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## **Why Australia must not embrace same-sex 'marriage'**

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ALL OF US ARE INVOLVED IN personal relationships of one form or another. These friendships call us to strive for the good of the other person. The special nature of married life calls us to a more dramatic engagement – to a radical self-giving and also to a willingness to accept what is offered. This can be very challenging for us. But it is the basis of a successful society.

Marriage as a loving, life-giving and faithful relationship is a natural institution that pre-dates all religions and nation states. Aristotle supported marriage as deserving of state support arguing that “Man is by nature more inclined to live as a couple than to associate politically, since the family is something that precedes and is more necessary than the state.” Since marriage and family pre-dates the state, the state has no right to alter or ‘re-invent’ our understanding of marriage.

Marriage between a man and woman gives us an inter-generational connectedness. The individual becomes more attached to the wider society through their sensitivity to those who have gone before and who will come after them. Parents and grandparents labour so as to ‘lay up store’ for their children and grandchildren and this contributes to the ongoing development of the society. Unions and relationships which are by their very nature and choice, non-procreative are more concerned with satisfying their own immediate needs and wants.

Through marriage we move to a circumstance where we are with an ‘other’ who is different – who is equal but complementary, who is biologically and psychologically different and yet physically compatible at the most intimate of levels. An acceptance of this complementarity of men and women enables an individual to mature in their psychosocial understanding of what it is to be a human person. A society which fails to respect the inherent and natural complementarity of a man and a woman is a ‘Humpty Dumpty’ society in which human sexuality becomes whatever people choose it to mean, no more nor less.

The traditional purposes of marriage are the good of the couple and the procreation and education of children. Societies that do not support the concept of marriage as an exclusive relationship between a man and a woman are promoting human relationships as exclusively self-indulgent arrangements. Such a society chooses to ‘live for the moment’ and is unconcerned with the raising and care of children; by default it is also less concerned with the raising of the ‘good citizen.’

The protection of marriage as a faithful and life-long union is important for the welfare of children. Every child has the right to know that it exists as the fruit of a loving and human marital act between a man and woman who have committed to a faithful and exclusive union. A society which treats children as optional extras that can be ‘ordered in as required’

undermines that trust and reassurance which has been the normal experience of children. Same sex couples who desire children are treating them as a commodity to which they are 'entitled.' In contrast, traditional marriage has always valued children as a 'gift' created through a loving act of two complementary persons. Husbands and wives have always had the right to 'try' to have kids, but not to demand them as an entitlement.

There are intrinsic differences between what fathers and mothers are able to offer their children. While respecting the strident efforts made by lone parents, no person gets married so that they can become a single parent. It is always regarded as a default option which offers less than the original. All single mothers and fathers wish that they could still enjoy the complementary contributions of a spouse to the raising of their children. To suggest that fathers' and mothers' contributions to the raising of children are exactly the same is to 'dumb down' sexual difference.

To move to sanction same sex marriage would be to open the gate to various other forms of relationships. There are now increasing demands for polygamous and polyamorous relationships involving several individuals and mixtures of homosexuality and heterosexuality. These persons are also asserting their 'rights.' There is no arguable end point once we dismiss the special status accorded to the intrinsically different relationship which is faithful and enduring heterosexual marriage.

Marriage as a communion of distinctly complementary persons ordered to the procreation and upbringing of children is not a distinctly religious concept. It can be, and has traditionally been, grasped by those of all faiths and of no faith. In the absence of a complementary biological union, persons cannot share one another's lives in a distinctly marital way. Relationships which are by choice sterile cannot welcome children since they have chosen a lifestyle which by its very nature excludes children. To 'order in' a child by the use of primitive or sophisticated reproductive technologies so that the desires of a same sex couple can be satisfied is a form of child abuse.

Finally there is nothing more vital to the welfare of the society than creating, nurturing and protecting the conditions under which children can be raised by their biological mums and dads as a norm. It is the basis of the family and of that fundamental unit which has been used by all societies to rear upright people and responsible citizens. Parents form the first and best educators of children. This is because their children know that they are the fruit and recipients of unconditional love. Certainly many social institutions have a role to play in the support of marriage and family – but so has the law. To fail to ensure that marriage has a special status under the law is to encourage a view of marriage as something which individuals, couples or even groups can alter according to their own subjective desires. We need to continue to preferentially support a civic institution that encourages authentic and enduring unions – unions that reflect sexual complementarity. Unions that have an openness to life and children. Unions that are intrinsically ordered to the care and education of their own children. Unions which have an intergenerational connectivity that draws them beyond their own immediate needs and wants. In short, we need a culture that protects and supports by law and policy: monogamous marriage.

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