

The Wayback Machine - <https://web.archive.org/web/20160726133516/http://www....>

About Hang Together

Who We Are

HANG TOGETHER

*"We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all
hang separately." – Benjamin Franklin*

MARRIAGE IS DEAD. LONG LIVE MARRIAGE!

Posted on September 26, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

KYLE BROACHES AN EMOTION-LADEN AND EXTRAORDINARILY CONTENTIOUS
topic. And he broached it well, yes?

In some of our early posts, we talked about discovering areas where there might be consensus on moral topics we were not aware already exists. I think this might be one, but I suspect it will be an unwelcome discovery to those who have styled themselves as defenders of marriage.

Let's start with this. Marriage, as an institution, is dead, and the homosexuals had nothing to do with it. What's more, there is a broad and deep consensus that we are well rid of it, and we don't want it to come back. And that's an accurate description even before we inquire into the homosexual community's thoughts on the matter. All the *sturm und drang* over gay marriage is an artifact, the residual twitching of nerves in something already gone.

Our defense of "traditional marriage" has been chaotic and counter-productive because we allow side issues to distract the public conversation from the heart of the issue, which is the nature of marriage itself. If we concentrate on that, I think it will become clear that gay marriage is an unnecessary and inconsequential distraction from the real problem. But if we are unwilling (or unable) to mend the real problem, then there's really no point in objecting to gay marriage.

Marriage – the traditional variety that we conservatives say we are defending – is a three-faceted institution. The first facet is the relationship between the people involved. This is where they find mutual attraction, develop trust and commitment, pledge their troth one to another. The second is between the couple and God. They recognize that their union in marriage creates something that did not exist before, and that they are answerable to him for its care and nurture.

The third facet, the one generating all the heat, is the relationship between the couple and the state. This is where conservatives tell the homosexuals they may not marry because marriage is between a man and a woman. And it is where the homosexuals argue that their love for one another should be recognized and legalized just like that obtaining between heterosexuals.

All this heat generates no light because we get distracted from the real question, which concerns why the state is involved in marriage in the first place. Marriage, as far as the state is concerned, is about formalizing certain arrangements in recognition of the fact that only a man and a woman can bring a new life into the world, and that there has to be a stable framework within which to bring that new person to maturity. The state doesn't care whether the people love each other. Nor does it have any legitimate interest in the nature or object of that love. The state cares about marriage because if a man and a woman get together and produce a child, someone has to care for the wee little one. And if it is not the child's parents, the burden falls on society.

A few generations ago, however, we decided that sex is sport and marriage a convenience. We intentionally decoupled sex and its consequences from the institution of marriage. Now, this is not to say that the purpose of marriage is having children and that those who choose not to multiply are somehow less married. But it *is* to say that (a) keeping sex in marriage, and (b) making marriage durable, is important because when a man and a woman get together, children often follow. And someone has to be responsible for them.

And that is why marriage is dead. The third facet of marriage, the facet that exists as a matter of law, is purely functional. It is the permanence of the relationship for the sake of protecting and providing for the fruit of the union. That is to say, the state's contribution to marriage is the cement that holds the

couple together. Yes, there are some pedagogical undertones, some normalizing influences to the state's imprimatur, but those are incidental, they are not the purpose of governmental involvement.

The advent of culturally-acceptable promiscuity and no-fault divorce effectively eliminated the third facet. Satisfying sexual desires without reference to marriage not only carries no shame, it is a matter of celebration. And those who, for whatever reason, choose to marry can return to singledom whenever convenient. Which leaves not much of a rationale for the third facet at all. Sure, the courts have to referee division of the matrimonial assets and make a show of telling one spouse to send child support, but the state's role in attracting people to marriage and providing the functional cement once in is now entirely gone.

So the institution of marriage is finished, and there was much rejoicing in the land. The vast majority of people do not want it in its three-faceted form (even those who stay together want to make sure the escape hatch stays near at hand and swings open easily). Culture doesn't want it. And the government has followed the population's lead by banishing it. The abolition of traditional marriage represents about as profound a moral consensus as you will find on any topic. There are a few people here and there who lament its passing and see the tragedy that lies in its wake, but they are lonely prophets whose voices are wearing out.

So when we defend "traditional marriage" without rebuilding its permanence as a protection for the next generation, what is it that we are actually defending? Certainly it isn't the first facet. Whether two guys refer to each other as husband cannot conceivably cause cognizable harm to others. Nor can

it be the second facet. If God does not approve of gay marriage, then the couple hazards his judgment. But he has not made us executors of his judgment.

If we see ourselves as defending the third facet, what exactly are we trying to keep exclusively for heterosexual couples? Is it the government-issued certificate of marriage? Or the tax breaks and other official miscellaneous perquisites? Something else? And to what end?

Marriage is dead. Traditional marriage, that is. We re-created it in our own image many decades ago, and we've been shouting "Long live marriage!" ever since. But when we eliminated the *raison d'être* for marriage's third facet, we simultaneously made the institution entirely compatible with homosexual unions

I'm really not much for defending shells, the form of things without their substance. So unless we're going to defend all three facets of marriage, then we should seriously consider shelving the debate over gay unions. What'll it be?

[Pin It](#)

[Share](#)

Share this:

[f Facebook](#)

[t Twitter](#)

[G+ Google](#)

Bookmark the [permalink](#).

← Hail the Virtuous Independence of
the Undecided Voter!

Legislating Morality →

11 Thoughts.



Kyle Ferguson

September 27, 2012 at 9:14 am

I couldn't agree more. I thought about broaching that issue in a recent post but chose against it. The debate over gay marriage is not about protecting marriage but about protecting financial benefits of marriage in the eyes of government. We have common law marriages in most states, which are certainly not marriages. Single people and non-married couples can adopt. You make an excellent point that most conservatives who are arguing against gay marriage do so on the basis of facet one and two while claiming it's about the third. If Christians were consistent, they would say that the state shouldn't reward marriages of one Christian and one non-Christian, as that also is spoken against in scripture. The last thing we really need is the government becoming a 'sex police' that enforces sexual norms among consenting adults. And I agree that the issue isn't gay marriage, that's a symptom of a larger problem. Excellent post!

Reply

Pingback: [Ockham Ruined Everything! | Hang Together](#)

Pingback: [Marriage Is Not Dead » First Thoughts | A First Things Blog](#)

Pingback: [Marriage Is Not Dead | Hang Together](#)

Pingback: [Marriage Is Not Dead](#)



Nomenclature

September 28, 2012 at 3:45 pm

Marriage is dead. Feminism killed it. So far it is almost exclusively men who have suffered from the loss of this now evil institution. Soon only foolish men will marry. No man should marry. To marry is to invite ruin. As fewer and fewer men marry, however, women will be the ones to suffer. Their bastard children too will suffer. This, not our sovereign debt, will spell the end of the West.

Reply

Pingback: [The State's Interest in Marriage Transcends Children because Marriage Does | Hang Together](#)

Pingback: [The State's Interest In Marriage Is Not Co-terminus With The Nature Of Marriage | Hang Together](#)

Pingback: [Ain't No Functionalism Here | Hang Together](#)

Pingback: [The New Fight for Marriage – The Gospel Coalition Blog](#)



Jorgen Schmidt

March 7, 2013 at 2:17 pm

Marriage is alive and will stay alive so long as there is one man who refuses to march to the beat of the secular drum. I for one could give a rats ass whether or not the government recognizes it.

Reply

Leave a Reply

Enter your comment here...

SEARCH HANG

TOGETHER

RECENT POSTS

[I Resign. What Comes Next?](#)

[Don't swerve, but drive on
into the breakers](#)

[On Christian Faith and "Self-
Evident" Truths](#)

[In These Times](#)

[Real Disorder Needs Real
Compassion](#)

[Schools, Transcendence and
Pluralism](#)

[Angry? Try Resolve, not
Rage.](#)

[At the Twilight's Last
Gleaming](#)

[I agree, with qualifications](#)

[Psalm of the Day](#)

ARCHIVE

Archive 

SUBSCRIBE VIA EMAIL

Subscribe

META

[Log in](#)

[Entries RSS](#)

[Comments RSS](#)

[WordPress.org](#)

Proudly powered by [WordPress](#). Theme: Book Lite by [WPshoppe](#).

