

Justice, Mercy, Reason, and Tradition

A Submission to the Anglican Church of Canada's
Commission on the Marriage Canon

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I have written this with some trepidation. The emotional charge that seems to accompany this issue has a tendency, especially in light of the complex pastoral challenge we are facing to prompt misunderstanding in the very places we say we need it. I pray I will not be heard to say more or less than I intend.

I am not presently in a same sex relationship but if I was I wouldn't want my church disrespecting the uniqueness of my relationship by pretending it is something that it is not. Changing the church marriage canons to make same sex relationships the same as marriage will result in a loss of the distinctiveness of both types of relationships. The loss of recognition of distinctiveness in a society is often a step toward oppression. Justice and mercy are not served by simplistically "treating everyone the same" or else we should start tearing down wheelchair ramps in order not to show favouritism.

Considering the differences between same sex relationships and the marriage of complementary genders, entrenching the pretence of equivalence as a legal fiction is not only patronizing but in light of what follows is perhaps even a bit absurd. Wanting to "bless" homosexual relationships for what they really are is one thing but pretending they are the same as marriage is not so much a blessing as an obliteration; as if the only way a minority can be respected is to eradicate their unique identity and pretend they are part of the majority. The following examples may illustrate that proclaiming equivalence between homosexual relationships and marriage is a fiction that is unworthy of us as a people who are committed to justice, mercy, reason and tradition.

Ever since the sexual reproduction of species was invented (as compared with mitosis or reproduction by bisexual individuals) those species that depend on it require a sexual “marriage” between complementary genders in order for that species to propagate and survive. If same sex unions prevailed the species would die in one generation. As wonderful as same gender sexual partnerships may be, they are simply not marriages in the biological sense of the word, and it disrespects their own uniqueness to pretend that they are.

The dualism of Hebrew, Taoist and Christian faith allows for harmony between the different, distinct and complementary aspects of creation. On the other hand monism claims no ultimate distinctions between anything, and therefore provides no basis for morality, ethics or love between persons. It will be ironic and counter productive if our Christian quest for greater justice and mercy for homosexuals follows the path of reductionism: the blurring of distinctions and disrespecting the uniqueness of same sex relationships.

If we compose a yin and yang symbol of two blue or two red portions rather than one of each it may be very beautiful but it ceases to be a symbol of the full nature of the universe: complementary pairs of opposites. Same sex partners may be able to express a variety of virtues through their relationship, but by virtue of their common gender they simply cannot express the symbolic yin-yang of creation. To pretend that they do does a disservice both to them and the significance of the symbol.

In the biblical account of gender, just as a day consists of both evening and morning, the sexes are portrayed as complementary states of being which are deliberately separated from each other in the process of bringing creation out of chaos. By being subtracted from one common humanity, only together do they represent the whole of the species. It is logically evident that no one individual can represent the whole of humanity because each of us is limited by our gender to being only a part of total humanity. No one gender (no matter how many individuals of that same sex are gathered) can portray the whole human race because total humanity consists of two “opposite” sexes. In Jewish and Christian understanding humanity exists in two genders and the significance of “one flesh” in marriage is not only sexual companionship between individuals but the reunification of those separated genders as the two once again become an expression of the whole humanity. The human race is able to replicate itself and represent itself only through the marriage of both complementary genders.

That both genders are explicitly said to be in the divine image also suggests that the full expression of that divine image in humans requires both genders. Apparently the creation of complementary genders also says something about the nature of divinity.

New Testament theology suggests that the analogy of marriage between two genders that need each other in order to maintain life speaks of the Christ-human relationship. My choice of a sexual partner of the same gender might be able portray assorted aspects of humanity and divinity, but it is fundamentally unjust to expect it to portray more fully, as a marriage does, the nature of humanity and divinity.

Among the features that make marriage sacramental (a visible sign of sacred grace) are its ability to reflect 1) the grace of wholeness in creation (pairs of opposites), specifically 2) the completeness of humanity, 3) the divine image (in which both genders were created) and thereby share in, perhaps most importantly, 4) a co-creative potential to produce LIFE. In Jewish notions of holiness (*tumah and taharah*): laws of ritual purity tend to define that which is more or less sacred or sacramental by virtue of its tendency or potential for life. Just as the power or “life” of a battery depends on the actual potential between the two opposite/complementary poles, the life of our human species flows not through sexual relationships per se but only through the marriage of complementary genders.

Changing the laws to allow battery manufacturers to label and sell as “batteries” objects that have either two positive or two negative terminals rather than one of each won’t make such creations function as if they were real batteries. They may have the potential to serve other useful or beautiful functions but do not have the essential potential required to produce a spark (of life). We can tell children that toys in the shape of magnets are “magnets” but unless they have both north and south magnetic poles they are not really magnets. We may study how electrons interact with each other or how protons interact with each other but we are apt to produce poor science if we presume that we thereby understand atoms which are the unification of both electrons and protons. Granting my same sex relationship the status of marriage in the face of its inability to fulfil the assorted potentials and responsibilities of that status could be seen as a type of cruel mockery.

Of course we may use the term “marriage” loosely to refer to the joining or fitting together of any two kinds of things, but biologically, philosophically, symbolically theologically and sacramentally, the thing that makes marriage between humans a marriage is the completeness of the image produced by the reunification of the two complementary genders that were separated in our creation. A marriage canon which blurs the distinction between marriage and same sex relationships would reflect a theology impoverished in its understanding of the significance of both. It would encourage a trend toward a bland dehumanizing uniformity by a reduction of the very limitations and distinctions that make us truly human.