

Is Marriage a Universal Right?

("What is Wrong with Gay Marriage?" by Stanley N. Kurtz
Commentary, September 2000, pp. 35-41)

"A clear majority of the American public opposes same-sex marriage," says Stanley Kurtz of the Hudson Institute. "And yet this opposition, though real, is by-and-large silent. So striking is this general silence, that one cannot help but wonder about the reasons for it."

Three respected and moderately liberal Protestant theologians were recently asked to explain their views to a television audience on the question of gay marriage, Kurtz notes. All were opposed to gay marriage, but they declined to appear because they feared being publicly labelled as "homophobic."

Kurtz notes the powerful "censoring role" of the mainstream media, and the fact that a small group of deeply committed partisans can sometimes succeed in imposing certain costs on their ideological adversaries.

"But one also senses," he says, "that the silencing of the majority would never have been possible, were the majority itself more certain of its ground."

Misunderstanding the Democratic Ideal of Equality

Because we as Americans favor tolerance and equality—and consider them obligations of our democracy—we have become confused when required to justify the very traditions, such as marriage, upon which "democracy itself depends." This is because those traditions seem to conflict with the democratic ideal of non-discrimination.

How, Kurtz wonders, would gay marriage actually play out? He notes that in reality, the gay community has long "put a premium on sexual promiscuity" and on rebellion against society. Radical gays have long argued that homosexuality is by its very nature incompatible with the norms of a monogamous marriage. Would marriage truly prove to be transformative?

William Bennett argued in a *Newsweek* editorial that the transformation would likely not take place in the habits of the gay community, but in the *heterosexual* community: same-sex marriage would fatally undermine an already weakened institution by breaking the bond between marriage and the principle of monogamy. Besides, Bennett argued, once gay marriage became the norm, there would be no principled argument remaining by which society could resist polygamy.

Marriage exists as an institution, Kurtz explains, not

because it is a "universal right of all," but because "certain communities have decided that this particular form of personal alliance between a man and a woman both needs and deserves social encouragement."

If marriage was really a universal legal right of all who sought it, then it would have to be redesigned in the form of a contract by which any group of parties could form whatever sort of alliance they chose.

What is Marriage For?

"What we are thrown back on," Kurtz says, "are the fundamental questions of what marriage is, and what it is for." Even more important, he says, the continuity of the two-person marital bond is "all that stands between our children and chaos."

Kurtz believes that marriage is naturally anchored by the complementarity of the sexes, although "even to mention it [complementarity] these days is to invite ridicule." He notes that male-female physical and emotional complementarity is biologically-based and thus "not about to disappear." Women help to domesticate men.

Another anchoring factor is the man's sense that his home is his "castle" and he its "king," despite the reality that "a rough sort of equality" has always lain hidden in the reality of a husband-wife relationship. "What the Promise Keepers has the audacity to say out loud about a man's authority within the marriage bond remains," Kurtz says, "in subtler form, the formula of heterosexual marital success."

Same-sex marriage has enormous subversive potential, Kurtz notes. Gay activists are already arguing for an experimentation with "novel family configurations" involving sperm donation, open marriage, group marriage, and polygamous marriage. Websites have been set up to support "polyamorists"—women who live with more than one husband.

In short, he explains, gay activists are asking us to "transform, at unknown cost to ourselves and to future generations, the central institution of our society." Gay marriage ought to be resisted "firmly, politely and above all, unashamedly."

"If there ever was a place to draw the line," Kurtz insists, "this is it." ■