

published, a number of prominent Democrats claimed that marriage was a matter for the church, while the proper role for the state was civil unions and a guarantee of material benefits. This argument has always made little sense to me. The ability of ministers, priests, and rabbis to perform marriage ceremonies is granted by governments, not by religions. And civil marriage is normal and widespread. Besides, it will only satisfy the pragmatic liberals. Idealistic conservatives will see civil unions as tantamount to marriage, and idealistic progressives will see them as falling far short of equal protection.

And what of the constitutional amendment to legally define marriage as between a man and a woman? Conservatives will be for it, and many others with a heterosexual stereotype of marriage may support it. But with nineteen states legalizing gay marriage and a majority of Americans for it, such an amendment is now dead in the water.

Progressives have reclaimed the moral high ground—of the grand American tradition of freedom, fairness, human dignity, and full equality under the law. There is no longer a need to talk about civil unions and just the material benefits. The job of ordinary citizens in the remaining thirty-one states is to reframe the debate, in everything we say and write, in terms of our moral principles.

With the divorce rate for heterosexual marriage skyrocketing, the sanctity of marriage is more important than ever. Talk sanctity. With love and commitment, you have the very definition of the marital ideal—of what marriage is fundamentally about. Any couple willing to fight for a public recognition of their love and a lifetime commitment has sanctity on their side.

We all have to put our ideas out there so that political candidates can readily refer to them. For example, when there is a discussion in your office, church, or other group, there is a simple response for someone who says, “I don’t think gays should be able to marry. Do you?” The response is: “I believe in equal rights, period. I don’t think the state should be in the business of telling people who they can or can’t marry. Marriage is about love and commitment, and denying the right to marry to people in love who want a public lifetime commitment is a violation of human dignity.”

The media does not have to accept the right wing’s frames, and in state