

Beyond Mere Pairing

Genesis 2:18-24; Hebrews 2:9-11; Mark 10:2-16

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All human beings, male and/or female, are called to a paired relationship in communion with each other, one that suppresses neither their identity as a couple nor their individual differences.

The moralizing concern of church tradition has seen in matrimonial commitment the entire richness of the Biblical story of the origins of this relationship. Yet marriage is not possible for all people. Still, no human being, whatever his or her life choices might actually be, can avoid this aspiration towards the unity of male-female duality. (Our readings today do not address the question whether two people of the same sex can aspire towards a similar unity.)

One interpretation of this human structure has been marked by the patriarchal effort to suppress the deeper challenge of the male-female relationship in two contrasting ways: either (the “higher” way) by constructing legally exclusive frameworks attributed to the divinity or (the “lower” one) by trivializing the duality, formalizing it as a merely conventional or arbitrary arrangement.

Yet it seems that what inspired the Biblical story of the male-female couple’s origins is the amazed awareness that neither the masculine nor the feminine possesses an absolute dimension. The idea dawns on us that their duality converges from a common divine source and that therefore this duality tends to find its fulfillment in communion.

Jesus, that wise interpreter of the “Old” or First Testament, understood that this story of the human couple had much more to do with the original form of the human being designed by the Creator than it did with legal distinctions fashioned by men. That’s why, when confronted with the question of legal divorce, he clarifies the relationship of the human couple in terms of the original project of humankind’s fulfillment. The male is realized— becomes real, becomes himself— in relation to the female, and the female becomes herself in relation to the male. Yes, but this fact does not necessarily imply that marriage is the only experience in which this fullness can be lived. Marriage includes it, of course, as a concrete option for man and woman.

In our personal histories, all of us human beings, whether male or female, are invited to embark on the venture of taking on and integrating certain dualities— but also of casting off others either not fully assumed or else experienced as contradictions. We travel a path which, as it goes along, requires us both to drink from our origins and at the same time to be made new in the spirit of Jesus, the New Man. It is in this dynamically unfolding way that within each person, male or female, the fully-realized figure of the human being is sketched. To realize ourselves in duality of relationship is to realize our own individual being.

Does the day ever come when this process of integration is finished? The process is ongoing, directed towards integration. The male and female pair journey as pilgrims towards this goal. The vocation of human communion is fully realized only in the couple’s sacramental commitment. But the sacrament itself is always being more and more fully realized, as the pair walk with Jesus throughout their lifetimes— and beyond.

At the same time the limits, as well as the experiences of human fullness, will have multiple and diverse manifestations. Among those manifestations would be marriage, of course— but also maternity or paternity without a partner; celibacy; and the

experience of other sexual orientations. But all are directed towards the search for communion.

It is the creative and creating relationship with the other person and particularly with the person whose sexual identity is different from my own— it is this which causes me to grow and develop. It is in the complexity and richness of this relationship where the interior dualities assume their proper dimensions and express themselves in the most human form. Without this relationship my own individual being is not fully realized.

The important thing is not to deny this relationship to or disfigure it into a yoking of unequals... to do so would be to lose origin and direction. “God made them male and female...and the two shall become one flesh,” says Jesus.