

Why Gender Matters 5: Otherness Nurtures Family

Besides the obvious reasons why a man and a woman need each other to bring forth life, he and she together help the lives that they create become creative.

That takes effort: surmounting the fear that her difference from me is precisely what I most need to thrive. And trusting God that my gendered gift supplies something essential to her. We must foster that reliance upon each other so that otherness breeds more appreciation than annoyance. Or intimidation. Or judgment. I love Bonhoeffer words: 'God created this person in His image, not mine.' When I am tempted to forego her vantage point for mine, I recall those words and realize that I am setting myself over the Creator by denying the gift of her difference. Disagree with each other? Of course. Deny her gift? Perilous!

Lent helps here. One discipline we undertake together in this season is daily prayer and reflection on a devotional guide. I never cease to be amazed at her take on the material. It is a window to her soul that I can only discover if I look. And listen. Her splendid difference from me is precisely what engages and challenges and summons my best. She knows that her voice matters. That frees her to respect mine with the editing rights that her conscience demands. I return the favor.

At times such engaging reveals my worst. Before her I face what I do not want to express. In tough areas that I would rather leap over than submit, I must give an answer. And there I discover an ally. In the searchlight of the one I love most, I expose my own demons so that love can have its deepest way in me. My dark silence casts the longest shadow on her. So too does the light shine most brightly when we confess our faults in order to heal each other (James 5:16).

We gathered for a family birthday for Annette last week. My gratitude lies in how our kids look out for each other. I see this as a gift of how Annette has looked out for their best interests. Each of them said just that, in the particular ways she has served them. She gives generously, a mother par excellence. Might her security in the love we share stoke her freedom to offer herself?

Maybe. If so, then I consider my love for her—freely given, with all the fullness I can muster—the best offering of my life.