

The separate roles of State and Religion in Marriage

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In my fifty years of Ordained Ministry and over 300 weddings, I have come to a number of simple conclusions about Marriage.

The state has a legitimate interest in protecting the rights of children and of common property and so has an interest in regulating the legal partnership we call marriage. The state also has some legitimate public health concerns expressed in prohibitions of incest and polygamy and regulation of the spread of STDs.

Religious groups are free to decide how they will celebrate a commitment between two people, whether jumping over a broomstick, crushing wineglass or kneeling for Holy Communion. They are also free to choose to whom they will permit such religious ceremonies.

In the course of my years of pastoral work and my doctorate in Marriage and family issues I have become convinced that sexual orientation is largely settled either genetically or by enzymes present in utero. It is not a lifestyle choice, as is religion, but like basic personality and handedness is set at birth. That does not mean that it can never be changed. I was changed from left to right hand writing in first grade by the old "hit them with a ruler if they use the wrong hand" method. My handwriting today shows the price I paid. I see no role for the state in regulating basic traits of any individual if those traits do not threaten anyone else.

I oppose any attempt by the state to tell religious groups who or how they might marry but also reject any attempt by religious groups, including my own, to impose particular definitions on the state.