

Entre Amigos-Opinion/Commentary

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The common good cannot be redefined by decree

By Mar Muñoz-Visoso

Tatara-taraaa! Hear ye, hear ye! By order of the Lord Governor, may it be known that, from now on, apples will be called oranges...and oranges will still be called oranges...Tatara-tataraaa! Absurd, isn't it? Well, something similar happened recently in the state of New York with the passing of a law that allows gay couples to "marry," thus redefining by decree the meaning of marriage no matter the consequences.

As in medieval times of absolute monarchies, a few "noblemen" have arrogated to themselves the task of deciding for the people for the benefit of a few who, in reality, have little or no interest in marriage and its purposes.

Anticipating people's discontent, they wouldn't allow the question to be voted on in a referendum, just in case the people, ignorant and uninformed, might have a different opinion. But like the town criers of old—some would still remember them—they have made known to all the new regulation in loud voice and expect us to submit to it without saying a word because it simply "is the law." Sooner or later, reality will catch up with these legislators. (Let's hope sooner.)

For centuries and throughout cultures, marriage has always had two main purposes: the good of the spouses and the procreation (and raising) of children.

Biology itself tells us that men and women are equal but different beings. A look to male and female physiological features is enough to show that they are beings of the same species but are not identical but complementary. It is their nature, not just a capacity, to be united in a harmonic and pleasure-filled sexual union that is capable, in turn, of producing more of the same species to assure its continuation.

But we are beings with body and spirit, and in marriage—be it civil or religious—the intimate union of husband and wife goes beyond biology or pure physical pleasure. To establish that communion, that bond, and the complicity that comes from the total self-giving of each other, the commitment must be total and exclusive. There must be trust and mutual respect, a firm promise that we are in this together, that we are going to take care of each other and that, if children are born of this union, we both will be equally responsible for their security, upbringing and education.

As Christians, we also believe that in addition to being a civil contract marriage is a sacrament, symbol and expression of the communion of love that is God, and that through it God gives us the grace to fulfill its purposes.

Working for the good of the spouses, procreation and the upbringing of children contribute to the common good. And the common good cannot be redefined by decree. Throughout the centuries, different societies have understood the importance to the state of upholding the marriage institution—which precedes the state—for society's own sustenance, wellbeing and

progress. And the state has found ways to promote the institution and protect it by granting to marriage certain legal protections and privileges that it does not give to other kinds of personal relationships.

Family, what emanates from the nuptial contract, is the basic cell of society, the first society, the first school, the first experience of authority and government children have. It is the privileged place where virtues are nurtured and the character of children formed. Thus, marriage does not exist to publicly sanction just any kind of affective relationship, friendship or partnership between people of the same or different sex. Marriage is a society with very specific features and purposes.

Does this mean that people with homosexual tendencies are not equal or don't share the same individual rights? Not at all. Every person possesses basic human rights, but no one has the right to redefine marriage. The law can look for solutions for all persons to questions such as visiting rights at hospitals, custody, inheritance, etc., but not at the expense of eroding marriage's fundamental status. Marriage is uniquely important to the common good because it bridges the most fundamental human difference there is, sexual difference. The bond between husband and wife, like no other relationship, builds peace in the family, in the neighborhood, and among nations.

Those who do know about marriage, its highs and lows, its difficulties and joys, successes and fracas are those who have preceded us in exercise and commitment; those who day after day have been in the fight for keeping a promise that they made to one another many years ago, always looking at the common good, above and beyond personal satisfaction. Manuel and Rafaela, my in-laws who just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, come to mind. My parents, Benito and Maribel, who are into four decades of marriage, do too. But I also do not forget those who due to death of or abandonment by the spouse have had to endure the "commitment" all by themselves, trying to be mothers and fathers all at once. All of them are examples to us and rocks that sustain us.

St. Thomas Aquinas said at one point that unjust laws were not laws at all. And that one could and even should rebel against them. What are we waiting for?

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