WHY IS MARRIAGE BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN DIFFERENT?

For Catholics, marriage between a man and a woman is different from any other relationship. Therefore, the word ‘marriage’ should not be used for any other relationship.

The reasons for saying that marriage is a distinctive relationship are based upon

- the intent of the Creator of human nature
- Commonwealth law related to marriage which cannot change
- general human experience and instinct.

The intent of the Creator

The latest Commonwealth census showed that around one third of Australians now consider themselves to be atheist. Not believing in a Creator, the Creator’s intent is irrelevant to their thinking.

However, for all who do believe in God, marriage between a man and a woman is the revealed intent of the Creator of human nature – the One who understands human beings better than they understand themselves.

The second of the two Creation stories in the Bible ends with the man and the woman becoming one flesh. (Genesis 2.24) In the culture of the time, the body was the ‘language’ which expressed the person in verbal and non-verbal ways.

Becoming ‘one flesh’ meant becoming one physically, spiritually, emotionally and intellectually. Deepening ‘oneness’, along with openness to children, are the purposes of marriage for believers in God.

For Christians, Jesus taught that failures to live marriage as God intended were the result of human selfishness. (Matthew 19.8) Some today argue that such failures are merely different ideas about what marriage really is. This is not the Gospel view.

Jesus reaffirmed marriage as revealed by the Creator, teaching (Matthew 19.6)

So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide.

Commonwealth Law

Slogans such as ‘marriage equality’ have blinded many to the reality that Commonwealth law will never recognise marriage between a man and a woman as the same thing as ‘marriage’ between a couple of the same sex. The issue really is not about equality but whether one word should be used for fundamentally different realities.

Marriage between a man and a woman in Australia is illegal if they are too closely related by blood. The reason for this is to protect possible children from genetic disorders and higher risk of physical and developmental disability.

This reason cannot apply to couples of the same gender. Their relationship will always be different.

Human experience

Over thousands of years, there have been different ideas about marriage across different cultures. But what has been common is the recognition that marriage is between a man and one or more women or a woman and one or more men.

What God revealed in the Book of Genesis human beings have known by intuition. This intuition will not die for it is instinctive to human nature.
Respect for homosexual people
Homosexuality has taken a great variety of forms across the centuries in different cultures. Its psychological genesis is still largely unexplained.

Like all people, those of homosexual orientation are called to chastity, God’s commandments are for all: they do not discriminate.

In a society which continues to sexualise its young at ever earlier ages, the idea of people not ‘having sex’ seems impossible. However, such ideas reflect a failure to integrate the sexual within the whole human person.

The Catholic Church calls all people to respect the dignity of every human being, regardless of sexual orientation. Hence, homosexual people need to be spoken to – and spoken about – respectfully in the current debate about same-sex marriage.

What inequality is there today?
Those arguing for same-sex marriage have offered only slogans such as ‘marriage equality’ and ‘all love is equal’. There have been no substantative arguments put forward to justify such slogans and I discussed their disingenuity two weeks ago.

No one wants inequality and so linking same-sex marriage to equality reflects public relations genius. Tanya Plibersek, now Deputy Leader of the Opposition, explained in 2015 that the Rudd Government had:

...changed 85 laws, removed every piece of legal discrimination against gays
and lesbians and same-sex couples on the statute books.

Linking same sex marriage with equality has won support from many people. In fact, the issue is not about equality, but the effort to change the meaning of a word.

Consequences elsewhere
One of the questions ignored is ‘What are possible consequences if same sex marriage becomes law?’ The answer is found in other countries such as Canada where

- parents have been denied the right to withdraw their children from sex education classes they found to be objectionable
- same sex marriage has been presented in schools as an alternative to man-woman marriage, leading to confusion about roles such as mother and father
- a statute in Ontario compels Catholic schools to host ‘Gay-Straight Alliance’ clubs
- civil marriage celebrants are refused the right to follow their consciences by not celebrating same sex marriages
- religious organisations have been fined for not renting facilities for same sex marriage celebrations
- preachers have been subjected to investigation by human rights tribunals for speaking about Christian teaching on marriage.

In Australia, Archbishop Julian Porteous was investigated by the Tasmanian Anti-Discrimination Commissioner after a complaint by a Greens Party candidate over the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Pastoral Letter Don’t Mess With Marriage.

Parishioners may be interested to read an analysis of the Canadian situation on www.mffc.org.au/news>samesexmarriage

Conclusion
Let us try to promote reasoned discussion in our families and communities on the issue of same-sex marriage. Let us respect the fact that a life-long loving committed relationship between a man and a woman that is open to children is special.

Let advocates of same sex marriage accept that a different word is needed for same sex relationships.

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