

NO TO BENEFITS FOR UNMARRIED COUPLES

The following op-ed piece by William Donohue appeared in the *New York Daily News* on May 19.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has done more to restore civility to New York than any other mayor. That is why it is so frustrating to see him now endorse legislation that would help to destabilize the institutions of marriage and the family, the very font of social stability.

What would we think of a doctor who did medical research on lung cancer and then recommended smoking to his patients? So it is with Giuliani's proposal: by treating marriage as an alternative lifestyle, the mayor lays the seeds for social disorder, something he fights hard to check.

The reason why marriage has always been given preferential treatment in society, as well as in law, is because most people understand that there is a fundamental social interest in safeguarding its health. Marriage channels the sexual appetite in a constructive fashion and allows for the development of a stable and patterned environment into which children are born; it goes by the name of family. If none of this mattered, then there would be no need to institutionalize sexual relations. After all, people have always found ways to fornicate and procreate without subscribing to social norms.

Men and women who live together outside of marriage do so because of convenience, sexual or monetary. Unfortunately, the social science data convincingly show that those who practice cohabitation before marriage have a much higher divorce rate than those couples who do not. That's because lifestyles of convenience are ill-suited to the rigors of compromise, a property that is integral to relationships built on

commitment. While surely not intended, Giuliani's scheme adds to the likelihood that cohabitation, and eventually divorce, will increase.

If marriage counts, it must be treated in a special manner. But there can be nothing special about marriage if Mark and Mary, as well as Mark and Mark and Mary and Mary, decide to shack up, declare themselves partners, pay twenty bucks to City Hall, and cash in on marriage benefits.

Those who say that they are not attacking marriage by extending marital benefits to those who shack up are kidding themselves. I'm a veteran and thus I qualify for veteran's benefits. Extend those benefits to Clinton and my special status is gone. I'm not a senior citizen and should therefore not qualify for the perquisites that they ordinarily receive; if I did, seniors would lose their special status. And it cannot be said too strongly that this is not a matter of discrimination: it is a matter of drawing critical social distinctions based on merit.

We live in a culture where men and women want all the sex they can get, but they don't want the kids or the diseases that their promiscuity engenders; this explains their enthusiasm for abortion and AIDS research. Self-absorbed, we've forgotten to distinguish between individual tastes and desires and legitimate social interests. So we keep pressing for more rights and less responsibilities.

One more thought. Who's going to police this monster? When the relationships break up, who will know? Will the benefits continue in perpetuity? And what if the two Marks meet another Mark? Will they be able to declare themselves in an extended domestic partnership and thus slip the new Mark in the door, without, of course, being discriminated against? We've moved from a culture of My Three Sons to Three's Company, so why not ratify it, Mr. Mayor?