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# Culture and the Meaning of Marriage

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Public policy is for the common good, not the advantage of a minority. State governments have traditionally overseen the definition and solemnization of marriage because they have an interest in promoting the general welfare.

All societies throughout recorded history have publicly recognized the institution of marriage as a sexually complementary public institution. The government's obligation is merely to recognize legally what marriage actually is. The government has no business creating an entirely new—and destructive—institution and then attaching to it the name of marriage.

Marriage is not solely or centrally about love. It is centrally concerned with children and their connection to their biological parents. The state has no interest or investment in whether couples love each other. If marriage were solely or even centrally about love and had no connection to children, the state would have no interest in or business being involved with marriage.

For these reasons the state is not only authorized but right to maintain a legal definition of marriage that determines what requirements a couple must meet in order to be allowed to enter it. It is also right to be extremely cautious in allowing these requirements to be changed; it must first be demonstrated before any wise government that social harms will not result.

The diminution of marriage in the public mind has already made us less aware of its social importance. Marriage, not the state, is the best Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Frankly, since the beginning of the “Great Society,” government initiative has done more harm to families and marriages than help. The same is true now. The cultural changes that would be brought about by changing our marriage laws are aptly expressed in the following letter, written by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in 2003.

“It might be asked how a law can be contrary to the common good if it does not impose any particular kind of behaviour, but simply gives legal recognition to a de facto reality which does not seem to cause injustice to anyone. In this area, one needs first to reflect on the difference between homosexual behaviour as a private phenomenon and the same behaviour as a relationship in society, foreseen and approved by the law, to the point where it becomes one of the institutions in the legal structure. This second phenomenon is not only more serious, but also assumes a more wide-reaching and profound influence, and would result in changes to the entire organization of society, contrary to the common good. Civil laws are structuring principles of man's life in society, for good or for ill. They “play a very important and sometimes decisive role in influencing patterns of thought and behaviour.” Lifestyles and the underlying presuppositions these express not only externally shape the life of society, but also tend to modify the younger generation's perception and evaluation of forms of behaviour. Legal recognition of homosexual unions would obscure certain basic moral values and cause a devaluation of the institution of marriage.”

