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**SHOULD SECULAR AUTHORITY REGULATE `SACRED INSTITUTION'?
GOVERNMENT LICENSE ISN'T REQUIRED FOR SACRAMENTS OTHER THAN
MARRIAGE**

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On Feb. 5 President Bush reiterated the position he staked out in his State of the Union address regarding allowing same sex partners to marry. "Marriage is a sacred institution between a man and a woman. If activist judges insist on redefining marriage by court order, the only alternative will be the constitutional process. We must do what is legally necessary to defend the sanctity of marriage."

"Sacred"? "Sanctity"? I wasn't aware that sanctity or sacredness were things that could be defended legally - or even needed defending. It seems to me that God can probably defend God and those things rendered to God more efficiently and effectively even than Congress.

Am I the only one who finds the mixture of religion and state in the peculiar institution of marriage rather disturbing? Were you aware that it is against the law in most states for a minister (priest, rabbi, imam) to perform a marriage ceremony if the couple has not procured a license from the state? Would any of us tolerate having to get a license from the state before holding a bris? Or a baptism? Before observing Qurbaani? Or communion?

It's time for government to get out of the business of regulating marriage as a sacred institution.

Many countries in the world have figured this out. If you want a sacred marriage, have at it. Only don't go to your state governor for permission. Support your local religious professional. Get married all you want - or all your synagogue will let you, anyway.

If the state wants to provide for a way of making society more cohesive, of stabilizing relationships and providing economic safety nets, etc., then the state should do so without co-opting religious ceremonies or sacraments. The state should establish a system of "civil unions" rather than using "sacred" marriage to further its ends. If you want to be married, to follow your religion's teachings, to profess your unending love for one another and to enter into what you want to be an exclusive club of married folks - go to church. If

you want legal benefits for your economic unit - go to the state. Marriage at church. Civil unions at the courthouse.

That way your church, mosque or other sect can continue to judge and condemn whoever it wants (or, more rarely, to accept and affirm whoever it wants). You can exclude or include whatever so-called "sins" you want. And the government of the people, by the people and for the people won't have to sully its proverbial hands by enforcing religious prejudices or superstitions.

Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's. Even Jesus had something to say about the separation of church and state.

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