

**Danville News Column**  
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**“Marriage and the State,**  
**5 February, 2010**  
**Word Count 750**

Before you commit to a marriage, a good question to ask is: do you love them for who they are or for who you want them to be? Most say, “I need to know you for me to love you.” The opposite is true. Only when you love someone do you really begin to know them. Some of us are slow learners.

Let’s clear away cobweb thinking: the state has a vested interest in marriage.

After all, you’re required to get a license, much as you would for hunting, fishing, or driving. No learner’s permit though. What else does the state require or prohibit?

In Pennsylvania, both must be present when you apply for a marriage license. If under 18, you need parental consent. You cannot marry your first cousin. Monogamy is required. The application costs \$46, valid for 60 days. If remarrying, bring your certified copy of final divorce, annulment, or proof of death of spouse. Blood tests aren’t required, though it’s a good idea for your lover’s sake. You don’t want him or her to say, “Thank you for that wedding present – I always wanted syphilis.” Plus, your marriage automatically gives legal rights over each other and each other’s property. And no same sex marriages in Pennsylvania.

The state meddles in our marriages. Why? Mostly because of babies. Which explains why the state has a vested interest in marriage, legally defining marriage as between woman and man. Are you tired of hearing marriage clamored about as a civil right? Since when is marriage a right? Wiser is to consider it a responsibility.

For all that Jesus says about love, he says very little about marriage. But repeatedly the Bible, along with religious and secular texts throughout the ages, presents how our pair-bonding happens for a very specific reason: for the sake of the progress of society which is secured when our children have been given the best chance to have their needs met, from food and shelter to morality and creativity.

A premise lurks behind all this, that there is and ever will be a fundamental purpose to a man and woman getting together. It’s called breeding. We don’t count on society to take care of our babies the way parents can and parents should.

State sanctioned breeding also protects mom and dad for when they get old, insuring that they will be cared for by their children. Don’t count on society to care for them. Marriage also obligates siblings to look after each other. Family is the Jell-O that holds the marshmallows of culture together.

You can debate all you want whether or not these fundamental purposes still hold – given older marriages, social security, nursing homes, divorce, celibacy, how some don't want to breed and some can't breed -- but let's agree that civilization is the direct result that human babies are utterly dependent on us for so long. Foals can trot within minutes of birth. Baby whales swim immediately. Babies depend on us, sometimes until they're in their 20's.

Which is why marriage historically isn't some lacy ritual of sentiment and affection as it's a pragmatic economic institution through which a society insures its future by making sure babies, old folks, and each other receive the best family can give.

We can argue all we wish -- either with mutual respect or as shouting matches to drown out the others for daring to disagree with you -- about how we as a society define marriage. But maybe we can pause and leave social policy to the social arena for a moment. Maybe we don't have to have authoritative opinions on every social issue. Try it. It can be wonderfully freeing not always having to be right all the time.

There is simply too much hurt and loneliness out there. We can either shout slogans and carry placards or we can care for the wounded and encourage the hopeful. Where does the hatred come from? From our love of something selfish.

For you have to wonder that if two guys giving each other rings is going to shred the fabric of society, it must be pretty flimsy fabric to begin with. How does two guys exchanging vows really affect you?

Far more challenging, and far more rewarding, would be for each of us look to our own houses and re-define our marriages, our relationships, our commitments, each day waking up to re-examine how we can responsibly love and be loved. When you love them, you begin to know them.