

Otherness and Intimacy

To honor marriage is to honor the distinctions of male and female, and how the two combine to form a whole. The one discovers its need in relation to the other—‘I do not possess what the other offers’, and one’s unique gift—‘I possess something the other needs.’

Gender complementarity is crucial to a marriage being able to ease the aloneness of both parties. It is precisely the other’s difference that satisfies the ache of the solitary heart. The mystery of the other draws one out of familiarity and into another reality. Gender differences provoke exploration and yield the rich discovery that the other rounds one out. At physical and psychological levels, one finds grounding and a covering that composes a whole.

Karl Barth writes: “Were Eve only like him, his mirror image, a numerical multiplication, she would not confront him as another...as such, the aloneness of neither would be eased.”

Frustrating at times? Of course. In the face of the ‘foreigner’, we are tempted to judge the other as less than human, our own familiar ways of knowing and being as superior. But gratefully, God did not create the other in our image but in His own.

Mike Mason writes: “Marriage seems to specialize at times in radically deemphasizing the similarities between partners and wildly exaggerating the points of difference. But that is so that a couple may come to know one another at the deepest level—‘bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.’

Becoming one flesh is a journey of discovery. We discover a beauty and wisdom and strength unknown to us; in that difference, the other has unique power to fortify and to console us. (S)he encounters us as the other, imparting to us what we may never have experienced but what we need.

Mason refers to marriage in a term used for the trinity—a hypostatic union, meaning that distinct properties (male and female) combine to form one new identity. He says: “Marriage is not about sameness but about oneness, which is less characterized by similarities than by difference...That oneness is not a skill to be mastered but a phenomenon to be marveled at with increasing humility and gratitude.”

To honor marriage, we must reclaim the inner meaning of God’s image: man for woman, woman for man. Together, the two create a whole that satisfies the aloneness of each. Honor marriage for the good of all. Vote YES on Proposition 8.

“Thank You God for Your design. You said that it was not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18), and You made a way for the gap to be closed. Give us grace to behold and to honor the other’s difference. Ease our aloneness through him or her.”