

This week I sent in my survey form to the Australian Bureau of Statistics. There was just the one question: *Should the law be changed to allow same sex couples to marry?* For my friends overseas, this is the Australian version of a plebiscite such as was recently held in Ireland. And by the end of next month 16 million Australians will have lodged their “vote” and had their say.

And it is right and proper that the whole population be consulted, since this is a question with profound implications – one that potentially redefines family - the basic building block of society. The present societal structure has been in place since before recorded history. A couple has always been one man and one woman. The nature of marriage has transcended history, religion, culture and politics. Whether in the time of the Egyptian Pharaohs, the golden age of Athens under Pericles, the Roman Caesars, the Bolsheviks in Russia, or the resolutely durable Monarchy in Britain, marriage has always involved one of each sex. Within belief systems that varied from the excessive blood letting of the South American Incas and Aztecs, to the gentler *dreamtime* of the Australian Aborigines, the polytheism of Ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome – and quite recently – the Christian Church - marriage has always required a boy and a girl. So this is a venture into uncharted territory.

The most comprehensive discourse on marriage that Christians have in the Bible is from Jesus Himself when He responds to a question about divorce. *“He answered, ‘Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female’, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ ‘So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate’”* (Mat 19:4- 6).

In summary, Jesus is saying:

- Marriage is founded in God’s act of creation
- It is a union between a man and a woman
- It is designed by God to be exclusive and permanent
- The man and woman become one
- God Himself joins them together
- No human intervention can break that union

Not a lot new here. Jesus has taken the original Gen 2 teaching on marriage and emphasised that it is exclusively a Divine enterprise.

The coming together – the conjugal act – is the only human contribution to the process. All the rest takes place in that great Registry Office in the Sky. When spouses consummate, seal, and reaffirm their union by conjugal acts, some deeper spiritual joining is transacted within the counsel of God.

I have read numerous attempts to explain how the physical uniting triggers this spiritual transaction. Many of them are based on biological complementarity – i.e. the man and woman “team up” to form a single operational unit for the purposes of procreation by bringing together all the necessary organs. But this can not be the whole story – the same occurs in the animal kingdom. In the end I have to line up behind the apostle Paul, *“And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become ‘one flesh’. This is a huge mystery, and I don’t pretend to understand it all.”* (Eph 5:31-32 Msg).

The Greek here μυστήριον (mystery) signifies *“that which lies outside of unassisted natural apprehension”* (W E Vine) – i.e. some external influence is required for enlightenment. So how are 16 million Australians going to form an opinion about the true nature of marriage? How can marriage be defined by postal vote?

I am reminded of the 16th century Florentine astronomer Galileo Galilee who was dragged before The Inquisition for saying that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but rather moved around the sun along with the other planets. Galileo was threatening the long held church cosmology which had the immovable earth with its basement dungeons called Hell, sun moon and stars apparently moving across the sky, and above all that – Paradise, with God in His heaven where He belonged.

Galileo was forced to recant his *heliocentric* beliefs about the nature of the universe. But legend has it that as he was being led out of the Hall of Inquisition, this feisty old *Father of Modern Physics* stamped his foot on the ground and was heard to mutter, *“And yet it does move!”*

The Divine order and structure of God’s creation exists independently of human beliefs. We may assert that $2+2 = 5$. We can even enshrine that assertion in legislation. But can we really make it so just by saying it is?

The term *Marriage Equality* implies that same sex couples are somehow disadvantaged relative to those in a traditional union. But this is disingenuous. In 2009 the Federal Government here in Australia amended 85 Commonwealth laws to eliminate discrimination against same-sex couples. Equality already exists – there has to be something more going on here!

Christians need to remind themselves that God designed marriage at creation and like His solar system in Galileo’s time, it *is* what He made it to be, regardless of changing human values. All of His universal laws are absolutely inviolable. It might seem that they are being broken with impunity right now but like jumping without a parachute, the consequences may be deferred, but ultimately, are inevitable.