

Special thanks to Lou Anne for sending this in. I think it's especially exciting to see this article, considering it appeared in a Baptist publication. Perhaps there is hope after all! -- Troy

editorial

So-called 'marriage protection' misdirected

By John Pierce

A well-known Religious Right leader was using his popular "Christian radio" program to rally the faithful in support of the Marriage Protection Amendment. To hear his passion, one would think the institution of marriage is suffering.

Well, for Americans, it has been for a good while. Unless factors change, persons getting married today have about a 40 percent chance of divorcing.

Statistics show that divorce rates have declined a bit recently. But that decline is likely impacted by the fact that many more couples are cohabitating than before.

In other words, they are not divorcing because they are not marrying. And those who claim lower divorce rates often do not take into account married persons who were previously divorced.

Hollywood is famous for multiple and disposable marriages -- most famously, Britney Spear's annulment some 55 hours after saying "I do" in Las Vegas in 2004.

Nationally, however, the statistics may be better than Tinseltown or Vegas, but the reality is that divorce has become a common part of American culture. And before we get on our moral high horses, the statistics are about the same for churchgoers as the rest of the population. Yet the proposed legislation known by the misnomer Marriage Protection Amendment (or Federal Marriage Amendment), which has been introduced in Congress three times since 2003, would amend the U.S. Constitution to define marriage as exclusively between a man and a woman. It is essential, proponents say, to protect marriage.

From whom? Gay and lesbian persons comprise a very small percentage of the American population.

Regardless of one's position on homosexuality (read that phrase again before sending a letter to the editor, please), it is incomprehensible to see the poor state of marriage among majority heterosexuals as a lesser threat than the minority efforts to gain some form of legal recognition for same-sex partnerships.

Slide the mask off the so-called efforts to "protect marriage" and one sees more of the repeated hostility — in the loving name of Jesus — toward gay and lesbian persons. The public reputation of Christians as fearful, judgmental and condemning is well earned by attitudes and actions such as this.

Levelheaded thinking about the whole issue of the government's role in marriages or legal unions can lead to various opinions. For me, the political problem is that government should have never gotten into the marriage business long ago — and should get out now.

From a Christian perspective (as well as other faith traditions), marriage is a spiritual commitment to spouse and God, something much more significant than a legal contract. It would be easy for the church or other faith community to do one (marriage) and the government to do another (legal unions).

People of faith understand marriage to be holy matrimony. The government is not — or should not be — in the "holy" business.

These "marriage protection" efforts fuel fear and hostilities many already hold toward gay and lesbian persons. The legislative proposals — nationally and in some states like Georgia -- are wasteful at best and vindictive at worst.

It is baffling to see how many prominent Christian leaders today keep looking for governmental sanctions of their religious beliefs. So much religiously fueled legislative activity is fearful reaction to the growing pluralism that threatens the cultural dominance of evangelical Christians.

As a result, good words such as "family values" and even "Baptist" and "Christian" have taken on negative connotations. We must change the often-valid negative perceptions attributed to us because of our self-righteousness and insecurities.

The church has a challenge in strengthening marriage and Families. But we need to aim at the right targets.

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