

benefits, all of those things, without exception, could simply and easily be made equally available by law to the unions of two homosexual persons without calling these unions marriage. Marriage can remain what marriage as always been and another name (pick one) can be given to unions of homosexual persons. The civil rights issues, in so far as there are any, can be easily solved without further reducing the definition of marriage.

One final point, if you will allow me. I know that gay activists are interested in claiming the name “marriage” as a way of asserting their personal dignity and the dignity, as they see it, of their loving relationships. But you do not claim your dignity by trying to adopt the ways or structures or titles or names or definitions of some other group of people. You assert your dignity by demanding respect for yourself, as you are, in all your diversity. Over the years homosexual activists have told us to respect diversity. Diversity means difference. So, I urge homosexual persons to embrace their diversity. It is not gay pride to aspire to an institution that is uniquely and by definition a heterosexual institution.

This was the error of some elements of the early feminist movement. In order to be accepted as women, women were encouraged to disguise and deny their uniqueness as women, to become as men are in order to succeed in business or politics or whatever. Perhaps you remember the whole “unisex” craze. But as the feminist movement matured, it was seen that women have a dignity that is their own and that does not demand becoming like men. Men and

women are really different. And women claim their dignity by being women with gifts to offer to business and politics and medicine and science and religion, not by denying or suppressing the differences between them and men. Gay men and women repeat that error in asserting that they can only have the dignity appropriate to them by appropriating the uniquely heterosexual institution of marriage, thereby, unwittingly, denying their own unique identity and dignity.

The Catholic Church affirms the dignity of every human being. Gay men and women are entitled to their rightful dignity. They are not entitled, in my thinking, to marriage.

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Another Look at Gay Marriage

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The recent passage of bills in several states and acts of certain state courts has raised a very important question: what is marriage?

First of all marriage is not a creature of the state. The state did not invent marriage or define marriage. The state doesn't own marriage. Marriage pre-exists the state. Incidentally, it also pre-exists the Church. The law simply reinforces and supports an already existing human institution. Marriage is a unique and natural phenomenon with a definition that springs from the very nature of the human person. It exists and has existed in virtually every human society for millennia. While there are minor exceptions in isolated cultures, marriage consistently has certain characteristics in its definition. The few exceptions prove the rule.

What are those characteristics? Marriage has always been a bond between

men and women. It is normally seen as a permanent state. It has required faithfulness. Marriage has always had two objects. One of these is the good of the spouses themselves, that is: mutual assistance; emotional, spiritual, physical support; a sharing of resources and property. Marriage also has, as one of its objects, acts, which are apt for the procreation of children. Now, of course, there can be unintended obstacles, which frustrate the achievement of that purpose, including age and health reasons, but marriage should be open to this creative impulse and then open to following through with the formation and education of any children that might be born. In that regard, marriage is a unique state because marriage makes children and children are necessary for the survival of any society.

What is the definition of marriage according to the state, in view of its recent legislation? What is the state's new definition of marriage? Well, certainly the state's definition no longer includes permanence. With the advent of easy divorce for virtually any reason proposed by the couple, many couples understand permanence merely to mean they will stay together as long as their love lasts or as long as they find the relationship to be contributing to their personal fulfillment. Many couples in America today marry with the desire for a permanent relationship but with the escape clause, however unexpressed, understood to be available to them.

Certainly marriage according to the state no longer includes faithfulness. Most people would agree that whether or not couples are

faithful to each other is no business of the state. Couples can decide to have an "open" marriage if they so choose. If one of them were to be unfaithful, that is purely a private matter between themselves and not subject in any way to the scrutiny of the law.

As for marriage and procreation, regrettably we all know that connection was ruptured some decades ago. Today about 40% of children in America are born outside of marriage and in some groups, the rate rises to about two-thirds of all births. Single-motherhood is the leading cause of poverty in America. Is it in the best interest of society to redefine marriage in way that proclaims that marriage and procreation have nothing to do with each other?

Now the state tells us that even being male and female has nothing to do with marriage. So if you eliminate permanence, fidelity, openness to children, and male and female, what is left of marriage? It becomes no more than a relationship for mutual assistance and sharing of property and, since the state cannot legislate emotional and spiritual support and assistance, it ends up little more than a contract regarding property rights. Marriage has been reduced to the least common denominator.

Now I am no hopeless romantic but this sounds to me like a frightening reduction in the nature of marriage, a social structure so necessary for the well-being of society. At this point you can see that what the state does is never more than civil unions. An individual couple may, by their own consent, choose to bind themselves in a religious or even nonreligious ceremony to more than a mere contract regarding

property rights, but the state makes no such demand. The state sees no difference between marriage and civil unions. However, is that really the "marriage" we want as a society, and, for that matter, as voters?

If marriage means marriage, with all the elements of that definition I have listed above, and if marriage is not just civil union, then there is nothing discriminatory about restricting marriage to one man and one woman. That is simply the definition of the thing. This is not discrimination. It is not discrimination to call things by their own names. We have different names for different things. A cat is not a dog; an oak tree is not a rose. It is not discrimination to call one person a man and another person a woman. It is not discrimination to call one person a father and another person a mother. It is not discrimination to call one person a husband and another person a wife. It is not discrimination to say that one person is heterosexual and another person is homosexual. It is not discrimination to call the union of a man and a woman marriage and to call the committed relationship of homosexual persons something else – you pick the word. Personally, I cannot believe that most Americans see no difference between marriage and homosexual unions, even when homosexual unions are perceived as desirable. There remains a difference and the difference should have its own name.

As for the civil rights and obligations that have been attached by civil law to marriage, for example, inheritance or other property rights, rights regarding medical care, or the right to certain employment