

New Bethel Christian Life Commission Report – July 2008

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Quote of Month

“Be kind, for everyone you meet is in a great battle.” Philo of Alexandria, circa A.D. 40

How Religious Are We?—*American Piety in the 21st Century*—A Baylor Study on Religion

Baptist Standard (10-2-06): 10-11, by Hannah Elliot, *Associated Baptist Press*, edited by M. G. Maness

Four Views of God

A—Authoritarian	31.4%
B—Benevolent	23%
C—Critical	16%
D—Distant	24.4%
Atheist	5.2%

U.S. Religious Affiliation

Evangelical Protestant	33.6%
Mainline Protestant	22.1%
Catholic	21.2%
Unaffiliated	10.8%
Black Protestant	5%
Other	4.9% - Jewish 2.5%

One of the most detailed studies on religion in the 21st century, asking about “practice” as well as theology. “We found that almost a third of people who said ‘I don’t know my religion’ five questions later gave us the name of a congregation” that they attend, said Kevin Dougherty, Baylor sociologist.

Take Two—In America, An F in Religion

U.S. News & World Report (4-9-7): 28, by Jay Tolson, edited by M. G. Maness

With 9 in 10 claiming to believe in God or a Supreme Being, U.S. is considered most “the most religious of modern industrial nations. Yet when it comes to knowledge about religion, it ranks among the most ill-informed. While close to two thirds of all Americans regard the Bible as a source of answers to life’s questions, only half can name even one of the New Testament Gospels. Head of Boston University’s department of religion, Stephen Prothero recently wrote *Religious Literacy* that tells how we got that way. In answer to the question, *how should America address religious illiteracy?*, he said, “I think we need to have courses about the Bible and world religions in middle schools and high schools, and I think they should be mandatory—with an opt-out provision. One course would cover the five or seven great religions. The other would be about the Bible. Students would learn the basic stories and characters.”

Take Three—Newspapers Re-Think Religion Sections

Baptist Standard (4-30-7): 18, by Hannah Elliot, *Associated Baptist Press*, edited by M. G. Maness

The *Dallas Morning News* received the Religions Communicators Council award for the nation’s best religion section, the 10th time in 11 years. But there will be no 12th time, as the *News* discontinues the section, citing economic concerns. They are not alone: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* combined its religion stuff with its “living” pages, and the *U.S. News & World Report* and the *Whichita Eagle* have cut religion editors and downsized the beat. According to the *Annual Report on American Journalism*, there was a loss of 600 full-time professional employees at daily newspapers in 2005, and more losses to come, citing less advertising and the exponential growth of internet communications. Richard Oppel, editor of the *Austin American-Statesman*, said termination of a religion section is not the tragedy it’s made out to be. The *Statesman* covers faith-based news throughout its pages and includes a “faith page” inside the features section on Saturdays. “I never believed in religion ‘sections,’” Oppel said. “They were a showy response to an obvious religious interest when newspapers were in their salad days.... Dependent on advertising, and advertising can be thin in that sector.” In fact, the absence of a strictly “religious” section means faith-based stories must appear throughout all news—a distribution that more closely reflects real life. Brad Owens, a journalism professor at Baylor, said, “I’d be more worried if the religion beat reporters go away. I’d hate to see any one reporter confined to just one section.”

“Marriage” in California – recent decision May 15, 2008 – Constitutional Questions

IN THE SUPREME COURT OF CALIFORNIA - S147999 - re MARRIAGE CASES

Following are exact quotes culled from the first 10 pages of 172-page decision, minus footnotes

In *Lockyer v. City and County of San Francisco* (2004) 33 Cal.4th 1055 (*Lockyer*), this court concluded that public officials of the City and County of San Francisco acted unlawfully by issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples in the absence of a judicial determination that the California statutes limiting marriage to a union between a man and a woman are unconstitutional....

The present proceeding, involving the consolidated appeal of six cases that were litigated in the superior court and the Court of Appeal in the wake of this court’s decision in *Lockyer*, squarely presents the substantive constitutional question that was not addressed in *Lockyer*. In considering this question, we note at the outset that the constitutional issue before us differs in a significant respect from the constitutional issue

that has been addressed by a number of other state supreme courts ... in interpreting the applicable provisions of their respective state constitutions, to determine the validity of statutory provisions or common law rules limiting marriage to a union of a man and a woman.... These courts, often by a one-vote margin ... have ruled upon the validity of statutory schemes that contrast with that of California, which in recent years has enacted comprehensive domestic partnership legislation under which a same-sex couple may enter into a legal relationship that affords the couple virtually all of the same substantive legal benefits and privileges....¹

Accordingly, the legal issue we must resolve is not whether it would be constitutionally permissible under the California Constitution for the state to limit marriage only to opposite-sex couples while denying same-sex couples any opportunity to enter into an official relationship with all ... but rather whether our state Constitution prohibits the state from establishing a statutory scheme in which both opposite-sex and same-sex couples are granted the right to enter into an officially recognized family relationship.... The question we must address is whether, under these circumstances, the failure to designate the official relationship of same-sex couples as marriage violates the California Constitution.

It also is important to understand at the outset that our task in this proceeding is not to decide whether we believe, *as a matter of policy*, that the officially recognized relationship of a same-sex couple *should* be designated a marriage rather than a domestic partnership (or some other term), but instead only to determine whether the difference in the official names of the relationships *violates the California Constitution*....

As explained hereafter, the determination whether the current California statutory scheme relating to marriage and to registered domestic partnership is constitutionally valid implicates a number of distinct and significant issues under the California Constitution.

First, we must determine the nature and scope of the “right to marry” — a right that past cases establish as one of the fundamental constitutional rights embodied in the California Constitution. Although, as an historical matter, civil marriage and the rights associated with it traditionally have been afforded only to opposite-sex couples, this court’s landmark decision 60 years ago in *Perez v. Sharp* (1948) 32 Cal.2d 7114 — which found that California’s statutory provisions prohibiting interracial marriages were inconsistent with the fundamental constitutional right to marry, notwithstanding the circumstance that statutory prohibitions on interracial marriage had existed since the founding of the state — makes clear that history alone is not invariably an appropriate guide for determining the meaning and scope of this fundamental constitutional guarantee. The decision in *Perez*, although rendered by a deeply divided court, is a judicial opinion whose legitimacy and constitutional soundness are by now universally recognized....

In defending the constitutionality of the current statutory scheme, the Attorney General of California maintains that even if the constitutional right to marry under the California Constitution applies to same-sex couples as well as to opposite-sex couples, this right should not be understood as requiring the Legislature to designate a couple’s official family relationship by the term “marriage,” as opposed to some other nomenclature. The Attorney General, observing that fundamental constitutional rights generally are defined by *substance* rather than by *form*, reasons that so long as the state affords a couple all of the constitutionally protected *substantive* incidents of marriage, the state does not violate the couple’s constitutional right to marry simply by assigning their official relationship a *name* other than marriage....

An Ideal Husband

By Maureen Dowd - New York Times - Op-Ed Columnist - Published: July 6, 2008; edited by M.G. Maness

Father Pat Connor is a 79-year-old Catholic priest born in Australia and based in Bordentown, N.J., and has been giving marriage counseling for decades, “mostly common sense” advice about **how to dodge mates** who would maul your happiness. “Hollywood says you can be deeply in love with someone and then your marriage will work,” the twinkly eyed, white-haired priest says. “But you can be deeply in love with someone to whom you cannot be successfully married.” For 40 years, he has been giving a lecture — “Whom Not to Marry” — to high school seniors, mostly girls because they’re more interested. It’s important they look hard *before* they fall seriously in love, because then it will be too late,” he explains. “Infatuation trumps judgment.” I asked him to summarize his talk:

“Never marry a man who has no friends,” he starts. “This usually means that he will be incapable of the intimacy that marriage demands. I am always amazed at the number of men I have counseled who have no friends. Since, as the Hebrew Scriptures say, ‘Iron shapes iron and friend shapes friend.’ What are his friends

¹ In light of the comprehensive nature of the rights afforded by California’s domestic partnership legislation, the status of such partnership in California is comparable to the status designated as a “civil union” in statutes enacted in recent years in Connecticut, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Vermont [similarly Oregon, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, and Washington]....

like? Sometimes, even your friends can't render an impartial judgment because they are envious that you are beating them to the altar. Envy beclouds judgment."

"Does he use money responsibly? Is he stingy? Most marriages that founder do so because of money — she's thrifty, he's on his 10th credit card. "Steer clear of someone whose life you can run, who never makes demands counter to yours. It's good to have a doormat in the home, but not if it's your husband.

"Is he overly attached to his mother and her mythical apron strings? When he wants to make a decision, say, about where you should go on your honeymoon, he doesn't consult you, he consults his mother. (I've known cases where the mother accompanies the couple on their honeymoon!)

"Does he have a sense of humor? That covers a multitude of sins. My mother was once asked how she managed to live harmoniously with three men — my father, brother and me. Her answer, delivered with awesome arrogance, was: 'You simply operate on the assumption that no man matures after the age of 11.' My father fell about laughing.

"A therapist friend insists that 'more marriages are killed by silence than by violence.' The strong, silent type can be charming but ultimately destructive. Paul of Tarsus got it right when he said, 'In all your dealings with one another, speak the truth to one another in love that you may grow up.'

"Don't marry a problem character thinking you will change him. He's a heavy drinker, but if he marries a good woman, he'll settle down. People are the same after marriage as before, only more so.

"Take a good, unsentimental look at his family — you'll learn a lot about him and his attitude towards women. Kay made a monstrous mistake marrying Michael Corleone [in the Godfather]! Are his goals and deepest beliefs worthy and similar to yours? I remember counseling a pious Catholic woman that it might not be prudent to marry a pious Muslim, whose attitude about women was very different. Love trumped prudence; the annulment process was instigated by her six months later. "Imagine a religious fundamentalist married to an agnostic. One would have to pray that the fundamentalist doesn't open the Bible and hit the page in which Abraham is willing to obey God and slit his son's throat.

"Finally: Does he possess those character traits that add up to a good human being — the willingness to forgive, praise, be courteous? Or is he inclined to be a fibber, to fits of rage, to be a control freak, to be envious of you, to be secretive?

"After I regale a group with this talk, the despairing cry goes up: 'But you've eliminated everyone!' Life is unfair."

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/06/opinion/06dowd.html?em&ex=1215748800&en=fd7b516e55613dae&ei=5087%0A>

Should Divorce Require a Two-Year Wait – My Personal Opinion

Regarding Rep. Warren Chisum's push to extend divorce to a two-year wait in this next session.

"Texas legislator favors tougher divorce laws," Beaumont Enterprise, by Sarah Moore, July, 2, 2008

Source: http://www.beaumontenterprise.com/news/local/texas_legislator_favors_tougher_divorce_laws_07-02-2008_22_28_01.html

This is from a letter I wrote to my Texas representative, Jim McReynolds.

Please know that I stand AGAINST the measure to force marriage counseling and vociferously against a forced extension of a two-year wait in divorce. Resolving a salvageable marriage is a good thing. But by the time most people get to the divorce stage, a history has preceded that often precludes a resolution.

Without doing a survey, I would still bet that most of those vying for such are those with good marriages.

Does Rep. Chisum and his colleagues really think their fellow citizens are so immature or below them that they have to "Look out for those poor souls who do not know how to look out for themselves." This is not a traffic law or a criminal sub-routine they are addressing. This action is very condescending. A law will not decrease divorce, divorce is not an inherently bad thing but often a solution, and moreover making the marriage laws tougher will only increase cohabitation. They intend to strengthen marriage, but they are actually questioning the sincerity and competence of of-age adults on the most important decision of their life—a vow between them before their God. And they do it at the back end, not the front end; that is, they are addressing the divorce, not the decision to marry.

When I married at 36, I—for one, and my spouse too—did not *plan* on marriage to be temporary, and to this day (at 52) do not know of anyone who *married* with the idea or plan of divorce. Everyone *intends* permanency, even youngsters. But the higher side of marriage is not the law anyway, but the vow between two people before God, a place where the law needs to stay away. Moreover, anyone thinks a law can *increase* a vow before God needs to think twice. There should be nothing more personal than a marriage vow, where the law supports and not dictates, and when a painful decision comes (especially in terrible marriages) to divorce we should let the couple move forward at their pace.

I married and divorced shortly after, the only time I was married, and we even went to counseling. She was a fine woman. We both did not have much of a choice, and no legislature could possibly know any better than the two of us and our families.

A forcing of counseling against the will of the participants is counter-productive and can actually increase the rancor; there is no good counseling that is forced. And a two-year wait for divorce is far dumber than a two-year wait BEFORE a marriage; the marriage is the more important part, a decision between two people, and if you cannot or will not make the pre-marriage wait more important, then forcing the two-year wait for divorce is actually a measure that decreases the value of the decision to marry itself. No one but fundamentalist Christians want to place the cart divorce before the horse of the decision itself. If two people can DECIDE to marry and go through the process, the latter decision to divorce ought to be easier and the law easier; not the reverse, where the divorce is harder than the actually tying of the knot.

The way to improve marriage is not to make divorce harder, but to make the marriage better, and even to make the decision to marry better. This is about value of marriage, and most of those divorcing (take a pole there if you like) truly VALUED marriage as much as anyone who has been married 50 years. MOST—they just did not get to know the treasure of 50 years. Those getting a divorce by and large did not marry by mistake and are not wanting to divorce, but have – because the VALUE of marriage – came to the decision through a broken heart. The state has no business meddling in the broken hearts of two people who loved each other and then found later that divorce was their only option.

Regardless, the bottom line is that the marriage vow is between two people, of age, and before God, and if they choose a divorce, that is their business before God too, not a legislator's, especially one who does not know many divorced people.

Sincerely yours, Dr. Michael G. Maness

Divorceproof Your Marriage

U.S. News & World Report (12-25-06): 72, by Ciane Cole, edited by M. G. Maness

Is there a single piece of advice that would help couples not only divorceproof their relationship but also make it more contented? Leading gurus agreed: “The letter ‘A’ is not just for affection; it’s also for appreciation.” Based on years of research, “the best single predictor of whether a couple is going to divorce is contempt,” said relationships expert John M. Gottman. “Celebrate the small, positive things in the relationship, notice and comment on what’s going well,” said Michele Weiner-Davis. Need to feel valued!

Crowd All Thy Canvas On, Cut through the Foam!

Charles H. Spurgeon, Sermon #1807, A Call to the Lord's Own Flock, 11-2-1884, pp764-765, Vol. 30

“Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them.” Ezekiel 34:30



one can hinder the work of God as much as God's own people if they are not true to their profession. If God be with us, now is the time for abounding activities. In evil days we tug the laboring oar to small purpose, for the vessel makes no progress against the vicious tide. But now that a favoring wind is with us, let us spread every yard of sail. “Crowd all thy canvas on, cut through the foam!” Now is the mariner's happy hour, and he must avail himself of it. If there be a possibility of greater ardor or intenser zeal, in the name of God let us rise to it. See to it, you servants of God, that you prove by your activity that the Lord is among you.

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