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Foundations of Sand and Shadows of Love (Part II)

If we are to consider thoughtfully why the Diocese of New Westminster was wrong in its action approving same-sex unions, we must understand what Christian marriage is. And for this understanding we should turn to the Christian tradition and ultimately to Scripture.

As we begin, therefore, we should remember that matters of the heart are not to be taken lightly. Our consideration of the Christian tradition and the Scripture needs a rational critique and sympathetic mind, if we are to distinguish between truth and error and to measure these by mercy and grace. We begin with tradition.

The most influential work from the period of the Church Fathers came from St. Augustine of Hippo, whose *De Bono Coniugali*, "On the Good of Marriage," written in 401 A.D., was a standard work for centuries, even into the period of the Reformation. Thomas Cranmer's service in the Prayer Book of 1549 for the Solemnization of Matrimony follows closely the basic outline of Augustine.

Augustine's outline for marriage has been characterized in three words: *proles* (offspring), *fides* (fidelity), and *sacramentum* (sacrament). These words, however, reflect meaning that sometimes overlaps, and the ideas themselves are interrelated. Augustine's work is the seed from which later formulations will grow.

Proles, offspring, is often cited as the first reason Augustine gives for marriage. But this is not precisely correct. In his *De Bono Coniugali*, what comes first is the idea of friendship and social community that is found in the common nature of Adam and Eve. Theirs is a union of friendship that derives from the fact that Eve was taken from Adam.

Augustine reflects on this truth in a beautiful poetic metaphor. "They are joined to each other side by side who walk together and observe together where they are walking." Augustine is no doubt thinking of the common life of knowledge and love in the Garden. It is there we remember that the Lord God also is said to have walked in the cool of the day. The capacity for human friendship is not simply for its own sake, but is always related to its archetype that is the Blessed Trinity.

In his Prayer Book of 1549, Cranmer lists procreation first as a reason for the divine institution of marriage, but his reasons themselves do not stand in an order beginning with the superior and moving down to the inferior. Cranmer seems to give each reason for marriage an equal

weight, although he begins with the natural state of the divine creation and the command to procreate, and combines Christian instruction with the natural state. Cranmer writes, "One cause was the procreation of children, to be brought up in the fear and nurture of the Lord, and praise of God."

Augustine's principle of the great good of friendship would seem to equal what Cranmer lists as the third of his reasons for the divine institution of marriage, namely, "for the mutual society, help, and comfort, that the one ought to have of the other, both in prosperity and adversity." Again Cranmer has taken the original state, that of friendship, and joined it to its Christian sense, that is, to the understanding of marriage as redemption, the mystical union of Christ and his Church, which is the new function of holy matrimony given the fall of man and man's redemption in Christ.

For Augustine, the original friendship of the Garden was the substance of human life through which procreation would be the propagation of their union, and there-fore, not only the consequence of the union of Adam and Eve, but also an extension of their society. Moreover, looking at procreation from the view of salvation in Christ, Augustine said that it was through the extension of human society by procreation that the Savior would be born into the world.

As a Christian Bishop and teacher of the Faith, Augustine would try to steer the course between two completely different views of marriage and procreation, Manichaeism and Jovinianism. Manichaeism taught that the body was evil and thus human sexuality was an instrument that produced more evil. Jovinianism, on the opposite end of the spectrum, put celibacy and marriage on the same footing. (The primary text for the argument against Jovinianism is *De Sancta Virginitate*.)

For Augustine, the body was not evil but good, and the procreation of the human race held the capacity for the great good of friendship. The idea that celibacy was superior to marriage came from St. Paul. With Paul, Augustine thought that if one were married, his concerns were naturally distracted from the more im-portant pursuit of the Spirit. This was the same idea that Jesus had expressed when He was in the home of Martha and Mary of Bethany, and called busy Martha to witness the greater work of her sister Mary who sat in quiet contemplation. Later in the life of the Church, during the Reformation, many would take up the view that marriage was equal to celibacy as simply another form of Christian discipleship.

Perhaps a summary of this thoughtful reflection thus far would be useful. (I said in the last issue that this would be a long response. So be patient!) Augustine held, therefore, that the first reason for the good of marriage was the community of friend-ship, which was extended through the means of procreation. It was this honorable estate which Cranmer says was "instituted of God in paradise, in the time of man's innocency." The story of the creation of the paradise of which Cranmer speaks is given in Genesis. "So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them and God said unto them. Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." In the image of the blessed fellowship of God's own life, humanity is created, and made to reproduce in the sphere of human existence. This is the

glorious beginning of marriage.

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