

Marriage Needs Support, Not Redefinition

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In 2004, Ohio voters passed an amendment to the Ohio constitution strongly advocated by the Catholic bishops of Ohio. It provided that: “Only a union between one man and one woman may be a marriage valid in or recognized by this state and its political subdivisions.”

Today, in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision earlier this summer striking down parts of the federal Defense of Marriage Act and the newly announced support of same-sex “marriage” by several Ohio politicians, talk is heard of repealing the amendment.

That would be neither necessary nor good public policy.

The Supreme Court’s decision means that the federal government must recognize same-sex “marriages” in states that provide for it, extending spousal benefits to the couples involved. However, the Court did not hold that the Constitution requires states to recognize such unions, thus redefining marriage. Neither the DOMA ruling nor the Court’s refusal to consider California’s Proposition 8 banning same-sex “marriage” means that Ohio and other states with provisions in their constitutions barring same-sex “marriage” will have to change. Nor should they.

Traditional marriage, the union of one man and one woman for life, is the cradle of the family, which is the basic building block of society. Not every married couple has children, but every child has a mother and father. Both parents are important, and they are not interchangeable. As a society we should be working to improve the chances that children are raised by both parents, together. That is not unjust discrimination against homosexuals. The Catholic Church teaches that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or family make-up, deserve God’s love, mercy, and respect according to the Gospel.

The Church also teaches that marriage is between two individuals, one male and one female. She is not trying to enshrine a particular theology of marriage into secular law, however. Rather, the Church seeks to uphold the understanding of marriage that has been shared for thousands of years by diverse cultures until just recently.

Traditional marriage, it must be admitted, is an institution under stress in today’s world. It is increasingly challenged by high rates of divorce, cohabitation, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy. As a society we should redouble our efforts to support marriage, not redefine it.

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