call those

marriage, you're trying to change the English language.

The church did not object to the introduction of civil partnerships in 2004 which gave same-sex couples improved legal rights. The state can not redefine what marriage is, Dr Sentamu says 'That does not mean you diminish, condemn, criticise, patronise any same-sex relationships because that is not what the debate is about.

'The Church has always stood out - Jesus actually was the odd man out. I'd rather stick with Jesus than be popular because it looks odd.' Mr Cameron indicated his support for gay marriage in October, saying: 'Conservatives believe in the ties that bind us; that society is stronger when we make vows to each other and support each other. So I don't support gay marriage despite being a Conservative. I support gay marriage because I'm a Conservative.'

Liberal Democrat Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone has indicated that nothing would force churches that disapprove of gay relationships to host same-sex ceremonies – but the CofE's analysis suggests any attempt to bar legalised gay marriage from churches would fall at the first court challenge.

Dr Sentamu has previously expressed concern over the 'gay marriage' of homosexual clergy after two reverends exchanged rings and vows at a service held in St Bartholomew the Great Church in the City of London in 2008

In a joint statement with the Archbishop of Canterbury Dr Rowan Williams, he said: 'Those clergy who disagree with the Church's teaching are at liberty to seek to persuade others within the Church of the reasons why they believe, in the light of Scripture, tradition and reason that it should be changed.

'But they are not at liberty simply to disregard it.'

Human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell, co-ordinator of the Equal Love campaign, said: 'Archbishop Sentamu is a religious authoritarian who wants to impose his personal opposition to same-sex marriage on the rest of society.' It is not a Christian value to demand legal discrimination against gay couples and to treat them as inferior, second-class citizens - with fewer rights than everyone else. 'The Government is proposing to legalise same-sex civil marriages in register offices. This will not affect churches.' 'The Archbishop has no valid grounds for objecting to civil legislation that will ensure marriage equality for all couples.'

'Church needs more black people': says the Archbishop who was once called a 'black monkey' by a parishioner

The Church must do more to avoid its leadership being solely white and middle class, the Archbishop of York has said.

Dr John Sentamu said white working class parishioners and black church-goers are poorly represented in the Anglican church.

He said: 'I used to chair the committee for minority ethnic Anglican concerns, and we seemed to be making some progress but that now seems to be going backwards.'

'Where we have lost out is black people who had been realised Anglicans, who are now joining Pentecostal churches. That's a huge drain.'

He said white working-class parishioners were often relegated to making tea after services, and added: 'The Church should be a sign of the kingdom of heaven and should be telling us what it will look like.'

'Heaven is not going to be full of just black people, just working-class people, just middle-class people, it's going to be, in the words of Desmond Tutu, a rainbow people of God in all its diversity.'

Addressing the accusation of 'institutional racism' in the Metropolitan Police that came out of the inquiry following the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence, Dr Sentamu said he believes many organisations have made progress over the past decade.

However, he said other institutions have avoided addressing the issue.

'Those that did it, there is some kind of change. Football never did it, so I'm not surprised (by allegations of racism on the pitch).'

'I didn't hear that the media ever said let's put a mirror to ourselves and see whether there isn't this tendency of stereotyping, or being prejudiced, of advantaging people because they went to the same school.'

The Archbishop said he never encountered racism from fellow clergy in his rise through the ranks of the Church of England but said he did have to deal with racist parishioners.

'When I was a vicar there was a lady who didn't want me to take her husband's funeral because I was black.'

'I took one funeral and at the end a man said to me, 'Why did my father deserve to be buried by a black monkey?' We received letters with excrement in.'