

Marco Paulo Reis, March 6th, 2016

Same Sex Marriage in the Church

This document is my effort to answer the request from Pastor John Docherty and put in words the sermon I did on February 7th at MFM about Marriage in the Church. I made an effort to be as faithful as possible to the ideas I presented that day. In some areas I thought that some additional information would be required so I added text between [].

May God helps us discern what is His will and help us walk in His ways.

Affirming Common Faith

I have been attending MFM for the past 11 years. It has been a good run. We party together, we sing together, we do church together and we strive to follow Jesus together. I teach your kids and you teach my kids.

But we do not agree on every thing. How could we? Being as diverse as we are, with different backgrounds and different upbringings.

Sometimes I say things in sharing time and you may wonder, “why does Marcos think this way?” I thought I would use this opportunity to explain my beliefs so that when you hear me making a comment you know where I am coming from.

Explain what I believe:

1. Intentional Universe - [Greek word *Logos*]

I believe in an intentional universe. That means God intended to create the universe. It was not an accident, nor an explosion. When He said, “there shall be light” he meant it. And then “there shall be birds, and creeping things and trees and fish”.

2. Purpose in Creation - [Greek word *Telos*]

Because I believe in an intentional universe I believe that God gave its creation a purpose. A goal where things should be directed. The easiest way to explain this is to talk about the seed.

1. Seed Example – acorn becomes oak tree

Think about an acorn. Inside every acorn there is the promise of an oak tree. Yes, I know not every acorn germinates and becomes a tree. I also know that not all oak trees are the same. However, the fact remains that the purpose, the *Telos*, of the acorn – its goal – is to become an oak tree.

3. Intrinsic value – Life – Conception at the heart of marriage

Now let me apply this concept to marriage. Healthy young man meets healthy young woman. They leave their families and come together. Intercourse happens. If they continue to have intercourse, guess what is going to happen? Conception. Nine months later what happens? [make baby crying sound] Diapers... I believe that at heart of marriage – its *Telos* – is conception.

[In an intentional universe, life has intrinsic value. Meaning it does not derive its value from anything else. It is valuable because it exists. That leads me to not support abortion, not support the death penalty, not support euthanasia, and as an Anabaptist to prevent war as much as possible. Marriage perpetuates life.]

4. Divine Purpose - God's will

There is a purpose why women have a womb and breasts; there is a purpose why men produce semen and they are produced outside the body. These features have one Telos in mind. Conception.

Because I think like that, it becomes very difficult for me to agree when someone says same-sex union is the same as marriage. How can it be? In one there is conception; in the other conception is impossible. Unless I missed something in my biology class. How can they be the same thing?

5. Marriage in the Church – The celebration of the union of man and woman

Not all marriages generate children. I know that. Some people are born sterile. I know that too. Others are impaired in some way that prevents them from having children. Granted. The fact remains, for me, that marriage in the Church is the celebration of a union between a man and a woman.

6. Same-Sex union is not the same as Marriage – no conception

Explain:

1. Support for Same-Sex Civil Union
 1. Love your Neighbour
 2. If you want to be treated justly you ought to treat justly

However there are other goods that a stable relationship brings ... I am aware of that, so I supported both in Canada and in Brazil the law for same-sex union. I am not [crazy]. In front of my Catholics friends, my evangelical friends, my conservative Mennonites friends I said that this change was a good thing. [I believe in the separation between Church and State and] the State should not discriminate based on sexual-orientation.

Two homosexuals live together. One wants to put the other as a dependent. They cannot. One dies, and wanted to leave a pension to another. They cannot. The law discriminates against them.

I saw [and continue to see] the same-sex couple as my neighbour. I think we ought to love our neighbor. If we want to be treated justly we ought to treat justly.

I don't think the same [line of reasoning] applies to Church. The Church exists to uphold moral truth. Let me give you an example of this.

2. Use HIV case in Brazil

1. Sex belongs in Marriage;
2. If you are single practice abstinence;
3. If you have same-sex attraction practice celibacy;
4. Don't be Promiscuous;
5. The problem is not who you are, but what you do;
 - 5.1. [all humans are sinners]

In 1982 Brazil had its first case of HIV. In the years that followed, the epidemic spread quickly. It affected men, women, homosexuals, heterosexuals, pregnant women. It was everywhere and it was not sparing anybody. Brazil is the biggest Catholic country by population in the world, so you can imagine what happened. On one side you have the Bishops singing their tune. Sex belongs in Marriage. If you are single you abstain. If you have same-sex attraction celibacy is for you.

On the other side you have the Minister of Health with an epidemic on his hands. What was he supposed to do? Well, he did three things. First he broke the patents of the anti-viral drugs to treat those affected by the disease. Second he started a major awareness campaign about HIV [how you contract it and what were the risks]. You could not go into a single school without seeing a sign about HIV. Third, he found a clever way to stop the spread of the virus. Condoms.

Condoms are widely available in Brazil. During Carnival you might be surprised to learn that it is easier to put your hands on a condom than a beer. Condoms are everywhere. They are cheap and easily accessible.

Brazil beat the virus. The Minister of Health got a UN award. You look at this situation and you say, “Those Catholic bishops, they never learn”. Hold on a second.

The hospitals that were using the anti-viral drugs to treat the infected – many of them were Catholic hospitals. The Church played a vital role in the awareness campaign that the government initiated. Even before people knew that HIV was the cause, the nuns were already on the front line, taking care of the infected.

They found a way to uphold moral truth and love their neighbour.

3. Church error of conflating sin with sinners
 1. The problem is not who you are, the problem is what you do;
 2. [all humans are sinners]

The mistake of the Church was to stigmatize homosexuals. The problem is not who you are, it is what you do. [Morality is concerned with people's actions]. We are all sinners, the Church was wrong to put the focus on homosexuals themselves instead of homosexual acts.

4. Church upholds Moral Truth
 1. [God create people after His own image] Genesis 1:27
 2. [The body is the temple the Spirit] 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
 3. [In beginning the One that made them, made them male and female] Matthew 19:3-5

I believe the role of the Church is to uphold moral truth. If the Church loses its salt it is good for nothing. The Church is there to remind people that there is a better way, and that God comes first.

Explain:

1. What is the Good news of the Gospel?
 1. There is redemption for our souls and forgiveness for our sins
 2. [Adulterous Women] John 8:1-11

The good news of the Gospel is that there is redemption for our souls and forgiveness for our sins. Jesus was able to love the sinner and reproach the sinful action. Look at the adulterous woman, She was wrong. Jesus extended grace to her by indicating, “we [humans] are all sinners”. He tells her “ I don’t condemn you”, and says straight to her face “Sin no more”.

3. Passages
 - 3.1. [God’s kindness is meant to lead us to repentance] Romans 2:3-5
 - 3.2. [Sun rises on the just and on the unjust, the rain falls on the just and unjust] Matthew 5:44-46

How could it be different? It is God’s kindness towards us that invites us to repentance. Jesus says, “The sun rises on the just and on the unjust. The rain falls on the just on the unjust.” God is kind towards us to so that we may, by receiving his kindness, turn away from sin.

Explain:

1. Why I care?
 1. Fear of the Lord;
 2. Sex without babies - Babies without Sex;
 3. Blessing Idolatry;
 - 3.1. Loving anything more than God;
 - 3.2. Put a persons sexual predispositions above faithfulness;

People ask me why I care. Well I fear the Lord. We are putting people’s inclinations and desires ahead of God’s teaching. This I cannot do. [Idolatry is loving anything more than God.]

Explain:

1. Hypocrisy - I am a hypocrite:
 1. [How do I dare to judge others?] Matthew 7:1-6
 2. [Why should others put God first when I don’t do it?]
 3. The problem is not what you are, it is what you do.
 4. Mathew 23:23-24
 - 4.1. [Do not swallow the fly, do not swallow the camel]
 - 4.2. Justice [do what is right no matter how you feel]
 - 4.3. Mercy [forgive those that trespass against you]
 - 4.4. and Faith [Be faithful to your God],

Now is a perfect time for you to call me hypocrite. You should open your Bibles to Matthew and say: “How do you dare to judge others Marcos? Why do you point out the speck in your brother’s [or sister’s] eyes when there is an oak tree in yours?”

You will be right to do so. I am a Hypocrite.

I do not judge you. I don’t even judge myself. My conscience does not judge me but I don’t declare myself just [1 Corinthians 4:4]. God will judge all of us.

You should also call me a Pharisee. “Marcos, you Pharisee, there are many bigger problems out there. There is war and famine. Refugees and missing women, and here you are, making a big fuss over two persons coming together in love”.

Again, you will be right to do so.

The problem with the Matthew passage that we read today is that Jesus tells the Pharisees “do not swallow the fly and do not swallow the camel”. To me, what you want me to swallow is not a camel. It is elephant and I just cannot do it.

Jesus tells the Pharisee to focus on the “weightier” things of the law. Justice, do what is right no matter how you feel towards the person. Mercy, you better forgive because you are sinner too. And faithfulness, God comes first. See, that is where it does not work for me.

5. Revelation 2:4-7

5.1. [“don’t forget your first love”];

5.2. [“remember from which height you have fallen”];

Every time I think about this, Revelations comes to my mind. “Remember from which height you have fallen”. “Go back to your first Love”. God comes first. I cannot go against God.

6. Matthew 16:26

6.1. [What profit you if you gain pleasure, and lose your soul?]

What do I profit to gain your approval and lose my soul? I cannot do this.

2. The moral framework of the Church is not the same as that of the secular world

I believe that people that support same-sex unions in the Church do so by applying the moral framework of the secular world. The Church has a different moral framework.

Explain:

1. Utilitarianism moral framework:
 1. Telos: Individual Freedom

If in your mind, your thinking goes like this:

- 1.1. I should be free to decide for myself what is good for me;
- 1.2. As long as what I do does not harm others;
- 1.3. It does not matter if you [Parents, Friends, Church, God] find my conduct foolish, perverse or wrong;
 - 1.3.1.1. [John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, Page 18-19, Penguin Classics]
- 1.4. People that do not support same-sex marriage in the Church are dogmatic;

If that is the way you think, then you are using the secular world moral framework. It is a utilitarian moral framework that bases the morality of an action on its consequence. This idea is everywhere in our society. In books, in film, in art.

This is the idea Disney tries to put in the heads of my children:

2. There goes Elza on the top of the mountain, away from everything and everybody. She says:
 - 2.1. "It is time to see what I can do"
 - 2.2. "To test the limits and **break through**"
 - 2.3. "**No right, no wrong, no rules** for me. **I am free**"

I am free when there is no right, no wrong. I am free when there are no rules. I believe that the Church has a different moral framework based on Romans 12:2

2. Christian moral framework - Romans 12:2:
 1. Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world,
 2. [a] but be transformed by the renewing of your minds,
 3. so that you may discern what is the will of God,
 4. what is **good** and **acceptable** and **perfect**,

Conclusion

1. If you believe it to be God's will that same-sex unions be blessed at Church;
2. If you believe it to be God's will that same-sex unions is the same as marriage; then
3. Do it and own it up. [Don't be lukewarm. Be hot or be cold] Revelations 3:16
 1. Challenge the – "I am born this way" – argument
The "I am born this way" argument is a weak argument. Human beings are born in many different ways and have many innate tendencies. I am maybe violent with my sex partner. Would you bless sadism?

If a bi-sexual person comes to the door and says: “I want to marry a male and a female partner, the three of us are in agreement, would you bless us?”

What are you going to say? If you do it the dogma of monogamy went through the window. If you don't, the bisexual person is being discriminated against.

The heterosexual gets married, the homosexual gets married, why not the bisexual? The bisexual would have a claim for justice.

2. Challenge - “Love vs Dogma” – argument

Which leads me to talk about dogma. I don't understand when you say: “ Choose love instead of dogma”. I really don't know what you mean. Maybe there is some cultural miss-communication going on.

Dogma in Greek means belief or principle. Are you saying that I should forgo my principles because of love? Love for what exactly?

In the Bible you are, more often than not, told to side with Dogma. Daniel sided with Dogma and stood up against the Babylonian King. Those three fellows that I never remember their names, they sided with dogma and for that they were sent into the furnace.

You know who sided with Love? Peter. Peter sided with love. Love for his life, Love to see another day. And in the process he denied Jesus three times.

In our own tradition, our Mennonite forebears were displaced, persecuted, jailed, tortured and even killed because they sided with dogma. Dogmas that said “Jesus is the Prince of Peace”, “if you hit me on one cheek I will give you the other”, and “Love your enemy and pray for those that persecute you”.

When you say that I should chose love vs dogma I really don't understand what you mean.

I would like to finish with HWB 813.